Little World/Mundinho:

An “Antropofagic” and Autobiographic Performance

(Uma Performance Antropofagica e Autobiografica)

Exegesis/Exegese: Offerings

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Declaration

I, Simone Silva Reis Mott, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Little World/Mundinho: An “Antropofagic” & Autobiographic Performance* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Simone Silva Reis Mott
November 2007
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Sim claro, Yes sure: thanks Josefine ... E Macabê querida, amada Maca do meu coração, onde você se encontrar nesse momento, escute, por favor, o meu muitíssimo infinitésimo obrigada!!! Obrigada! Obrigada! Maca não se preocupe querida, nem todas as pessoas do mundo são boas datilografias. Don't worry Maca, not all people in the world are good typists. I typed all this with two fingers!

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Abstract

Do que é que se trata esse projeto? É sobre mim, que sou nada, transformada numa transitória, risonha, híbrida camundongo-mulher-artista, procurando pelo que está além da verdade de não mentir. Trata-se de mim, uma mulher patética, vestida como uma menina pilotando uma lambreta e carregando uma maletinha (de qual saem sons, música, imagens e vozes) num cirquinho imaginário, engraçado, falso, inexistente e pobre.

How can we identify and emerge from the chain of bodies, territories and cultures, called “my body”, my “self”? Can the performing body transcend cultural boundaries? What would such transcedence look like? If it happens, what can it say about a possible intercultural body format? How to create a performance with an extracultural approach?

Invasion, migration, and population dislocation over the last five centuries has caused significant movement amongst global populations. Cross-cultural performances have developed from these invasions, migrations, and dislocations. The late 20th and early 21st Centuries have seen the development in the “West” of intercultural and extracultural theatre/performance. This project presents a performance derived from the unique combination of Brazilian and Australian performance practice. It sheds light on the power of the theatrical event for disparate audiences, and on the performer's experience of the creative process while generating a new performance text that addresses the questions: What is it to “be” “Brazilian”? Does “Brazil” exist? What is it to be “Latin American”? Does “Australia” exist? This project, Little World: Four “Autoethnographic” Performances, explores the author/performer’s “being” “Brazilian”, being “Latin American” in “Australia”, and a “performer” in “theatre”, through autobiographical and autoethnographic performances drawing on the writings of Clarice Lispector, Franz Kafka, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and the performance practices of Brazilian Candomblé and Japanese Butoh. It attempts to place the spectator in the position of the performer, encountering “Australia” through another culture and language. And following Oswald de Andrade’s “anthropophagy”, it proposes and enacts the cannibalising of the “foreign(er)”, the digestion of foreign stereotypes to produce new identities.

The thesis component of the project will provide a first person autobiographical and autoethnographic account addressing the questions raised above; the performance-making processes; and the social and theoretical contexts and the aesthetic elements of the performance.

Do que é que se trata esse projeto? É sobre mim, que sou nada, transformada numa transitória ... ... What is this project about? It is about me who am nothing, transformed into a transitory, laughing, hybrid mouse-woman-performer, searching for what is beyond the truth of not lying. It is about me, a pathetic woman dressed as a little girl driving an electric scooter and carrying a little suitcase (from which comes sounds, music, images and voices) in an imaginary funny, fake, inexistente, poor, little circus.
Estou possuída? Am I possessed?

A creature with enormous ‘bee’ glasses, dressed in black—a goddess with plastic teeth riding a scooter, and very badly so.

I will never be sporty like Australians. I will never ride a bike wearing a helmet.

Isso é a prova do meu “subdesenvolvimento” terceiro mundista?

Is this proof of my third world “underdevelopment”?

— Simone Silva Reis Mott
Offering 1. Ex-Votos

**ex-voto**
/eks voto/

- noun (pl. ex-votos) an offering given in order to fulfil a vow.
— ORIGIN from Latin ex voto ‘from a vow’.

— Compact Oxford English Dictionary

1.1 Salvador da Bahia, 2004

In 2004 I visited the Igreja do Nosso Senhor do Bomfim, a church in the city of Salvador da Bahia, in the northeast of Brazil. The church is famous for *milagres*, miracles—particularly miraculous recoveries from illness. I was in Salvador to research the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé and it seemed important to visit a church with practices extending beyond the norms of Catholicism. The Igreja do Nosso Senhor do Bomfim is a site for making votive offerings, *ex-votos*—a practice with a long history, well before the birth of Christ.

*Na primeira visita a igreja estava fechada. Não muito tempo depois eu ouvi notícias terríveis de que meu irmão—que administra uma pousada, um hotel particular pequeno, numa cidade de praia entre Salvador e Rio de Janeiro—tinha sido baleado em um assalto em seu trabalho na cidade de Vitória, mais para o sul.* On this first visit the church was closed. Not long after, I heard terrible news that my brother—who manages a *pousada*, a small private hotel—had been shot in an assault at his work in the coastal city of Vitória mid-way between Salvador and Rio de Janeiro. He was shot by a group of youths in the reception area in what we believe was a kidnapping attempt on his son. His son was also shot but fortunately escaped serious injury. My brother sustained injuries to his neck and spine, his liver, his lungs and to the lining of his heart.

Before leaving for Vitória to see my brother in hospital, I was compelled to again visit the church, this time with personal motives in addition to professional ones. When I arrived I talked to the priest and he confirmed that presenting *ex-votos* to saints is not strictly a catholic practice. It is a practice he explained that comes spontaneously from the people, and with such a weight of tradition, the church of Nosso Senhor do Bomfim has a dedicated chamber for *ex-votos*, the *Sala dos Milagres*, the miracle room. Still shaken by the news of my brother’s assault, I found the little room terrifying; a
bizarre, crowded, multi-layered, complex and over decorated installation on illness, dreams, desire, fantasy and pain.

**Figure 1.1 Sala dos Milagres**

I told the priest about my brother’s assault and he smiled kindly when I asked him: *eu devo trazer o presente para Nosso Senhor do Bonfim antes ou depois que a cura for feita?* “should I bring the gift to Nosso Senhor do Bonfim (Our Lord of the Good End) before or after the healing is made?” He answered that there are no rules but mostly people bring the gifts after the materialization of the request. Perhaps prematurely, I had bought in the morning, little wax effigies of the many parts of my brother’s body that I knew were shot, from one of the many shops near the church. My brother was in intensive care with his life in the balance. I was soon to return to Australia and would not have been able to place the ex-votos if my brother survived. In my praying, I explained the urgency to Senhor do Bomfin and that I was probably making my offering *in advance*. I felt sure however that Senhor do Bonfim would help my brother.

As an artist and solo performer I am prone to relate life’s occurrences to my work. I thought perhaps (and I was concerned about the Senhor getting confused) that doing things *wrongly* was like an element of performance, a silly mistake or a kind of frightening heresy. It seemed part of my ongoing research into being a *palhaça*, a clown, a clumsy practitioner of ex-votos.
1.2  Ex-Votos at the Igreja do Nosso Senhor do Bomfim

Ex-votos are an embodiment of gratitude for divine healing, a pact with the divine or as it was in my case, an open request for help. Traditionally, people make promises and offerings to deities or saints out of necessity—a need borne of hardship and a humble acceptance of ignorance and unimportance. All sorts of people make offerings of candles, fabrics, wooden pieces, sculptures, toys, paintings and pictures. Sometimes, and especially at the Igreja do Nosso Senhor do Bomfim, injured or diseased parts of the body are represented in paintings and sculpture and presented in thanks. In addition to wax effigies at the church are grotesque pictures of people in pain in hospitals, pictures of pregnant women smiling, of healthy and sick babies, children undergoing surgery, women in wedding dresses, and young people in beautiful clothes at medicine or law graduation ceremonies. There are also emotional notes scrawled on pieces of paper thanking the Senhor do Bonfim for the healing of relatives. The notes are testament to all manner of human suffering and fundamental needs: notes describing almost dying as a result terrible accidents; others, expressing gratitude for finally being able to buy a simple family house; for finally getting a job after years of unemployment and near-starvation.
1.3 Ex-votos in performance

In the context of my research, ex-votos can be an artistic manifestation based on faith and despair, feelings of dislocation, impoverishment and disempowerment.

In 8.8, Processes, I will detail how ex-votos and my experience at the Igreja do Nosso Senhor do Bomfim inspired aspects of my final performance for this project, the Little World performance presented at La Mama Theatre, Melbourne, in December 2006. As I will describe in greater depth, we hung as offerings pieces of dismembered dolls: heads, arms, legs, and torsos, as well as making arrangements of toys, candles and flowers under the stairs of the La Mama performance space. The violence and the shootings in Brazil encouraged me to develop a character called Irma Rotina, Sister Routine, who interacted with the offerings. The nun distributed cap-guns to the audience and asked them to shoot her while she made odd and childlike confessions in a pink, upholstered, child-sized armchair. A second character, Senhor Bibi Ferreira, donning um bigode falso, a false moustache, attempted a child-abduction of a doll with a pistol hidden behind plastic flowers presented as a gift.

These characters and offerings amongst many others constitute Little World, an intercultural performance investigating Brazilian culture, spirituality
and psyche through autoethnographic performance and from the perspective of a displaced artist finding her way in a new country. *Então, também, essa tese é uma oferta: um pacto com o divino, um pedido de ajuda; um testemunho de sofrimento e graça, uma expressão de gratidão, uma manifestação de fé e desespero, sentimentos de deslocamento, empobrecimento e fragilidade.* So, too, this exegesis is an offering: a pact with the divine; a call for help; a testament to suffering and need; an expression of gratitude; a manifestation of faith and despair, feelings of dislocation, impoverishment, and disempowerment. Like the Sala dos Milagres at Igreja do Nosso Senhor do Bomfim, it may seem sometimes bizarre, crowded, multi-layered, complex, and over-decorated; the scientific numbering (1.1, 2.1.2 & c) holding the disparate elements, **which really can be read in any order**, in tension. I assert, emphasise, underline, make it clear to you, that *este projeto é sobre performance, não é ciências sociais,* this project is about performance, it is not social science. Gayatri Spivak famously asked, “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak 1988). Here, she speaks. And in her own voice. But aware that she is enfolded in the processes and places she speaks against. A Brazilian-Australian, an Austral-Brazilian.
Offering 2.  (Some) autoethnography

When I look too much for a meaning, I do not find it. Meaning is as little mine as what exists in the beyond. Meaning comes to me in breathing and not in words, it is breath.

— Clarice Lispector

I am a Brazilian intercultural performer with knowledge of Candomblé, Umbanda and Espiritismo (see Offering 4) and I come from a family of healers. I have a special interest in translation between Afro-Brazilian theatre, literature, and ritual, and their “Western” (that is, North-American and European derived) equivalents. I am interested in research-based drama and autoethnographic performance, and since 1987 I have been engaged in the work of linking such theatre to literature. As an actor, performer, and director, I have been interested in the process of producing “messy” autoethnographic performances and texts.

I began this exegesis writing of my brother’s tragedy in Vitória, and I have hinted at the complex spirituality that interpenetrates almost every facet of Brazilian life. Maintaining this momentum, the familial and cultural flavour will continue; the autoethnographic content and discussion manifest in the performances of Little World and throughout this written exegesis.

As an introduction to my research approach, I include here a brief introduction to autoethnography. The remaining sections in this Offering serve to make an important introduction—to my family.

2.1 Autoethnography

By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life.

— Carolyn Ellis & Arthur Bochner
(Ellis & Bochner 2000)

[T]he self is a social phenomenon

— Kathryn Church
(Church 1995)

Building on Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner’s article “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject”, Armour, Moore and Stevenson define autoethnography as a form of autobiographical writing with “multiple layers of consciousness” that connects personal elements with that
of the cultural, and may take a variety of forms such as stories, poems and fictions (Armour et al. 2001; See also Ellis & Bochner 2000). Elaine Bass Jenks writes that, “while authoethnographers write about themselves, their goal is to touch a world beyond the self of the writer” (Bass Jenks 2002:174).

Susan Bennett (Bennett 2004) outlines some useful points to define the field. According to Bennett, an autoethnography is:

– An analytical/objective personal account
– About the self/writer as part of a group or culture
– Often a description of a conflict of cultures
– Often an analysis of being different or an outsider
– Usually written to an audience not a part of the group
– An attempt to see self as others might
– An opportunity to explain differences from the inside
– Sometimes a traditional essay answering the five Ws
– Sometimes a typical essay with topic sentences and three to five supporting examples
– Always an attempt to explain one element of self to other
– An explanation of how one is “othered”

Advocates of autoethnography frequently allude to the promise of certain universal truths in autoethnographic writings. On the position of Kathryn Church (see Church 1995:5), Andrew Sparkes writes, that “what we experience and present of ourselves as subjective or personal is simultaneously objective and public” (Sparkes 2002:216). He quotes Church:

*I choose to foreground my own voice. This is not narcissism; it is not an egocentric indulgence ... Critical autobiography is vital intellectual work ... The social analysis accomplished by this form is based on two assumptions: first, that it is possible to learn about the general from the particular; second, that the self is a social phenomenon. I assume that my subjectivity is filled with the voices of other people. Writing about myself is a way of writing about these others and about the worlds which we create/inhabit ... Because my subjective experience is part of the world, the story which emerges is not completely private and idiosyncratic. (Church in Sparkes 2002:216)*

The idea of autoethnography as research, is however one commonly regarded with suspicion in academic circles, particularly the social sciences (Church 1995; Sparkes 2002) where it is an approach often perceived to work in opposition to “scientific objectivity” (Sparkes 2002:214). Sparkes points to the need for autoethnographic writers to recognise the charge of “self-indulgence” frequently levelled against them—that it is indeed a real risk to be "self-indulgent rather than self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, or

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1 Who, what, where, when, and why.
self-luminous” (Sparkes 2002:214). He quotes from a critique on “narrative non-fiction” by Blake Morrison (see Morrison 1998), that “Confessionalism has to know when to hold back ... It takes art. Without art, confessionalism is masturbation. Only with art does it become empathy” (Morrison in Sparkes 2002:215).

Again on art, Stacy Holman Jones, writing on the emotional power of autoethnography, makes a connection with torch-singing, stating they are both storytelling activities that “enact a life story within larger cultural and social contexts and histories”. She writes that these stories are often lamentations that can provoke activated responses in recipients:

Why do we tell such tales? To inscribe our own melancholy, mourning, and release, and to evoke these same emotions in our readers and our audiences. More than this, though, we seek to create a live, charged exchange with an audience (Holman Jones 2002:51).

Holman Jones also writes that the author of an autoethnography, by looking inwards before expressing outwards, encourages self-reflection in readers (Holman Jones 2002:53), presumably, leading by example.

This project is broadly autoethnographic. It is also performance research that is, it is research in, by, through, and about performance as much as it is about “me”: it is not, and is not intended to be, a form of social science, or an illustration of social science “findings”. As Victoria University regulations in relation to creative work allow, I’m not aiming simply at a discursively expressed critical position (as understood in traditional academic research): I’m looking for productive creative relationships that can provide insights into my intercultural performance and the connection of the personal to the cultural. Thus, I have created a cross-cultural fictional mosaic of myself. Or should that be, a fictional cross-cultural mosaic that could be “myself”? In so doing, I am agreeing with Brian Massumi in his introduction to Deleuze and Guattari’s work:

The question is not, Is it true? But, Does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body? (Massumi 1992:3).

2.2 My family

I grew up in a middle-class family in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, in a city called Uberaba. The city, by comparison to other towns in Brazil, is
affluent. It is a regional farming centre and a university town with thousands of students from all over the state. My family has lived in Uberaba for several generations and I can trace my family heritage back to Portuguese and Italian roots. This introduction to my family—and some notes on their relevance to my performance work—is just that, an introduction. I will relate other stories throughout the exegesis.

![Family photo](image)

Figure 2.1 On holiday (bottom right) with family and friends in Brasilia

### 2.2.1 Unimportant little objects

In my solo work, I have never been able to hide my ideas behind the character. I have always been *too honest* to pretend to be somebody else on the stage. This is a difficulty for an actor, and an issue for more traditional approaches to theatre. I have to talk as “myself”; I have to be a voice; a singularity. I am doing it right now.

Talking again about the *Little World* performance(s)—you see (don’t you?), even in my thesis the performance and my life cross boundaries—I realized that the character’s personal little world was insignificant: unimportant little objects, “old fashioned” themes life themes like love, loss, family, country, memories.
My grandmother has no public importance, but the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector has. I write about Lispector in many sections of this thesis and her stories helped shape characters in the Little World performances. For me, my grandmother and Lispector are the same, despite the disparity in their profiles: my ghost friends in my solitude in Australia—they know me well. My experience of my grandmother’s illiteracy taught me something of being a foreigner in Australia, something of foreignness and alienation. How could my grandmother tell so many stories without even speaking correct Portuguese? Why can’t Clarice Lispector be explained? Why was my father so critical of so many things in Brazil? He used to sigh every night watching the Jornal Nacional. If you play with the family puzzle, you will start doing Latin American magical realism right now. How absurd my family is, I would say: my mother believes in communication with spirits, my father never even believed in God.

2.2.2 Encounters with childhood memories

During the creative process of Little World, I remembered my grandmother telling stories in the dark of night, without electricity, by the woodstove, through the night. We listened intently to those stories; they were so human, so sad, and so humorous. We were children and on holidays with our parents at her farm near Uberaba. I was particularly scared of bats—and there were many under the rough-hewn roof of her farmhouse.

My grandfather, my mother’s father and my grandmother’s first husband, was a healer. Due to his beliefs in parallel worlds—he was an espirita—he was surrounded by mentally ill people who came to him for help, especially people who heard voices and saw phantom figures. The farm was full of physically and mentally disabled people—crippled, deaf, blind, slow, and mad. As a well-brought up and protected girl from Uberaba, I experienced something of a jolt each time I visited.

After my grandfather’s death, my grandmother remarried and adopted five children whose mother was severely mentally ill. They had been abandoned in the bush close to my grandmother’s house. I loved playing with them during the holidays and the way they spoke “bad Portuguese”; my sister

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2 The daily news on the Globo TV channel.
3 A practitioner of Espiritismo or Spiritism, a religion popular in Brazil that involves communication with spirits. Spiritism is discussed in detail in Section 4.3.
and I would create translations back into proper Portuguese—a translation service for the family.

We all enjoyed telling each other ghost stories. Memories of this were a source of inspiration for Little World I—the first of three stages in the development of Little World (see 9.1)—and would ultimately serve to establish links with a variety of feminine characters.

### 2.2.3 My mother

My mother has the same charitable spirit as her parents, and when I was a child, she would regularly take me to visit the mentally-ill, the elderly, and the poor in Uberaba. I enjoyed going, but sometimes became nauseated, especially when I had to greet the poor and the aged with kisses, as they were not always clean in the charity houses. There was a woman called Maria das Bonecas who made beautiful dolls from fabric. She was senile and all her dolls had the same face. It sounds cruel when I remember how excited they were about our visits. I wonder if those people had any space to be individuals—at least a little. Remembering her dolls now, I have to admit that I feel something of a chill, and a certain sadness. At the time, whenever I showed signs of shock or amazement my mother would say “This is life my daughter!”

My mother was afraid of dying when she was pregnant with me. She was forty-two and caesarian section was not yet an option in Uberaba. I was born in 1967, the year Simone de Beauvoir visited Brazil, and my mother chose the name Simone because of her. I imagine my mother besotted with the French feminist, watching her on the television. She was afraid of having a terrible delivery. The delivery was strange, risky. My mother says she doesn’t know what they did to rescue us but she knew that she was unconscious.

### 2.2.4 My father and his family

My mother is fun. My father was so serious. Why did he complain so much about Brazil? Where was my father from? Somewhere else, some better place in the world? He was Brazilian but I could tell he never felt at home. His mother was from Italy. We had pasta and wine every Sunday—quite exotic. He spoke no Italian, but why couldn’t he speak with his hands or speak loudly? This was another cliché about Italians that my mother commented on—and she lamented his reserve.
Later I learned that my father’s family comes from Milan. They are Northern Italians, and I have heard that they are supposedly more “detached and cold”. I wonder if this mild bitterness on living in Brazil and criticism about Brazilian ways was because of his European background. I can remember my father looking out the window, silently contemplative, and a little melancholic. He didn’t care for samba or carnival.

He often wore a smile, but he was usually ironic and critical when we watched television together. His criticism peaked whenever “typical Brazilian behaviours” were shown: naked women, “samba” and sexual references. Yes, he was extremely serious, exactly like his mother, Virgulina Trezzi. She was a strong woman, a hard worker, and, of course, serious. She was probably none too happy with my grandfather’s (my father’s father) exploits as a musician, playing till late in serenades.4 My grandfather was a sign-writer for the railways by day, but a flautist at night—and after one late night too many, she broke his flute. Dona Virgulina may have been cold but she was not without passion.

Never an ambitious man, my grandfather brought little money home to the family and my father began his working life at the age of twelve as a packer in a factory. He finished his schooling at night and later became a public servant for the taxation department; then after my brothers were born, in middle-age and with my mother’s encouragement, he studied law and became a solicitor.

Late in my grandfather’s long life and after his wife died, he came to live with us. My mother adored my grandfather. At age one-hundred, he took to pacing through the house—pacing, albeit at a slow speed. He would repeat the phrase: É a natureza! É a natureza! That’s nature! It transpired my grandfather was lonely, and he confided in my mother that he had uma vida normal, “a normal life” with his wife up until she died. He asked my mother—in characteristically rustic terms—to find him uma mulher boa e liminha, “a good clean little woman”—and my mother, obligingly, began the search.

When my father received word of my mother’s quest, he was horrified and put an end to it. My father went to his room, laid a hand on his chest—nursing his heart—and sighed for hours.

4 Even today, people in towns like Uberaba pay musicians to serenade a sweetheart. My brothers used to play in serenades too.
The day after my father died, his brother came to take my grandfather from the house. My mother was doubly bereaved—she lost her voice.

2.2.5 My mother’s maid, Maria

In Brazil, many people, not just middle-class people, have *empregadas,* or maids. The reasons are complex and related to poverty, the schooling system, and the lack of affordable childcare. It is almost *expected,* an unwritten part of the social contract, for people to have an *empregada* or a *diarista*—a casual cleaner or maid—in Brazil. In Brazil, even maids have maids.

My mother’s *empregada,* Maria, is around fifty years old. She told me once that her first son was the child of a prisoner. He is black, she says, because of his father. She is from Pará, a large Brazilian state in the Amazon Basin. She was orphaned as a child, and after her parents’ death a local female farmer promised her and her sister a wonderful life on her farm; however, the reality proved somewhat different and they were kept as virtual slaves. One consolation was their proximity to a local penitentiary—and on Sundays, she enjoyed watching handsome men exercise in the prison grounds. One Sunday she became pregnant; she left the farm and never returned.

Maria looks Indigenous. She has a boyfriend who is very old. He uses *Viagra* and Maria gets no rest the nights he takes the tablet. She comes to work next day very tired. My mother wails in mock indignation: “You didn’t sleep, I know! Maria what did you do last night?!?” Maria replies: “Exactly what you think!” and laughs. She complains about Viagra and complains to me that the *veio—caipira* slang for *velho,* “old man”—wants to kiss her; his kisses are *babados*—“full of saliva”.

This is Brazil! A maid, *Viagra,* a widow, and laughter. A street-boy, a tourist, and a baby starving under a bridge—a PhD student in Paris and another in Melbourne on Brazilian government scholarships performing autoethnographies. I am in love with Brazil. My mother found out in the town market that Maria says to friends that she takes care of a *velha.* The “old woman” is my eighty-one-year-old mother. She didn’t like it.

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5 The direct English translation of *empregada* is “female employee”.
6 *Country.*
Offering 3. (Some) questions (and some statements)

I dreamed I was a good actor, not a performance artist, but an actor, a good one. I could realistically represent someone else in a movie or a theatre play, and I was so convincing as an actor that I would become that other person, forgetting completely who I was. The character that I represented in my dream was that of an essentialist performance artist, someone who hated naturalistic acting, social and psychological realism, someone who despised artifice, make-up, costumes, memorizing lines, being directed. In my dream, the performance artist began to rebel against the actor, myself. He did shit like not talking for a week, or only moving in slow motion for a whole day, or putting on tribal make-up and hitting streets just to challenge people’s sense of familiar. He was clearly fucking with my mind, and I, the good actor, got so confused that I ended up having an identity breakdown and didn’t know how to act anymore. I adopted a stereotypical fetal position and froze inside a large display case for an entire week. Luckily it was just a dream. When I finally woke up, I was the same old confused performance artist, and I was extremely thankful for not knowing how to act.

— Guillermo Gómez-Peña
(Gómez-Peña & Peña 2005:36)

3.1 Do que é que se trata esse projeto?

Do que é que se trata esse projeto? What is this project about? É sobre mim, que sou nada, transformada numa transitória, risonha, híbrida camundongo-mulher-artista, procurando pelo que está além da verdade de não mentir. It is about me who is nothing, transformed into a transitory, laughing, hybrid mouse-woman-performer, searching for what is beyond the truth of not lying.

Trata-se de mim, uma mulher patética, vestida como uma menina carregando uma maletinha (de qual saem sons, música, imagens e vozes) num cirquinho imaginário, engraçado, falso, inexistente e pobre. It is about me, a pathetic woman dressed as a little girl carrying a little suitcase (from which come sounds, music, images and voices) in an imaginary funny, fake, inexistent, poor, little circus.

This thesis is about an actor (good-bad-ham-contemporary-post modern-physical-espiritual-funny-hahaha-and-huhuhu). É isso, it’s this exactly: and difficult to define. This actor who is me and who is not a performance artist due to some residual attachments to traditional and imaginary theatre—this person who calls herself an actor with some fears of the expectations, also spent years of her life watching melodramatic Brazilian actors in Brazilian novellas, soap operas on TV—listening, memorizing and
miming LPs and observing her own life and that of her family. She is too lost to be a *good actor*.

However, she is a bit self-conscious to be a performance artist. Or perhaps she is not able to be herself completely. She has the pretentious will to perhaps entertain, to scare, and to amuse with nothing more exciting than reality (it includes her dreams).

She struggles with the possibility of being an actor who is not able to relax and being a performing artist (him/herself?). However she is not able to be an actor in the way Gómez-Peña dreamed that he was. She prefers working alone like many performing artists, and for some time has hated directors.

She could be considered a clown (*palhaça*) but she has no skills or training in any kind of circus techniques (traditional or experimental). She did ballet but forgot it completely. She learned how to play the piano but also forgot that and remembers the huge disappointment she caused her father who died of a heart attack years later perhaps because of other unexpressed disappointments.

She doesn't sing very well. She acts with no characters, and with no memorized texts—at least, not completely memorized. They aren't happy spontaneous improvisations though. She tries hard to memorise but she is not able to.

Beyond all the acting and previous to all the interpretations of herself/character she likes talking about death/love/childhood. Ironically she is able to remember many of her memories of childhood and family in Brazil.

She wakes up in the morning and asks herself *onde está a público?* “where is the audience?” I will not ask why she is like that otherwise I will have to respond! Despite not knowing, and because she does not know, who she is exactly she accepts that she is lost as a person and as an actor. Is she in a crisis because of turning forty? Perhaps. She is not one of Grotowski’s “actor saints” (Grotowski 2002); nor is she one of Eugenio Barba’s “theatre anthropologists” (Barba 1995; Barba & Savarese 1991a). She is too performative to have a discipline as an actor trained for example in Meyerhold, Suzuki, or Stanislavsky’s techniques. She tried hard to memorize
some clues from those Theatre Masters many times. She admits that it is a shame and feels embarrassed about her lack of memory (as a person and as an actor). For example, she could genuinely forget when her visa expires and suddenly wake up in the morning completely illegal. However, she never gives up because there is “something” that calls to her acting body.

Like a persistent, disciplined nun she keeps creating her own labyrinth in a teatrinho (little theatre) of life. Ironically, tragically, and hopefully humorously she is still performing. Performing is a fun search for herself, or even a running away from her own little world/closet. It is not “funny hahaha”. It is actually a pain and she hates rehearsing as well as cleaning up, making up the room and keeping the audience interested in what she does. She is not professional and will never be. Because there is a Josephina in her (see 7.2). There is a genuine illness, lack of time, money, training, and finally a lack of talent and interest in being a trained actor. There is “something” that keeps her in her career as an experimental performer-actor-director though. It sounds already great. Don’t you think?

3.2 Alguma coisa / something

“Something” is exactly what this thesis is about. “Something” is perhaps the thing that the ballet teacher said that I had once: *Simone você tem alguma coisa* “Simone you have something” What did it mean?

I should have asked her for a letter with a signature saying:

*Simone Silva Reis has something,

Yours faithfully,

Iara [whose surname I don’t remember].

Where is Iara the ballerina who came every week from Sao Paulo to teach in Uberaba? What is “something” please!? I am doing a PhD in performance/theatre and I need you to explain please what “something” means! Where is Iara the ballerina?

3.3 Being myself, being Brazilian

She takes many notes of rehearsals and has piles of notebooks from hours of hard work in her tiny apartment. She seems to go nowhere.
It is a semi-autobiographical performance. Everything is someway true and about her life despite the character always being someone “other.”

Apesar de ser uma atriz, eu continuo sendo eu mesma e vice-versa. Despite being an actor I am still myself, and the other way around. I’ve heard for years that I should be a versatile actor; that nobody should recognize me, that I should be a hidden being. These would be the most important aims for a ‘good’ versatile actor, but I’ve never pursued that.

Is it a weak point for a performer to be him/herself? Is it very narcissistic? Is it, by the way, very Brazilian? Você não lembra que eu sou brasileira? Do you not remember that I am Brazilian? I don’t dance samba nor do Capoeira. I come from a quite boring place in Brazil called Minas Gerais, a state in the southeast. There is no ocean, no naked, colourful sexy women. There are many cows and wonderful cheese; yes, futebol (soccer) too, but I confess that I don’t care. There are many mountains, wonderful rivers, and Catholic churches. And there is Candomblé, Umbanda and Espíritosmo (see Offering 4), beautiful colonial cities, delicious food and scary cemeteries. Yet, it is a boring place to visit and that’s why nobody knows it. It is not in the tourist guides for Brazil. Não consta nos guias turísticos do Brasil. I have learned dancing—a bit of fake samba watching mulatas on TV shows from Rio in my boring but lovely hometown, Uberaba.

Sabe o quê? Do you know what? I was told the small cities in Minas Gerais are a bit similar to England. People say the Minas Gerais people are reservado, tradicional e quieto. Those comments might be full of prejudice and clichés, but I’ve heard them since I was a girl. I am not that quiet by the way. I also don’t love Uberaba that much. But I cannot pretend that I am a typical Brazilian who loves carnival, capoeira, and cachaça. I like contemplation and can be melancholic, as mineiros (people from Minas Gerais) are seen to be.

3.4 Estou perdida?

Am I an actor or a performer? Am I a person? Am I a woman? Am I a mouse? Am I an academic? Am I lost? Estou perdida? Estou perdida sim. Yes, I am lost. Even more lost since living in Australia. Hélène Cixous gives me a bit of hope when she says that being in love is being lost:
There is a connection between love and being lost. In familiar metaphoric terms, when it’s a question of passion, we get lost, we run wild with a panting metonymy, we are lost, all the more so by being helped by the personage posted there to produce objectively being lost: that’s the case of Pougatchov, known as The Guide. The guide to getting lost. Guide to the secret (Cixous 2005:119).

That’s why I decided to talk about love while trying to tell the story of my life. Love is an important theme for my work. Love is also discussed a great deal in Brazilian music, rituals, and culture. Oh yes, I am Brazilian. Sou brasileira, sim. I am Latin. I have to admit it. Ai, ai, ai!
Offering 4.  Brazilian spirituality and Little World

Candomblé, Umbanda e Espiritismo são influências enormes neste trabalho. Umbanda emergiu durante a parte adiantada do 20º sécuro, crescendo rapidamente dos 1960s avante. Não tem nenhum doutrina ou rituals formal ...

4.1 Introduction

Umbanda and Candomblé are strong influences on this work, as is Spiritism or Espiritismo as it is known in Brazil and more eclectic spiritual practices. Umbanda emerged during the early part of the 20th Century, growing rapidly from the 1960s onwards. It has no formal doctrine or rituals and, although there are variations between regions, several features prevail throughout the country. Umbanda, which began in Rio de Janeiro shares some features with Candomblé. Candomblé is a religion of Bahia—particularly São Salvador da Baia de Todos os Santos—which developed from the slave trade in the 16th and 17th Centuries: African slaves blended their religions with those of the colonists and the Indigenous people of Brazil. Brazilian Spiritism has an altogether different history, with its roots linked to 19th Century séance practices in America and Europe and codified into a “science” by Frenchman Allan Kardec. Kardec’s Spiritism involves a belief in the presence and communicative capacity of spirits and in reincarnation and karmic principles (Hess 1994). David Hess groups all three beliefs as spirit mediumship religions, those that feature the activities of spirit mediums at the core of the practice.

Both Candomblé and Umbanda are strongly syncretic, bringing together Roman Catholicism, African, and Indigenous Brazilian religions, disguising their African roots and deities—the Orixás or Orishas—using Christian imagery and saints. In the Brazilian context, this term syncretism is commonly used to describe the bringing together of features of two parallel religious traditions: that of the Catholic saints with Candomblé’s Orixás (Hess 1994:202). In a broader expression of syncretism, the Orixás of Candomblé and Umbanda are considered by some to be like combinations of the Tarot’s Major Arcana (the Fool, the Emperor, the Star, and so on), Greek gods (Zeus, Hera, Hermes ...) and Christian saints (St. Sebastian, St. John, St. Benedict ...) acting as intermediaries between God or Olorun—the African Yoruba tribe’s name for the Creator—and the world.
This Offering 4 on spirituality presents an overview of the spirit mediumship religions and their interplay with mainstream religion in Brazil and the Brazilian “psyche”. In addition to the three mediumship religions above, I will also discuss more modern, idiosyncratic and fluid forms. Interspersed in this offering are some of my own spiritual observations and experiences. I begin to discuss how these inform my practice and the work Little World.

4.2 Candomblé

4.2.1 An overview of Candomblé

Candomblé is practised mostly in Bahia in north-east Brazil. While many variants exist, the most well-known form is derived from the Yoruba people of West Africa (Hess 1994:196; McGregor 1967:57). Candomblé is complex and difficult to explain. It is sometimes referred to as Macumba, however, this is really a generic term for all African religions in Brazil and is often used pejoratively in a similar way to words like voodoo or black magic in English (Hess 1994:198). Over many centuries, African slaves and their descendants practised their religions by blending them with Roman Catholicism, associating the deities, or Orixás, with particular saints or other Christian figures. Orixás have a “functional equivalence” with the Catholic saints: both have anthropomorphic qualities; both are associated with power over the natural elements or particular cultural activities; both offer personalities with which followers can readily identify and “establish a strong personal bond”; and finally both assist followers in their pursuit of personal goals in exchange for offerings (Frigerio 1989:39).

The Orixás or ancestor spirits are usually associated with natural phenomena such as thunder, fresh water, the ocean, and so on, as well as with mythical ancient royalty (Hess 1994:16). They are also associated with particular personal characteristics, abilities, rituals, music, and colours. In Candomblé practice each person has one main Orixá, who is the head owner of the individual, and usually three other Orixás who demand worship and offer protection. Each person has a divine origin, which links it to a specific deity. This divine part is located inside the head. The substance of divine origin expresses the link to a specific god (Martins 2001; Siqueira 1995; Verger 1997).

Candomblé has five fundamental themes:
1. Belief in God …
2. Belief in Deities [Orixás] …
3. Belief in Spirits …
4. Belief in Ancestors …
5. Belief in Mysterious Powers … (Talbot n.d.)

Candomblé mythic stories concern Orixás on missions from Olorum or Olodumaré, the Supreme Being. The missions are to create and govern aspects of the world and to be worthy of sustaining the worship of a cult following (Augras 2000). In Candomblé, life occurs at two levels: Aiye, the world, and Orun, which is beyond the real world, but coexisting with all the contents of this one: “Each individual, tree, animal, city, etc has its spiritual and abstract double in Orun” (Talbot n.d.). The myths reveal that in distant times Aiye and Orum were connected, and people could come and go as they please from one place to the other. However, this order, this connection, was violated, and there was consequently a separation and an unfolding of existence. One Candomblé creation myth says that in the beginning there was nothing besides air. When Olorun attracted breathing, part of the air transformed itself into a mass of water. The air and the water moved together and a part became a bubble or a mound-shaped matter, a reddish and muddy rock. Olorun breathed life over it and with his breath gave life to Exú, the first born, the first one in the Universe (de Moura 2000; Prandi 2001; Santos 1993).

4.2.2 Feminine power

Sexuality and fertility are powerful elements in Candomblé, which rejects notions of a split between body and soul. In the religious events of Candomblé held in the many casas de santo (places of Candomblé ritual), the body of each individual is related directly to an Orixá that conceives the sexual organs as a source of pleasure, thus going beyond their simple use for reproduction (de Barros & Teixeira 2000:108). Furthermore, Candomblé ritual is also a stage for the process of reinvention of the notions of feminine and masculine on the symbolic level, due to the multiplicity of sexual roles its mythical model has.

While the aspects of feminine sexuality have been privileged by the followers of Candomblé in Brazil (Augras 2000), feminine power is synthesized by the collective term Awon Iyá Wa (our Mothers) among the Iorubás, which refers to the passionate term of the “Great Mother”: the one and only Goddess who contains inside herself all the oppositions, comprising the full
circle of human qualities and unfolding herself into many feminine deities. According to Carneiro da Cunha (Augras 2000:19), the *Awon Iyá Wa* are androgynous and have in themselves good and evil, black magic and white magic; they have absolutely everything. In other words, they are *perfect*.

In Africa, the festival of *Gèlèdè* occurs to address the powerful *Awon Iyá Wa*. Taking place before each rainy season, its goal is to please *Iyá Mi* (our sorceress mothers) and soothe the terrible vengeful power of the *old respectable lady *Íyá Agba or Ìyámi Osòrògá*. During this festival, the fear that they will be locked forever inside the motherly body, that they will be sucked by the *frightening vagina*, forces men to temporarily abandon their masculinity, dancing, dressed in women’s clothes in order to mitigate the *Great Mother* and assuring the fecundity of the fields (Augras 2000:20).

The anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna (Hanna 1999:192) reminds us that even though the Nigerian Yoruba society is patriarchal, mothers have positive and negative dimensions and are also considered to be wielders of extraordinary powers. Thus, by paying a tribute to them, men share their innate power proclaiming their masculinity and femininity through visual signs:

*When men symbolically exteriorise, through dance, the basic forces of life, they may be affirming their virility and freedom before the presence of the powerful mothers; moreover, they may be recognizing and honouring the power of the mothers, as a means of calming them, allowing the mothers to use their “ase”, the vital mystical power, in the benefit of men* (Hanna 1999:192).

Reinforcing the ambivalence of these deities, Rita Segato (Segato 1995:428) links the combination of elements that are typical of a patriarchal family—characteristics of the dominant class in Brazil—with clearly non-patriarchal notions of the mythical family of the *Orixás*, save the existence of relative degrees of femininity and masculinity in each category. This is possible thanks to a variety of expressions of sexuality that are legitimate in the scope of *holy people*, also reunited regarding similar corporeal aspects.

In fact, when you examine “the people initiated, grouping them by orixás, one can notice that they usually possess common traits, both physical and psychological. The bodies seem to have, to a higher or lesser extent, according to the individuals, the kind of intellectual or psychological mark that animates them” (Verger 1997:34). These archetypes correspond to the
inherent, *hidden tendencies* that are conflicting with the rules of conduct and are, consequently, repressed throughout a person’s existence. Thus, if an Orixá corresponds to these *hidden tendencies*, its *filho-de-santo*, saint or holy child, will have a *relieving* experience.

Verger (Verger 1997:35) compares this experience with Morelo’s psychodrama and concludes that, contrary to a liberating angst process “in a depressing setting such as a clinic”, these hidden characteristics emerge in an admiring, fascinating, poetic form, during a “brilliant party”—the Candomblé ritual.

### 4.3 Spiritism

Pedro McGregor (McGregor 1967) attributes the beginnings of *Espiritismo*, Spiritism, in Brazil, to the work of homeopathic doctors such as the Frenchman, Dr. Mure and his Portuguese associate Dr. João Vicente Martins. The two doctors were committed to charitable work for the poor. In their work they used a combination of homeopathic remedies and a certain “magnetic” _treatment_, passing their hands closely over the patient without touching as they prayed to God for help in the cure. Both doctors created a slogan under which they worked: “God, Christ and Charity” and this motto was in McGregor’s view (McGregor 1967:88-89), the basis on which Spiritism was founded in Brazil. McGregor claims that rather than the ghostly phenomena and sensationalism associated with Spiritualism in America and Europe at the time, Brazilian Spiritualism would find its roots in homeopathy and the practice of charity.

McGregor writes (McGregor 1967:89) that homeopathic, neo-spiritualist groups headed by doctors and their friends in Brazil received excitedly the publication in 1847 of Andrew Jackson Davies’ _The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelation_, a book purportedly written under a trance. The author, a “simple cobbler revealed a quantity of fantastic information which he could not possibly have had of his own knowledge, and proved a testament to his extraordinary powers of mediumship”. McGregor writes that colleagues of Dr Mure, after his return to France in 1848, founded Brazil’s first spiritist group and that there is documented evidence of the group experimenting with communications with the dead as early as 1853. These experiments took
place before the publication of Allan Kardec’s *The Book of Spirits*\(^7\) in 1857, perhaps the most influential of all Spiritism books.

David Hess (Hess 1994:11-13) describes the existence of two streams in contemporary Brazilian Spiritism: one having a *scientific* emphasis and the other being more *evangelical*. Common to both streams however is a belief in Kardec’s fundamental principles of: “communication with the dead via mediums, the existence of a spiritual body, healing through spiritual energies and the gradual purification of the soul across various incarnations in a process governed by the law of karma”. Hess writes that Kardec “taught that Spiritism was a combination of empirical research, philosophical reflection and right action governed by the law of karma and the Christian golden rule”\(^8\) and that Kardec had “synthesized science and religion, not to mention East and West”. While intellectuals favoured the scientific stream, following particularly closely the teachings of Kardec in his first two books, *O Livro dos Espíritos*, "The Book of Spirits" and *O Livro dos Médiuns*, "The Book of Mediums" (Kardec 1859 [1944], 1944 [1857]), grass-roots Spiritists are more concerned with charitable works such as providing food and medical services such as homeopathy to the needy and conducting *passe* and *disobsession* sessions. Hess points at some disagreement amongst Spiritists as to whether Spiritism is a Christian faith with a great many Spiritists considering themselves Christian. Spiritist scholars have argued that a Spiritist may be aligned to any one of many religions and that as Kardec himself believed that Spiritism is the "scientific, philosophical and moral basis for all religions”.

On *passe* and *disobsession* mentioned above: *passe* bears a close resemblance to the *magnetic treatment* of Dr Mure and is a fundamental practice in Spiritism. It can be defined as “a Spiritist type of therapy that involves passing energy from a person and/or spirit to a different person. The person who gives the energy is generally a medium, and the energy comes from the medium’s spiritual body or from spirits that work with the medium” (Hess 1994:200). *Disobsession* is a treatment for *obsession* by troubled spirits and mediums work to “help them”, the spirits, “go on to spiritual hospitals or other places where they can receive help” (Hess 1994:197). The *obsessing* spirits are considered “commonplace” by Spiritists (Hess 1994:2).

\(^7\) Also published in English under the title *The Spirit’s Book*
\(^8\) “Do unto others as you would wish them do unto you”
4.3.1 Spiritism, a personal interjection

Growing up in an Espírita family, on the maternal side, in the town of Uberaba in Minas Gerais, I would be remiss to not give a personal account of Spiritism. Indeed, Uberaba itself is an important centre in the modern history of Brazilian Spiritism, as I will mention.

As young as ten years old, I attended disobsession sessions at my mother’s Spiritist centre. This centre is called the Casa Espírita Andre Luís and there they hold meetings every Wednesday night called trabalho de desobsseção, or in English, disobsession work. It seemed to me at the time to be all about people berrando, xingando, chorando and rindo—screaming, swearing, crying, and laughing—and sometimes the frenetic shaking of bodies. The mediums were the healers who talked to these spirits, giving out messages of peace and love called doutrinação. These obsessing spirits are supposed to have originated in the darkness or umbral, a specific place that people with little love or light, but who are still learning and open to grow, might go after death. Many of them are believed to be compulsive smokers, alcoholics, abusive people, perhaps murderers and suicidal beings or women who have had many abortions. It can be seen as a kind of Catholic hell, um inferno católico, but with some hope for the spirit to grow in a spiritual and ethical transformation.

The Book of Spirits consists of one thousand and eighteen questions and answers on all manner of spiritual topics. It was my mother’s preferred book and each time one of her children asked a simple question like, o que acontece com a gente depois da morte, mamãe? “What happens to us after death, Mum?” or Onde está tia Horizonta desde que ela morreu? “Where is Aunty Horizonta since she died?” she would immediately have a quick look in the book and answer us with definitions of body, spirit, peri-spirit and ectoplasm. Her father was a Spiritist and she grew up among spirits and mediums on a beautiful farm in Minas Gerais.

I always felt that all possible questions about death were answered in the Book of Spirits and my Mother’s faith was, as I still believe, absolutely inviolable. My faith was finally shaken when I went to University in Brasilia. It was like the end of a child’s dream and in its place, a huge new crisis developed, uma nova crise enorme, about my views on spiritual life, the dead and death. This is not to say that I am not proud of the intense questioning
that Spiritism engendered in my life. In my crisis, I lost most of my faith and found the book simplistic. I observed Kardec trying to codify religion and all the mysteries of life in a simple scientific way or worse still, in a way that was complicating something already too complex to be understood. The scientific answers appeared more nonsense to me than the inherent ambiguities of the questions: *Por que temos que provar esse fenômeno?* Why do we have to prove these phenomena?

After years, I confess I have lost my faith in almost the entire book, *em quase tudo*, and the one thousand and eighteen answers about death no longer convince me. My heart however is still genuinely moved by the beautiful *Espíritas* who are, and were, so devoted to Spiritism in Brazil like Chico Xavier, Divaldo Pereira Franco, Celso Cunha, Maria Henrique de Fidelis, my grandfather Sabino Lucas, my Aunt Horizonta Horizontina and finally my mother, Antonia Antonina da Silva Reis, or as she is known in Uberaba, Dona Tininha.

### 4.3.2 Francisco Cândido Xavier (1910-2002)

In Brazil in 1932 it was a year of an “extremely odd event” (McGregor 1967:120). A book was published that caused an extreme sensation, especially in literary circles, and compelled the well-known writer and critic Humberto de Campos to write in the *Diario Carioca* of July 10, 1932:

> *Francisco Candido Xavier is the name of a young man of humble origin, born in Pedro Leopoldo, Minas Gerais state, in 1910. After passing through primary school in his hometown, he joined a textile factory as a labourer. Later he worked in a commercial establishment, a grocery store, and, as this world was not too friendly, he started to think of the next, by joining the spiritists with the high functions and responsibilities of a ‘medium’. Having to occupy himself with the mediocre spirits that in this life frequented the shop he worked in, Francis Candido Xavier decided to be more selective in the world of the shadows, choosing for conversations with superior intelligences, writers, and especially poets, who had already passed to the other world. Through these conversations, in which the mouth took no part, his new friends transmitted some poems they had elaborated after discarnating, and these the young counter-clerk wrote down mechanically, without any effort either of his arm or his imagination. These spirits were originally Guerra Junqueiro, Antero de Quental, Augusto dos Anjos, Castro Alves and so forth (The Keats and Byrons of the Portuguese language). Called Parnassus Beyond the Grave, the book of Mr Francisco Candido Xavier is very interesting for live poets, although it is a terrible menace for those who dislike poetry, Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entraste!—there inside, in the kingdom of death, there are poets. And they sing! They sing the same way they sang here, without omitting even the precious language they used on earth. I would fail the duty imposed upon me by my*
conscience if I did not confess that, making verses through the pen of Mr Francisco Candido Xavier, the poets of whom he is the interpreter, present the same characteristics of inspiration and expression that identified them on this planet. The themes broached are the same that preoccupied them when alive. The taste is the same. And the verse answers, as a rule, to the same musical rhythms (McGregor 1967:120-121).

Humberto de Campos is “one of the giants of Brazilian Literature, a sharp-tongued critic by no means easy to please”, and he could not deny the legitimacy of style of any of the fifty-six poets in Franciscos Xavier’s book (McGregor 1967:121).

The medium, who had not finished primary school and who was semi-literate, became famous throughout Brazil. Francisco Xavier, or Chico Xavier, as he is better known through use of the diminutive for Francisco, lived nevertheless a life very unlike what one would expect of such a famous man. He always refused to accept a penny either from the sales of his books or from any other aspects of his work as a medium. Chico moved to Uberaba after retiring due to an eye illness. He became blind after sometime. For me, he was an important character that used a black wig, had the sweetest smile, wore big sunglasses and who my mother adored and believed in. I remember visiting his temple in Uberaba and seeing many actors and famous journalists that I had seen on Brazilian television. It was crowded. People came to see Chico Xavier from all over Brazil. Uberaba, a countryside town, became famous because of him. Once a week, he spent several hours as a medium, answering requests for medicines from those who had lost faith in the ability of doctors to cure their ills.
And who is the physician of the spirit world who fills out the prescriptions that Chico Xavier transmits in trance? None other than Dr Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes (1831–1900), doctor of the poor, famous president of the Spiritist Society. In his Uberaba temple, all the sick had to give was their names with no further information needed. Chico seemed to have the ability to heal millions of people. He has been another inspiration to my life and performances.

4.4 Umbanda

Umbanda tem mironga
Umbanda tem dendê
Quem quiça conhece Umbanda
Tem muito que aprender

[Umbanda has secrets
Umbanda has arguments
Whoever wants to know about Umbanda
Has a lot to learn]

— a popular Umbanda ritualistic chant

Umbanda originated in Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s as a religion syncretising Kardecist Spiritism, Candomblé, Catholicism and American Indian religious traditions (Jensen 1998:75). It emerged as part of a general

modernist impetus, with some versions of the history suggesting Umbanda was created by disaffected Spiritualist mediums that wished to follow a more Brazilian path (Hess 1994:15-16). While its roots were in the Brazilian middle-class, Umbanda soon became a popular religion and it is now estimated that a quarter to a third of the Brazilian population has some contact with Umbanda centres (Jensen 1998:75).

Brazilian sociologist Cândido Procópio Ferreira de Carmargo identifies Umbanda as a continuum between Spiritism and Candomblé with different Umbanda centres mixing the faiths to varying degrees (Hess 1994:29). While a standardisation of practice in Umbanda has been resisted (Jensen 1998:75), adherents of Umbanda believe in three core principles common to Spiritism: a belief in reincarnation; a belief in the evolution of spirits between carnations and a "belief in karma, or law of cause and effect” (Frigerio 1989:76). Umbandistas, followers of Umbanda, in general accept the "nature/ancestor spirits of the Yoruba, although rarely do the mediums incorporate or receive into their bodies the orixás” (Hess 1994:17).

Figure 4.2 Boats with offerings, Festa de Iemanjá, Umbanda ritual in Salvador\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} The Festa de Iemanjá is a phenomenon. Held every year in Salvador da Bahia and attended by crowds numbering three million, people make offerings to Mãe or Mother Iemanjá, the goddess of the sea. They put flowers, dolls, necklaces, and mirrors in boats and send them to sea as offerings and demonstrations of gratitude.
According to Alejandro Frigerio (Frigerio 1989:78-84) Umhandistas, followers of Umbanda, like many Spiritualists, incorporate Judeo-Christian beliefs and symbols into their practice and “are always quick to specify that since theirs is a religion, they are monotheistic, believing in one God”. God however, or Olorun as he is widely known, is somewhat marginalised by the roles of the Orixás, the most important of which in Umbanda, Oxalá, “is syncretized with Jesus Christ”. Some Umbandistas, in contrast to followers of Candomblé make a distinction between Orixás and Orixálás, the latter of which are considered “pure energies of nature”. Orixás are considered highly evolved spirits that have passed through this corporeal life and in accordance with their advanced state, have roles and powers similar to that of Orixálás.

Beneath the Orixás in the Umbanda pantheon, and still subject to the process of evolution through reincarnation, are the entidades espirituais, the spiritual entities. Two main kinds exist: the Caboclos, indigenous spirits from South America and the Pretos Velhos, literally the old blacks, the spirits of African Slaves. These spirits, commonly received by pais and mães-de-santo mediums during Umbanda sessions, help needy practitioners with advice and in turn ensure their further spiritual evolution through these encounters.

Figure 4.3 Preparing offerings to Iemanjá, Salvador
Other more polemic spirits, due to their association with witchcraft, are the Exú and the Pomba Gira (female Exú) spirits, immoral spirits of more marginalised lives such as those of thieves, prostitutes and drunks. “What they lack in terms of spiritual enlightenment they have in power, and for this reason they are very much in demand for they can be used for doing harm or for undoing the harm that spirits of their kind have done” (Frigerio 1989:82). Spiritual sessions of this sort dealing with Exú and known as Quimbanda, while acknowledged as indispensable to temple life by Umbandistas, commonly attract accusations of sorcery.

**Figure 4.4 Mãe-de-santo with offering, Festa de Iemanjá**

David Hess offers a more sympathetic view of Exú and Pomba Gira, the trickster spirits. While they are sometimes associated with Christian Devil, he writes that they “are just very streetwise spirits who generally give down-to-earth and sometimes ornery advice. In short, they are the very Brazilian rogues (malandros) of the spirit world (Hess 1994:24 & 197).

In my own experience of Umbanda ritual, I can attest to the provocative nature of entities such as Pomba-Gira and Exú They can be radically sexual, provocative entities and when a medium is possessed by this type of visitor in the templo (temple), the atmosphere is very exciting, intense, dense, humorous, perhaps even tense and sensual—they say there are no boundaries to what will embarrass you.
4.5 Further spiritual hybridity & eclecticism

4.5.1 Mother’s milk

Pedro McGregor observes (McGregor 1967:86) colourfully and in the language of his times that the Brazilian gentry practically “sucked a knowledge of magic from the breasts of their Negro milk-mothers”. McGregor relates this to the “widespread toleration and even encouragement of miscegenation” and a liberal education system emphasising the humanities. This, he believes, contributed to the spirit of tolerance and permissiveness that identifies the Brazilian character, his (her) mystic outlook and good-humoured ambivalence towards strict rules and dogma (the Australian reader may perhaps view this as a kind of “mystic larrkinism”!?). McGregor clarifies that the Catholic missionaries who were “in at the beginning” of Brazil’s history were unable to enforce “the rigid codes of their church in the lush of the exotic country to which they had been sent, nor could the padres following them stop the landlords, the white master, from exploiting an easy access first to Indian, then to Negro women, with all the pleasures of the intercourse that followed” (McGregor 1967:88). Consequently Brazilians broke away from the strict rules of Europe and became conditioned to accept wide-sweeping freedoms, freedoms that would be socially intolerable in Europe. McGregor goes on to argue that this permissive and eclectic influence influenced Brazilian intellectuals to develop an open-minded approach absent from their
European contemporaries. As he writes on the Brazilian intellectual and the environment:

*He was thus that much more receptive to ideas, attitudes, and suggestions which the Occident might normally dismiss as eccentric and unscientific. The primitive rites of African Negroes and their descendents would be rejected but the Brazilian intellectual would be familiar enough with the magical world of fetichism [sic] in which they lived. He clarifies that Brazil lives impregnated with magic. The medicine man, the feticher [sic], has among our populations a prestige considerably greater than the directors of our destinies—it is necessary to have the courage to confess it. In Brazil, the general average of true Catholics does not exceed ten per cent. There is an extremely large number of neo-pagans and spiritualists in every locality, however small it may be, and a very high percentage also in the cities. Ninan Ribeiro sums it up when she says that the number of whites, mulattoes and individuals of all colours and colour gradations who, in their afflictions, in their troubles, laugh at the power of talismans and fetisheers [sic], but secretly consult them and heed them, is incalculable. Such a link with primitive “animist” religious rites having been established, we see that the miscegenation of races not only has its counterpart in religious syncretism, but also serves as a ridge to the acceptance of a much higher, rational, intellectual, cultured philosophical approach to the consideration of human’s relationship with the divine (McGregor 1967:89).*

I am happy to acknowledge in this quite Brazilian thesis, that despite his condescending tone and my abhorrence of the language, McGregor’s position is a true one. Brazil is still living impregnated with magic despite many people denying their strong links with all sorts of practices outside the Catholic mainstream.
I have heard many stories of intellectuals being deeply engaged with Indigenous and African rituals, as well as variations and hybridizations of those rites. I myself was often involved, first as a medium and, later on, as a researcher and artist. I have seen many university lecturers having and giving consultations and learning and experiencing all sorts of healings. It is part of the culture, although many people might feel envergonhado, embarrassed, or afraid to admit it. There is a huge discrimination in relation to people who practise Umbanda and Candomblé in Brazil, even though some of these are extremely well-respected and socially engaged people—especially people involved in arts and social projects—such as Mãe Stela de Oxóssi in Salvador from the temple Ilê Axé Opo Afonjá-Bahia. Her work as a mãe-de-santo is extremely beautiful; and when I had a meeting with her she didn’t charge me. Era uma surpresa maravilhosa—it was a wonderful surprise, considering that Candomblé usually involves a lot of money for consultations and magic. In general after the consultations they say that you have to do certain things to open your path in life or to block someone’s spiritual attack etc. I have at times heard terrible things about Umbanda and Candomblé mães e pais-de-santo manipulating their filhos e filhas-de-santo (holy children—or clients) in ways that might constitute abuse of spiritual and human power. However, if
we remembered what the Catholic priests did to the Indigenous people in Brazil, we might also scream.

4.5.2 Tia Neiva and the Vale do Amanhecer

In Brazil I have attended, both as a participant and as an observer, many styles of neo-pagan religions and rites—like those of the Vale do Amanhecer (Valley of Dawn) in Brasilia created by a female medium, Tia Neiva (Aunty Neiva, 1925-1985), who was once a truck driver. She began her spiritual journey having amazing visions and superb premonitions. When I arrived in Brasilia, the first thing I did was visit her colourful little mystic city. The temple at the Vale do Amanhecer was full of tiny brightly coloured flags which I found cafona (Brazilian kitsch) and wonderful.

Tenho que confessar que eu acreditava em todas aquelas energias, aquelas forças e espíritos mas talvez não da mesma forma que acreditam as pessoas da Vale. I must confess, at the time I believed in all those energies, those forces and spirits but perhaps not in a way people from the Valley believe. I had visited Spiritist sessions throughout my childhood and adolescence in Uberaba but I had never seen anything like the Vale do Amanhecer.

There are approximately 500 residents in the Vale do Amanhecer and according to the official website (www.valedoamanhecer.com), many of the residents were abandoned children taken in by Tia Neiva. Deve ser verdade—it must be true. In Brazil it is very common that mediums are seriously engaged in social work. According to the Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vale_do_Amanhecer), the focal point of the community is the Temple of Dawn, “built of stone, in the format of an ellipse, with a covered area of about 2,400 square meters”. Inside is coloured labyrinthine space, um labirinto colorido, with several distinct sub-spaces, each one with its function connected to the spiritual works carried out daily. At the back of the temple, highlights Wikipedia, is a statue of Pai Seta Branca, a pre-Colombian spirit with whom Tia Neiva allegedly began communications in 1957. The entire Vale do Amanhecer complex is elaborate, with artificial waterfalls, a star-shaped lake, stone staircases, statues of Orixás from Candomblé such as Janaina and Iemanjá, and grass huts. In addition, there is a Government regulated school, restaurants, an auto repair shop, and a bookshop. Tia Neiva was happy to be herself, to be a cafona in her style, and
was able to convince authorities from Brasilia to support her mystical project. I have wondered at times if these authorities were among her clients—as McGregor explained, many intellectuals and politicians (I mean well-educated Brazilians) can be clients of those mediums, who in turn can be extremely supportive to them.

Wikipedia describes the “sect” of the Vale do Amanhecer as having a “sincretism [sic] with elements of Christianity, Spiritism, mysticism, Afro-Brazilian religions, belief in flying saucers, and ancient Egyptian beliefs” and that the robed mediums servicing the visiting clients “consider themselves the reincarnation of an extraterrestrial people, ‘the Equitunas’, who supposedly landed on the Earth 32-thousand years ago, and later returned in successive reincarnations in civilizations like the Hittites, the Jonians, the Dorians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Mayans etc”. Tia Neiva is said to have had the spiritual mission of commanding these people under the supreme command of the spirit Pai Seta Branca.

4.5.3 More Egyptologists

I have attended sessions at another temple in Brasilia that was founded by a couple who worked as mediums with Tia Neiva until she died. When Dona Eva’s husband died, she decided to bury his body inside a pyramid in the backyard of the temple. The pyramid is a special place for those people who are highly influenced by Egyptology. I used to go to this place in Brasilia and, each time I entered the pyramid to receive the positive energies I believed were inside, I had to face her husband’s grave. For the mediums, his spirit was always there working with them. Dona Eva gave consultations in a little room inside the temple. I once saw my Doctor there and he said “Hello!” and commented that “this place is simple but has so much strength!”. I was a bit surprised because it is a place generally visited by poor people being as it is in a precarious and marginalised suburb in Brasilia. In another temple, I once saw the Head of a School at the University of Brasilia where I work as a lecturer.

4.5.4 Performing in a Trance?

I was “accused” of being in a trance state during my first performance at the Teatro Nacional Cláudio Santoro in Brasilia in 1994. I denied it strongly because, as a new staff member in the theatre department of the University of Brasilia, I wanted to be seen as an artist with “reliable” “academic”
credentials. In retrospect, this was an important moment for me in terms of finding my identity as a performer. The “accusation” and rumours that followed amongst students and staff were propagated by a pai-de-santo called Raul de Xangô, who in reality intended his analysis as a complement. Raul de Xangô is a spiritual practitioner for whom I have a great deal of respect. He has developed a hybrid religious practice centred on what he describes as a “democratising” of Candomblé. By democratising he means his own personal liberty in adapting the strict rules of Candomblé practice. At Raul’s temple in the Federal District of Brazil (the municipality including Brasilia) and in his private consultations he applies a mixture of Candomblé, Umbanda, magista (spiritual magic), numerology, and astrology.

![Man in trance, Festa de Iemanjá](image)

Raul saw me on the stage and decided from there to invite me to many of his temple rituals and many times he did not charge to “throw shells” for me (a divination game of Candomblé called Buzios). He presented a paper at the University of Brasilia about Umbanda and said to many of my students, who were attending the Conference, that I was probably possessed when acting in the Teatro Nacional in 1994. Many of my students looked at me as if I was a kind of a medium, and perhaps I am. However, I have never felt comfortable with this definition and I do not like the idea of being forced to do mystical performances because I am a Brazilian with this background. I do

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11 From a telephone conversation with Raul de Xangô on 19 October 2007.
know however that it has been influencing, enriching, and inspiring my path as a performer.

Figure 4.8 Pai-de-santo Raul de Xangô during Exu ritual (photo Mila Petrillo, Brasília 2005)

I have mentioned in this Offering 4 on spirituality my training as a medium and it has indeed been an important part of my learning as an actor. I have long since stopped this kind of spiritual and physical practice due to my many doubts and lack of faith to be a truly spiritually and physically committed medium. I believe in, but I also doubt, my ability to go into a trance. I know this is an ambiguous statement but perhaps this is part of the complexity and eccentricity of being a contemporary Brazilian performer.