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A DOUBLE REPRESENTATION OF REALITY IN “DIALOGUE WITH THE SPIRITS”

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Abstract: The representation of reality on the screen presupposes a series of signs that lead the spectator to associate what he sees with elements of reality (gestures, emotions). Such representation is treated in this article in the context of the incorporation of an entity (or spirit) under the aspects of communication, alterity and belief. When a medium incorporates a spirit, there is a relationship with an invisible other under the seal of belief in the mediumistic act; it is also a communicational process, as it is a flow that begins with the other, passes through the body (of the medium) and reaches an interlocutor. This, in the object investigated here, is the interviewer of both the entity and the medium. We seek, therefore, to question whether this imbrication can be considered as a double layer of representation of the real. To shed light on our questions,

Keywords: Representations of the real, umbanda, communication, interview, audiovisual.

INTRODUCTION

When we imagine the forms of representation of the real through the documentary genre, we clearly visualize the indexical aspects contextualized by two main elements: the documentarian and those to whom he turns his cameras, real people in real situations that we dissociate from the fictional character. This dissociation is the result of a context that aggregates several markers that bring the process closer to a “truth”, to something with which we identify, such as physiological indices¹ in the form of testimony, enabling the seal of the real. This is a presupposition that we took as a starting point for the development of this article – in

the guise of a theoretical bias –, aware that it is not a rule, much less a consensus among researchers (and that is why we bring the contradictory in this article, in later section).

The documentary genre brings, among other resources, the uniqueness of the “interview” format, where there are essentially the roles of the interviewer(s) and the interviewee(s): this process takes place, in an interview, “a for one” eg normally between an interviewing subject (A) and another interviewing subject (B). However, our object of study indicates the presence of a third subject (C), which we can call “entity” or “spirit”, that is: is the interviewer dialoguing with (B), (C) or both? It is at this point that the simple contextualization of the genre as a journalistic documentary or capturing the real deserves more complexity and depth.

It is up to us to establish, within this problem, three forms of approaches that are convergent: 1) the communicational bias, where there is the assumption that the medium is serving as a mediating device for the communication of (and with) a spiritual entity, but considering that this communication is materializes and unfolds, therefore, in two actors in the process (actors B and C according to the previous paragraph), which configures 2) alterity, where the medium gives way to the “other”, to the spirit, referring to the aspect of 3) belief, where there is no doubt about the effective incorporation. Florence Dravet (2016) states that “[t]he game between the presence of another and the deviant mind [medium] can only be remedied by belief. One must confidently believe that there is another presence there; a radical alterity: in the Umbanda system, a spirit.” (p. 303).

1. For Fernando Andacht (2015), “[the] fact that someone turns red (with shame), cries, sobs or exhibits a tremor, is considered a physiological index by the audience, in their search for genuine testimonies [...]. Such indexical signs would be the decisive guarantee of the authenticity of this communicational experience, the cause of its physiological rather than cultural/conventional nature. This kind of effect on the audience of factual genres constitutes their distinctive element, what differentiates them from fiction, for example, from the television soap opera.” (p.81).

In relation to the alterity/belief approach, we must, within the academic rite, relate only the elements that communicate with each other within the scope of the chosen object, namely, the interviewer/entity/medium and the indicia that make up the ritualistic identity, which in the case in question refers to the Umbanda religion in Brazil: such indications concern the entity interviewed itself – an Exu², a character that integrates not only Umbanda but also other Afro religions / cults (Candomblé) and with Afro-Brazilian elements, among which we highlight Jurema/Catimbó, Tambor de Mina, Encantaria, Batuque, Quimbanda etc. (CASTRO, 2019, p. 58; AMARAL; DRAVET, 2019, p. 129; OLIVEIRA, 2019, p. 201), as well as the imagery that characterizes this entity.

What we aim at in this article is to raise questions - even if inconclusive - about representations of the real under two circumstances: one in which the entity incorporated in a medium can be considered as a representation of the real and the disembodied medium, speaking to the interviewer. Both situations happen in the same video recording, according to our object of study. What we have here, then, is what we call a double representation of the real, or a layered representation. To support our considerations, we use as theoretical support some studies of the representation of the real in documentaries made by Fernando Andacht, from 2005 to 2017.

THE INTERVIEW IN DIALOGUE WITH THE SPIRITS

The material analyzed is a video published by the Jefferson Viscardi channel, also titled

2. In Umbanda, Exu is both worshiped as Orixá (which means one of the superior forces, similar to Catholic saints) as an entity called “guardian” or “protector”. Within the “protector” category, there are several denominations of exus, linked to different groups (called “phalanges”), each with its own stereotypes. In our object of study we have Exu Tranca Rua das Almas; other examples are Exu Veludo, Exu Meia Noite, Exu Caveira, etc. For more details, see Janaina Azevedo (2008, p. 45) and Ademir Barbosa Júnior (2014, p. 152).

dialogue with the Spirits (or simply DcE, as it appears in the descriptions of the videos), from the YouTube channel. The beginning of this channel’s activities on the platform dates from August 26, 2006; it has around 3,573,307 video views and 52,400 subscribers (August 2021 data).

In the “about” tab of the channel, we find the following description (citation *ipsis litteris*, without correction of spelling errors):

The Dialogue with the Spirits records, in audio and video, the mediumistic manifestation and its philosophical, cultural and religious content. It takes place at a unique moment in human history when more and more people seek to understand who they are, what they do here and where they are going after death. In line with the belief that life goes on and that we are more alive than ever before, communication with our ancestors is a fact that becomes more and more palpable. The fraternal voices from beyond give advice in each video, guiding us on future penalties and rewards, always encouraging virtuous conduct, sobriety in relationships and respect for institutions. They encourage peace among men of good will, love, humility and tolerance in all circumstances. In its context this work listens without judging, without discriminating and above all without confronting truths or defending them inviting each one to filter according to what proves to be useful and healthy physically, psychologically and emotionally. (JEFFERSON..., 2021).

According to the description above, the purpose of the channel is to offer a compilation of interviews with different spirits, regardless of which cult or religion they work (but all of them of a mediumistic nature, of course), assuming that the viewers have the belief in these entities - considered ours. ancestors,

in the producer's view – and in the afterlife. The speech of these spirits aims to awaken the virtues of the spectators for the practice of good.

The presentation format of the videos is generally – but not exclusively – constructed as follows: the interviewer (in this case, Jefferson Viscardi, who rarely appears on the recordings) talks with embedded mediums, asking them some questions prepared in advance, leaving the entities free to talk as long as they want. There are few interruptions by the interviewer; the freedom given to the entities for their considerations makes the videos quite long, commonly exceeding an hour in length. Once the questions are asked, the mediums disembodied and eventually the interviewer also talks to them.

The video in question is titled - as it is in the description - “DcE 899-2 - [Exu is a MIRROR of the PERSON.] - Exu Tranca Rua das Almas - Medium: Priest Fernando Parada” and dated December 30, 2019, with

duration of one hour and seven minutes. The footage was taken with a single camera, so we only see the medium from the front angle during the entire video. In the editing process, the producer previously inserted an extract of the entity's speech during the first three minutes, followed by the introduction in the form of a “vignette”. During the video, the producer inserted quotes from the entity's speeches as an emphasis, aiming to provoke the viewers' reflection on points he considered important.

Our criteria for choosing this video was based solely on the number of views (378,376 at the time of writing this article); being the most watched video on the channel. In the description, we have the following information: “[...] recorded on 04092018 [September 4, 2018]; Spirit: Exu Tranca Rua das Almas; Medium: Priest Fernando Parada; Courtesy Casa Nossa Senhora do Rosário.” (DcE, 2019).

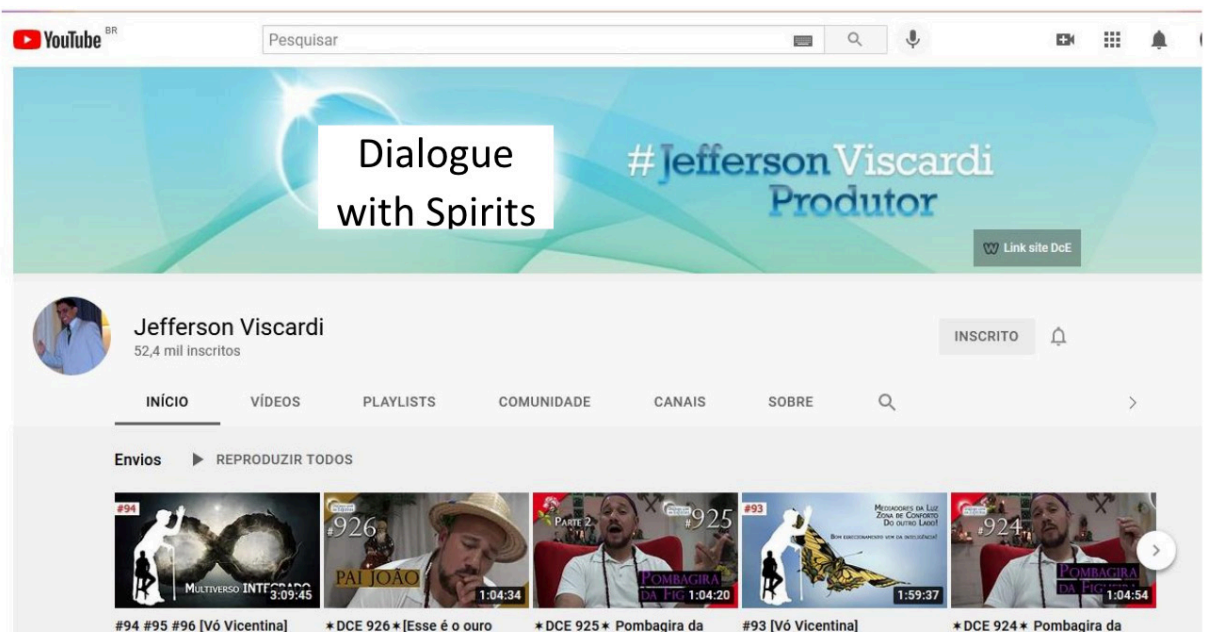


Figure 1. The Jefferson Viscardi YouTube channel.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/user/jerfow/featured>

A BRIEF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE MEDIUMISTIC UNIVERSE

We can contextualize mediumistic religions – roughly speaking – within a communicational process in which an element called “spirit” or “entity” communicates with a human element called “medium” in the practice called “incorporation”³, with the help or not of ritualistic or liturgical elements, configuring what Dravet calls “co-presence in a single body” (2016, p. 295). The spiritual being, through the medium, can then manifest itself to the other participants of the cult / ritual / liturgy for the most diverse purposes: passes (spiritual energy), counseling etc., using material resources as auxiliaries of these practices - among them, candles, cigars, alcoholic beverages, herbs – and specific clothing that allows the identification of the spiritual entity, configuring important symbols of recognition:

The world constructed by the rites and their myths occurs, therefore, in semiotic terms, through the apprehension of objects through the categories that participate in semiosis. In other words, meaning is not a creation of a transcendental self, but a construction, the result of the encounter and the relationship of a sign with another sign, which occurs continuously, infinitely, even without our realizing it. (FERNANDES, 2009, p. 90).

For a better understanding of our object of study, we clarify that the mediumistic religions practiced in Brazil have different origins and also different practices. Of these religions, we highlight the three⁴ with the highest number of practitioners, according to a 2020 Datafolha Institute survey⁵: the Spiritism practiced in our country has a European matrix and its doctrine adopts the texts published by the Frenchman Allan Kardec in the 19th century⁶; Candomblé has an African matrix inherited from several regions that were amalgamated, due to the process of slavery, suffering a certain syncretism with the Catholic religion aiming at the possibility of worship by slaves without the censure of the planters; such syncretism was abandoned as freedom of religious worship opened up during the 20th century, where a greater identity with African origins was sought (PRANDI, 2004, p. 223-228). Finally, Umbanda is considered a typically Brazilian religion, formed from indigenous matrices (aspects of pajelança and the presence of entities called caboclos), Catholic (belief in Jesus Christ and in some saints who syncretize with orixás), Candomblecists (presence of the orixás).

In the specific case of Candomblé and Umbanda, both religions worship, among other spiritual forces, the orixás, which are entities originating in African cults, but with differences. In Candomblé, the orixás are

3. Dravet differentiates, through a historical overview, nuances existing between incorporation (a term used in Brazil to define the spirit/medium relationship) and trance, possession and ecstasy. (2016, Passim).

4. It is not our intention to delve into the historical aspects and particular characteristics of each of these religions. Some considerations, however, are important: first, Candomblé is not a homogeneous religion. It is divided according to the nations / kingdoms of origin in Africa, which influences the liturgical aspects and also the pantheon of Orixás. So, we have Candomblé Ketu, Jêje, Angola etc. In the case of Umbanda, there are several aspects that emphasize with greater or lesser force one of its three matrices. For example, we have Umbanda Branca (with greater emphasis on Spiritism), Omolocô (Candomblé), Sagrada (including degrees of initiation, with esoteric elements), among others. Other Brazilian mediumistic religious practices that deserve mention are Jurema Sagrada or Catimbó (with indigenous influence),

5. According to the survey, Spiritism is practiced by 3% of the Brazilian population, while Candomblé, Umbanda and other Afro-Brazilian religions are practiced by 2%. (G1, 2020).

6. According to Stoll (2002), “[...] Allan Kardec was still writing the main volumes of his work, when Spiritism arrived in Brazil, being, therefore, disseminated almost simultaneously with its diffusion in Europe [...]. Livraria Garnier, considered at the time the main publishing house in Rio de Janeiro, launched the first title [by Kardec], *The book of spirits*, in Portuguese, in 1875”. (p. 364, 394).

considered deities and “lower” to terreiros through mediums, while in Umbanda the orixás are considered spiritual forces of a single God (Catholic God syncretized with the greater orixá Zambi or Olorum, depending on Candomblecist influence), not manifesting themselves through mediumship and not “downloading” in the terreiros. Exu is considered an orixá in both religions (not consensually); Umbanda’s peculiarity lies in considering the orixá Exu as the head or commander of several “phalanges” of exus, which are not orixás, but called guides or protectors. This is the case of our object of study.

THE INTERVIEW IS WITH THE SPIRIT (AND WITH THE MEDIUM)

It is difficult for us to suggest a label or even a genre for this type of production; We will content ourselves with framing it as an interview in a participatory and non-journalistic way, but we cannot exempt such production from an approach - even if involuntary - documentary, given the set of productions that make the channel Dialogue with the Spirits a peculiar collection of interviews with mediums incorporated in the most diverse aspects of mediumistic religions with its almost 850 videos (data from 2021), covering religions such as Spiritism, Umbanda, Quimbanda etc. which basically maintains the front camera format, where the interviewer almost never appears, that is, the interviewee is

[...] an “I” that stands as the only source of discourse [...]. In the case of the documentary, it is not only a matter of producing or capturing the experience of

the filmed subject, but also of welcoming it, a complicated thing and even more resistant to calculation, no doubt, but also smoother and more subtle., since it is in its nature to overflow or escape the representation that approaches it (GUIMARÃES, 2011, p. 71).

It is in the interview process that, both in telejournalism and in documentary, the real has the potential of manifestation:

Whether in the elaboration of a detailed profile or in the agility of making a “people speak”, it is rare for the audiovisual product that does not use the interview as a fundamental element to contextualize and guarantee the status of truth that characterizes the telejournalistic and documentary genres. (MUSSE; MUSSE, 2010, p. 1).

This characteristic of letting the truth appear in the interviewee⁷ is made possible by the way the interview is conducted, where important points are to make the interviewee feel free to speak and not interfere with editing resources, recording the moment as unique and incomparable, resulting in a composition of spontaneity, tone of voice, among others. elements, a trademark of many documentarians (MUSSE; MUSSE, 2010, p. 6-7; ANDACHT; OPOLSKI, 2017, p. 131).

Also according to Musse and Musse, the interview builds and rescues a collective memory, when several subjects talk about their experiences or memories, and it is also a construction of the subject’s history, through their reports and reflections on their own life (Ibidem, p. 6-7). In the case of the interview with Exu Tranca Rua das Almas, this occurs at various points in the video, where the entity tells us various situations from the spiritual world, as well as the own

7. It is worth noting here the contradiction with regard to “authenticity”, notably in authors such as Ismail Xavier (2010), in a study on documentaries by Eduardo Coutinho, where the real of the testimony is performative, theatricalized, in what the author calls microrealism: “ there is the composition (the geometry of the process) and there is the energy field, that of the camera’s intervention through its presence and its interaction with what is in front of it, dissolving the idea of an ‘objective’, passive record, which would maintain the radical separation between look and object. There is a regime of presence (performance, acting for a defined look) there, a ‘being in a situation’ very dear to phenomenology, but it would be naive to suppose in this being-there, in this performance, an absolute aura of authenticity and truth.” (p. 16).

memories of being “incarnate” and also the approach to the public through a colloquial language. This can be illustrated in response to a question from the interviewer, whether Exu Tranca Rua das Almas would be known by the title of “lord”: “[if] I call myself lord, I am putting myself above you. Now if I sit here, by your side, drinking a cachaça [...], I’m being more your brother than putting myself above you. (DwE, 2019, 37min40s).

It is the singularity of Exu Tranca Rua das Almas – and not of the medium –, its idiosyncrasies, which will awaken in the viewer, through a reading contract, a negotiation mediated by symbols that contemplates what Hanno Beth and Harry Pross illustrate as a “perfect storm” of perceptibility and compatibility (BETH; PROSS, 1987, p. 158), the belief in what is being seen as a representation of the real, as Lins and Mesquita (2008) clarify when analyzing four Brazilian documentaries and the tension between the impression of the past reality by them and the spectator’s belief in their reality, through an “agreement” between both parties. The image

[...] it can lie, falsify, simulating telling the truth, but it can also be associated with other images and other sounds to manufacture unprecedented experiences, complicate our apprehension of the world, open our perception to other ways of seeing and knowing. Images are fragile, impure, insufficient to speak of the real, but it is precisely with all the precariousness, starting from all the gaps, despite all the risks, that it is possible to work with them [...]; it is in the articulation of images in the time of projection that oscillations, uncertainties, sensations, reflections and learning take place, it is in the duration that the impression of reality and the spectator’s belief so dear to the documentary tradition are called into question. They are documentaries that lead the viewer to ask themselves: what do I see on this screen? Reality, truth, simulacrum, manipulation,

fiction, all at once? (LINS; MESQUISTA, 2008, p. 10).

Based on this reflection, we found that the reading contract (or agreement) - regardless of belief - is a fundamental element for the interview message to be effective and effectively a representation of reality. In our object of study, we went through some of the viewers’ comments, and most of them were positive, that is, there was this belief in the veracity passed on in the video by Exu Tranca Rua das Almas. Some excerpts (transcribed *ipsis litteris*):

- Spectator 1: “Very flattered to know that this Exu is a great companion and friend Laroyê [characteristic greeting for exus] Mr. Locks Rua das Almas”
- Spectator 2: “It’s all worth it!”. This advice from the entities is very good. I will listen more often”
- Spectator 3: “Very good these teachings of your Exu Tranca rua, thanks for this channel gratitude”

Other comments let onnot the “breaking” of the reading contract, but the distrust in incorporation. The reactions were as different as possible, from indignation to offensive, to playful. According to impressions transcribed *ipsis litteris* below:

- Spectator 4: “Charlatan...”
- Spectator 5: “It is for these things that religion is frowned upon. Unfortunate”
- Spectator 6: “What a shame.... You’re destroying religion this [improperity] there was never Tranca Ruas das Almas, recording live Yet??? My make me it. please, it’s ugly.”

It is natural (and healthy) the lack of consensus among viewers in any video format, whatever the approach (politics, music, religion, etc.). What draws our attention in the object studied is that the dissension, in the excerpts placed, is in the “performance”

of the medium, which for some spectators is not a representation of reality: they believe in Exu, but not in the one presented in the interview, or that is, they do not believe that the medium is effectively incorporated.

A “DOUBLE LAYER” OF REPRESENTATION OF THE REAL

In a semiotic analysis of the documentary “Jogo de Cena”, by Eduardo Coutinho, FernandoAndacht (2012) deals with the mediations of the legitimate narratives of women who tell real stories and the subsequent interpretation of these stories by actresses. The documentary “...produces an exorbitant situation both for ordinary women, who came to the stage with their stories, and for the actresses, who were asked to re-enact the stories.” (p. 84). The validity of the reading contract, in this case, refers to the fact that the spectator knows that the stories are being retold / interpreted, and that, in our understanding, it does not configure a double layer of representation of the real.

In the case of our object of study, based on the belief system that seals the reading contract, the spectator does not see a form of interpretation incorporated in the medium’s narrative; he sees the *own* entity speaking, with the help of a set of symbols that make up the imagery of Exu Tranca Rua das Almas. Symbology is present, giving Exu a unique character, that is, imagery components such as the top hat, the cape, the red and black guide, in addition to the medium’s own feature in a trance state. From the sound aspect, the change in the way of speaking (when the medium is in a trance, the characteristic voice of Exu; after the trance, the voice of the medium) is also an important semiotic reference, as Andacht and Opolski tell us. (2017), referring to the speeches of the individuals present in “O fim e oprincipio”, by Eduardo Coutinho:

[The] sonority of speech is a form of communication and extraordinary expressiveness, in the literal sense of the word, because people [...] communicate through sound aspects of belonging, which, in turn, generate singular and unique performances, therefore, interesting, worthy of being contemplated [as a performance] expressively scenic vocal [...]. The sound provoked by each of the interactions comprises certain interjections, accents and dialects that are iconic-indicial signs [...]. (ANDACHT; OPOLSKI, 2017, p. 139-140).

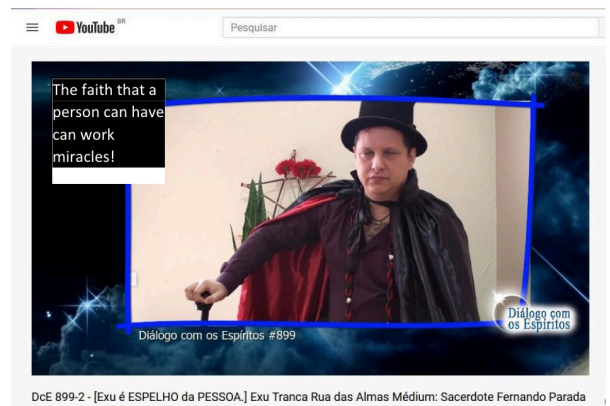


Figure 2. Exu Tranca Rua das Almas incorporated in the medium Fernando Parada.

Source: YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbmqPNLIwtQ&list=PLjrLGdkeT6Lfoi4qOmpR-JrrzCgNZ5jdQ&index=12>

Dravet goes beyond the vocal index, attributing to the entire visual, gestural and sound ensemble a “speech of incorporation”, which enables the identification of spiritual entities, composing their imaginary:

There is, in fact, what we call “incorporation talk” that ratifies the system. It can be oral or gestural speech. Smoking a pipe, for example, is part of the Preto-Velhos code. The caboclos smoke cigars, the Exus and the Pombagiras, cigarettes. The Pretos-Velhos have a soft speech, while the caboclos have a direct and harsh speech. The Exus, a mocking speech, and so on. These are codes [...] these representations and these codes correspond to collective imaginaries around the entities. (DRAVET, 2016, p. 302).

The next frame shows the disembodied medium, and without some of the previously used utensils:



Figure 3 - The disembodied medium.

Source: YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbmqPNLIwtQ&list=PLjrLGdkeT6Lfoi4qOmpR-JrrzCgNZ5jdQ&index=12>

We then found that the medium's bodily presence can be considered simultaneously as primary and secondary media. The primary media is the body itself and its gestures, including vocal sounds (PROSS, 1971, p. 127 apud BAITELLO JÚNIOR, 2001, p. 1); the secondary media, in addition to writing, for example, is composed of body complements: "[...] masks, paintings and body adornments, clothes [...], sticks [...], objects or material supports that carry your message." (BAITELLO JÚNIOR, 2001, p. 2-3).

In the first part of the video, therefore, we have in front of the camera the entity Exu Tranca Rua das Almas being interviewed by Jefferson Viscardi, in a time horizon of just over an hour, where more than 30 questions are asked. In a second moment, we have the disembodied medium, also being interviewed. In the first layer of "representation" we perceive the body as primary and secondary media through gestural, visual – clothing and accessories, such as a cane – and sound compositions. In the second layer, from the final three minutes of the video, the medium undresses part of

the sign apparatus (removes the top hat and cape), changing the facial expression and vocal tone, evoking the body as a primary medium.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although we were not able to reach a conclusion about the impression that the video gives to the viewer, since the identification as truth is not consensual (despite the majority of the public affirming that it is), what is undeniable in our object of study is, under the imagetic aspect and also iconic / indexical, the large amount of symbols that give the embedded medium the displacement, the alterity, which gives rise to Exu Tranca Rua das Almas. This is what Fernandes (2019) tells us, associating the Peircean categories (by Charles Peirce) with the pantheon of orixás:

Semiotic concepts, with their categories, present how we interpret, how we think about things, how phenomena are apprehended by subjects. Knowing, apprehending, representing the world – of rituals – occurs, therefore, in this interaction that starts with the assimilation of objects, their categorization, and their subsequent representation, transforming them into signs again. This process is none other than semiosis. (p. 90-91).

In short, the representation of the real, in the two layers of our object of study, is conditioned both to a reading contract signed with the spectator - in the case in question, whoever receives the message must know to a greater or lesser degree some fundamentals of religions of African origin, knowing who Exu is – in terms of belief; one must believe that the medium is incorporated, believe in spiritual entities, in the invisible world. Without the knowledge that allows the correct reading of what is happening and without believing that there really is a spiritual phenomenon in the duration, representations of the real end up becoming

ineffective (without a reading contract and without belief) or partially valid (when at least the reading contract is established).

We suggested as future studies to expand this perspective and validate – or not – the hypothesis that this representation of the real is placed (or juxtaposed) doubly or in layers, interfering or not in the semiotic/imagery contextualization. Audiovisual studies related to otherness issues can be enlightening for this new aspect, too.

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