

## Ativismo visual de Grada Kilomba na obra *Ilusão*, Narciso e Eco

Janete Santos da Silva Monteiro de CAMARGO<sup>1</sup>

Izaque Pereira de SOUZA<sup>2</sup>

Teresa Kazuko TERUYA<sup>3</sup>

**Resumo:** O ativismo visual é uma importante estratégia artística, muito utilizada por artistas visuais contemporâneos. Neste artigo o artefato cultural trazido é a performance artística Narciso Eco (2017), que é a composição visual número um da obra *Ilusão*, que está inserida na série de exposições denominada “Desobediências poéticas”. A obra citada é vista como um artefato cultural de afro-resistência, por abordar uma temática afro-brasileira e africana de forma política e engajada. Para nossa construção utilizamos a metodologia bibliográfica, alicerçados nos Estudos culturais e nos concentrando na vertente da cultura visual. Nesta investigação, nosso objetivo é investigar a potencialidade educativa da arte performática *Ilusão*, Narciso e Eco, da artista Grada Kilomba. Como resultados evidenciamos que a obra artística Narciso e Eco contribui para uma educação antirracista.

**Palavras-chave:** Afro-resistência. Artefato cultural. Arte performática.

<sup>1</sup> Mestranda do PPE, Programa de Pós-graduação em Educação, da UEM (Universidade Estadual de Maringá- Integrante dos Grupos de pesquisa; GPEMEC, Grupo de Pesquisa em Educação, Mídia e Estudos Culturais e ARTEI- Grupo de Pesquisa em Arte, educação e Imagens, ambos pela UEM/Maringá, Paraná. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3673-3639>. Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/560008806550863>. E-mail: janetessmc@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Doutor em educação (UEM - Universidade Estadual de Maringá). Compõe a Comissão Permanente para Verificação de Autodeclaração de candidatos pretos e pardos junto à Universidade Federal do Paraná e o Instituto Federal do Paraná (IFPR) e é Membro do NEIABI (Núcleo de Estudos Afrobrasileiros e Indígenas) do Instituto Federal do Paraná - Campus de Cascavel/PR. Faz parte do Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisa em Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (GEPDE), Grupo de Pesquisa e Defesa dos Direitos Humanos Fundamentais da Criança e do Adolescente (GPEDDICA) e do Grupo de Pesquisa em Educação, Mídias e Estudos Culturais (GPEMEC). Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2292-0791>. Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/0533180121544805>. E-mail: ipsouza.souza@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Doutora em Educação (Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Silva). Pós doutora (UnB - Universidade de Brasília). Professora aposentada (UEM), voluntária do Programa de Pós-graduação em Educação (Mestrado e doutorado), pela mesma Universidade. Líder do Grupo de Pesquisa em Educação, Mídia e Estudos Culturais (GPEMEC). Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4876-4400>. Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/6114790100914539>. E-mail: tkteruya@gmail.com

## Grada Kilomba's visual activism in the work *Ilusion*, *Narcissus and Echo*

Janete Santos da Silva Monteiro de CAMARGO

Izaque Pereira de SOUZA

Teresa Kazuko TERUYA

**Abstract:** Visual activism is an important artistic strategy, widely used by contemporary visual artists. In this article the cultural artifact brought is the performance art *Narcissus Eco* (2017), which is visual composition number one of the work *Ilusion*, which is inserted in the series of exhibitions called "Poetic Disobedience". The cited work is seen as a cultural artifact of Afro-resistance, for addressing an Afro-Brazilian and African theme in a political and engaged way. For our construction we used the bibliographic methodology, grounded in Cultural Studies and focusing on visual culture. In this research, our goal is to investigate the educational potentiality of the performance art *Ilusion*, *Narcissus and Echo*, by the artist Grada Kilomba. As results we show that the artistic work *Narcissus and Echo* contributes to an anti-racist education.

**Keywords:** Afro-resistance. Cultural artifact. Performance art

## El activismo visual de Grada Kilomba en la obra Ilusión, Narciso y Eco

Janete Santos da Silva Monteiro de CAMARGO

Izaque Pereira de SOUZA

Teresa Kazuko TERUYA

**Resumen:** El activismo visual es una importante estrategia artística, ampliamente utilizada por los artistas visuales contemporáneos. En este artículo el artefacto cultural que se trae es el arte performativo Narciso Eco (2017), que es la composición visual número uno de la obra Ilusión, que se inserta en la serie expositiva denominada "Desobediencia poética". La obra citada se considera un artefacto cultural de afrorresistencia, por abordar un tema afrobrasileño y africano de forma política y comprometida. Para nuestra construcción utilizamos la metodología bibliográfica, fundamentada en los Estudios Culturales y centrada en la vertiente de la cultura visual. En esta investigación, nuestro objetivo es investigar la potencialidad educativa de la performance Ilusión, Narciso y Eco, de la artista Grada Kilomba. Los resultados muestran que la obra artística Narciso y Eco contribuye a una educación antirracista.

**Palabras clave:** Afro-resistencia. Artefacto cultural. Arte performativo.

## Introduction

Known for her works that present a performative art that unveils the decolonization of thought, the luso-African researcher and writer Grada Kilomba produced the performance “Illusion” in the biennium of 2017/2018, in which she addresses two Greek myths that symbolize the traumas of colonialism still ingrained in contemporary society: Narcissus and Echo, and Oedipus (MORAES, 2021).

The artistic work *Narcissus and Echo* is one of the video installations presented in the exhibition titled “Poetic Disobediences” at the Pinacoteca of São Paulo. In *Illusion Volume I*, the story of Narcissus and Echo is discussed, while in *Illusion Volume II*, the story of Oedipus is explored (VOLZ, 2019).

This article aims to analyze Volume I of the performance *Illusion*, which encompasses the myth of “Narcissus and Echo.” Its objective is to investigate the educational potential of the performative art *Illusion, Narcissus and Echo*. To achieve this, it employs a bibliographic methodology, which, according to Gil (2002), is based on already existing materials such as scientific articles and books, as there are various sources for bibliographic research, grounded in the theoretical framework of Cultural Studies and informed by visual culture.

Our analysis was conducted based on the video of the performance *Narcissus and Echo*, posted by Mendes (2020) on the YouTube platform. However, we emphasize that, due to copyright issues concerning the images, we have chosen to present only excerpts from the performative narratives of the work, utilizing verbal signs to mentally visualize the scene.

## Performative Art as a Decolonization of Thought

With the advent of European avant-gardes<sup>4</sup> in the early 20th century, theater became hybrid, incorporating various disciplines, discourses, and voices into scenic texts. This integration allowed both verbal and non-verbal materials to be staged, leading to an intersection of performance, visual arts, and activism within theater (CABALLERO, 2011). As a result, “[...] performance, the

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<sup>4</sup> European avant-gardes, as the name itself suggests, took place in Europe with the aim of questioning classical art and implementing a new way of producing art.

unpredictable, the extraordinarily ephemeral, and irreproducible rituals have permeated the avant-garde scenic textualities that many have come to regard as collages” (CABALLERO, 2011, p. 18).

The word "performance"<sup>5</sup> is used to indicate the representation of a theatrical piece; however, starting in the 1960s, visual artists abandoned museums and began to theatricalize the visual arts, and these actions were termed happenings and performances. (CABALLERO, 2011).

Performance can incorporate elements from both theater and visual arts. From theater, we can observe elements of the performing arts such as space, stage, vocalization, dramatization, and lighting. There is also the exploration of body language, gestures, gaze, voice, and posture. In the visual arts, both the artist and the objects of the performative composition presented in the scenic space exhibit textures and depths, as we visualize the creation of an artist, much like a painting or sculpture (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

Thus, performative art associates different types of languages with the reality presented on stage.

[...]Depending on how these languages (sounds, images, body, words) are organized, the performance either simulates reality or constructs and deconstructs narratives to express experiences that we have never lived or that we need to experience to avoid saying that this does not exist or has never existed. For example: episodes of every day racism. (OLIVEIRA, 2021, p. 24).

The visual elements highlighted by Oliveira (2021) are those observed a priori; however, it is important to emphasize that the production of meanings that theatrical and visual signs provide to the viewer occurs differently for each individual (HALL, 2016).

Furthermore, the theme of performance has gained prominence as both a school and academic knowledge and has progressively been included in the pedagogical projects of schools worldwide. The use of performance in schools requires interdisciplinary procedures, critical interventions, a mixed language, and the application of action pedagogy (SANTANA, 2014).

Grada Kilomba's first exhibition in Brazil, titled "Poetic Disobediences," took place at the Pinacoteca de São Paulo under the curation of Valeria Piccoli in 2017. The exhibition featured four installations, each presented in a separate room: Illusion, vol. I, Narciso and Eco (2017), and Illusion, vol. II and Oedipus (2018). These works are video installations presented on two channels, in which Kilomba recreates a scenario from African tradition, critiques the colonialism still

<sup>5</sup> As Oliveira (2021) teaches us, the concepts of performance can be numerous; however, this research does not aim to work with the definition of performance but rather with its potential for activism within this artistic genre.

Ativismo visual de Grada Kilomba na obra *Ilusão*, Narciso e Eco embedded in contemporary society, and reinterprets Greek myths in a decolonized manner (VOLZ, 2019, PINHO, 2021).

Staged in Brazil for the first time at the São Paulo Biennial, ***Ilusão*, vol. I: Narciso e Eco** primarily addresses the politics of invisibility. The recreation of the myth serves as a metaphor to discuss a society that has yet to resolve colonial issues. The performance questions the need to break away from patriarchal and colonial frameworks. (CONCEIÇÃO, 2021).

Grada Kilomba's psychoanalytical work revolves around the traumas and wounds that have marked the history of the Black population. The author holds whiteness accountable for the colonial scars still present in contemporary society, which affect the Black population. She also asserts that history is marked by power relations (MARCONDES; MARQUES, 2022). In this sense, she "[...] discusses the politics of erasure of the history, knowledge, and aesthetics of Black people in post-colonial societies" (MARCONDES; MARQUES, 2022, p. 6).

With the performance *Ilusão I Narciso e Eco*<sup>6</sup>, Kilomba draws from classical mythology and offers a reinterpretation of Narcissus, drawing a parallel with society, where he reduces the entire world to his own image. In the myth, the image of whiteness is questioned by the way it excludes everything that does not resemble it; in doing so, it places all culture, race, and ethnicity in a secondary position, promoting violence and exclusion against anything that does not fit within Eurocentric standards. This compels the artist to narrate history in an inclusive manner, seeking to tell what has been obscured in the officially recognized histories up to this point (MORAES, 2021).

Moreover, according to Greek mythology, Narcissus is a beautiful young man who, although he captivates everyone, does not fall in love with anyone. As a punishment, he becomes infatuated with himself after seeing his image reflected in a lake. Eco, on the other hand, is a talking nymph who always insisted on having the last word<sup>7</sup>. Eco's repetitions symbolize a lack of a distinct voice; she merely reproduces the consensus voice in society, contributing to its maintenance (SILVA, 2020; LIMA, 2020; KILOMBA, 2019). Eco falls in love with Narcissus, witnesses his death, and dies shortly thereafter (SILVA, 2020; LIMA, 2020). This punishment for Narcissus occurs because he uses his beauty for seduction and disdain toward everyone, which leads Nemesis to decree that Narcissus would fall in love only with himself, someone who could not reciprocate his love (LIMA, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Echo, due to a punishment from Hera, could only repeat the last word she heard. She fell in love with Narcissus and began to follow him ( Vasconcellos, 1998).

Comentado [U1]: Não tem o texto dessa nota

The performance *Narcissus and Echo*, by exploring the repetition of words and sounds while imposing silence, highlights the climax of the narrative and allows the audience to hear beats and engage in listening. Thus, in the presence of rhythm, duration, intensity, and silence, the performance enables a reflective action of self and for self, and it articulates a theme that has been historically and socially constructed from the denial of silenced stories and cultures (OLIVEIRA, 2021). Therefore, it is possible to understand that in our society, only the voice of the white citizen is heard and reproduced throughout society. "Echo would be a kind of white consensus [...]. It is a critique of the apparent neutrality that, in truth, collaborates to maintain existing power structures without any questioning" (SILVA, 2020, p. 7).

Grada Kilomba narrates the story fulfilling the role of a griot<sup>8</sup>, as she does so from a rationalized perspective, with a political role in the enunciation where issues of gender are also discussed (LIMA, 2020; PINHO, 2021). "In the performances and works of Grada Kilomba, Black bodies assume a central place and operate a political and optical displacement, establishing another semiotic and sensory platform" (LIMA, 2021, p. 45).

All the characters in the work *Narcissus and Echo* are Black, and the reinterpretation of the myth allows us to perceive the violence in the process of subjectivation of Black people within the logic of whiteness. The whiteness of the white background refers to whiteness as violence and imprisonment (PINHO, 2021). Perfection and beauty are attributed to Narcissus, and the actor portraying the mythical character Narcissus runs his hands over his arms and face, making it clear that beauty and perfection are associated with skin color. Narcissus and the other character attempt to touch each other, but initially in vain. Later, when they do touch, they dance to the sound of the music "Horizon Aflame"<sup>9</sup>.

The performance in the works of Grada Kilomba is presented in a dense manner, primarily because it takes into account the corporeality that affects both the actor and the spectator. Her artistic work demonstrates an interest in relating body, aesthetics, and politics, promoting actions that make visible and question the everyday racism experienced by the Black population, a racism also experienced by the artist herself. The performance is approached through the body and is

<sup>8</sup> Griots (or griôs) "[...] they are specialists responsible for the collective memory of their tribes and communities" (SILVA V; SILVA, H, 2005, p. 277).

<sup>9</sup> Horizon Aflame, is explained in the exhibition catalog by Djamila Ribeiro as a protest song by South African singer Neo Muyanga (SILVA, 2021). The artist Neo Muyanga is a singer, songwriter, and produces revolutionary music (ECAS, 2015, translation ours).

Ativismo visual de Grada Kilomba na obra *Ilusão, Narciso e Eco* constituted through interarts, providing hybridism among various areas of knowledge. The enacted knowledge provokes reflections through the interrelationship between corporeality, gesture, and voice (MORAES, 2021). In the performance under analysis, the body represents a form of resistance.

The body is a document shaped by memory; it becomes a visible space for mobilization and resistance amid displacements, between the transient and enduring experiences of the diaspora. It is essential to consider the body in its other forms of expression, such as through writing and voice (SANTOS, 2020, p. 686).

Kilomba's artistic works aim to question, problematize, and demystify colonial thought through myths, concerns that we also address in this research. Decolonial thought interrogates the colonized conditions of epistemology, seeking the emancipation from various types of oppression and intellectual domination (MORAES, 2021).

"Decolonization refers to the undoing of colonialism. Politically, the term describes the conquest of autonomy by those who have been colonized, and therefore involves the realization of independence and autonomy" (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 224).

It is possible to infer how the decolonization of colonial thought is present in the performance *Ilusão Narciso e Eco* and how urgent this decolonization is, given the persistence of this thought in classifying, hierarchizing, differentiating, and dividing, leaving behind lived injuries in contemporary times (MBEMBE, 2018).

Kilomba also works from an interdisciplinary perspective, through a conceptual dance that interlinks psychoanalysis with mythology, dance, and thought, and with this versatility, proposes a decolonizing art (LIMA, 2019). Ribeiro (2019) notes that the relationship between the myth of Narcissus and whiteness has been present in academic works since 1990; the theme emerged in Brazil with the presentation of the doctoral thesis "Narcissistic Pact of Whiteness" by Maria Aparecida Bento. For Bento (2022), the Narcissistic Pact consists of maintaining the privileges of the white population, who inherit the whiteness of their ancestors, endowed with privileges as a result, and often reinforce these privileges based on merit, which is observed due to the fact that positions of power are not occupied by the black population.

The connection between Grada Kilomba and Maria Aparecida Bento stems from the fact that the Greek myth of Narcissus preaches the idea that white people, trapped in a "universal" standard image, deny the different and the "others," meaning that anything that does not fit within the universal, within the standard established by whiteness, is deemed "the other."



In this sense, the myth of Narcissus represents a society that cannot see beyond whiteness, positioning it as the standard or norm. However, the echo observed in the words of the character Echo from the Greek myth represents a discursive reproduction with a lack of reflection, symbolizing a segment of society that perceives civilization only through the lens dictated by eurocentric society, which normalizes everything. That is to say, from Echo's speech, which always repeats Narcissus's last words, a crystallized racism echoes (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

When black individuals are placed in a situation of subalternity, they are seen as "otherness"<sup>10</sup>, which occurs through the personification of the repressed aspects of white society. This causes everything that white people reject to be attributed to black individuals. Through the division of the ego, whiteness retains the good part for itself and assigns the bad part to the other, the black person. The other becomes different through a process of hierarchization, and this mechanism leads us to contemplate questions of difference (LIMA, 2020).

When we address otherness, it is essential to refer to issues of identity and difference. Hall (2006) argues that identities exist in symbolic time and space and constitute systems of representation such as writing, painting, photography, and drawing, which cannot be homogenized. Thus, "the strengthening of local identities can be seen in the strong defensive reaction of members of dominant ethnic groups who feel threatened by the presence of other cultures" (HALL, 2006, p. 85).

It can be inferred that for the white population, the incorporation of black culture into school curricula represents a threat, a disruption of the silencing of minority cultures. This is regulated by Law 10.639/03, which stipulates that all educators in basic education must work with content related to Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture, particularly in the subjects of Literature, Art, and History. The methodologies for this work are regulated through the National Curriculum Guidelines for Education on Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture, produced in 2004.

According to Woodward (2004), Hall (2003, 2006, 2016), and Silva (2004), identity is constructed through difference, and identities undergo constant mutations. Woodward (2004) argues that while difference can exclude and discriminate, it can also be viewed as a source of diversity.

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<sup>10</sup> Otherness is a term used by various authors, including Kilomba (2019), Bento (2022), and Hall (2016), who use this term to question Eurocentric standards that normalize whiteness as the norm, while the Black population, which does not fit this standard, is referred to by the cited authors as "Otherness." "The European discourse has always taken skin tone as the main basis for distinguishing status and value." (BENTO, 2022, p. 28).

Regarding difference, Lima (2019) states that the processes of identification and differentiation are accompanied by power. "Historical, economic, social, or political power manifests itself in a struggle for narratives aimed at domination in structural dimensions such as education, health, identity representation politics, and the media (LIMA, 2019, p. 16).

In an interview with Djamila Ribeiro, Grada Kilomba (2019) asserts that the Black population is viewed as different and that, due to this difference, it does not enter power structures—which can be referred to as structural, institutional, academic, and everyday racism, depending on the case and analysis. She emphasizes that while the "good" is assigned to the ego of whiteness, the "bad" is projected outward. Consequently, the Black population becomes dangerous and undesirable, and the Black individual is rendered "the other" through a process of denial (KILOMBA, 2019). The Black individual represents what the white individual does not want for themselves, with negative images associated with them, such as "[...] the thief or violent thief, the lazy and malicious bandit." Such dishonorable aspects, whose intensity causes extreme anxiety, guilt, and shame, are projected outward as a means of escaping them (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 37).

Furthermore, otherness influences the psychology of the Black population, not as a feeling of inferiority but as a feeling of non-existence (FANON, 2008). This is caused by the structural racism embedded in our society even in contemporary times. Otherness causes traumas that show that Africans on the continent and in the diaspora are forced to deal not only with individual and family traumas but also with historical and collective traumas that render us "the other," subordinate and exotic beings of whiteness (KILOMBA, 2019).

Within otherness, racism is ingrained, and it encompasses three characteristics: the construction of difference, hierarchical values, and historical, political, social, and economic powers. In this analysis, difference is evidenced by the very process of discrimination; however, it cannot be understood separately from hierarchical values, since, based on the latter, difference is constituted by the stigma and dishonor of inferiority. Thus, we encounter a process of naturalization that assigns negative characteristics to the Black individual, generating prejudice and discrimination. When this prejudice and/or discrimination is intersected by historical, political, social, and economic power, we have racism (KILOMBA, 2019).

Almeida (2019) reinforces that racism is complex in the social imagination, being reinforced by education, cultural industries, and media. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the decolonial thought provided by the artistic work *Narcissus and Echo*, as it is only through this that it is possible

to combat racism and alleviate the pain, anguish, and trauma it causes, since "color prejudice is an idiocy, an injustice that must be eradicated" (FANON, 2008, p. 27).

We present a passage below that was extracted from the narrative of Narcissus and Echo, reflecting the shock that the Black population experiences in a society that normalizes whiteness.

It is an optical rupture,  
For the images  
that I see,  
do not reflect  
the society  
in which I live. (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 14).

There is a narcissistic pact in contemporary society that makes it clear that whiteness is a privileged identity (KILOMBA, 2019). This pact arises from the supremacy of white society over the black population, and even in contemporary times, we continue to see the social and economic disparity between black and non-black individuals (BENTO, 2019).

narcissism is  
the love directed  
towards the image of oneself;  
the excessive admiration  
for one's own appearance;  
and the inability to love  
or recognize others,  
as objects of love (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 13)

It is important to focus on the perspective of trauma or what we can refer to here as traumatic events that the author seeks to elucidate in her analysis. This is because such events need to be understood within the framework of the processes of colonization and the coloniality that still persists in social imaginaries and practices. This makes traumatic processes intertwined with the invention of blackness through a gaze and a naming policy that positions whiteness as the foundation for formulation, as well as its brutal violence, in that by designating someone as black, a whole movement marked by subalternization, inferiorization, objectification, and commodification of ways of life and subjectivities has also been established (LIMA, 2021). Thus, the artistic work "[...] brings in its narrative trauma as a constitutive trait of the violence of whiteness" (LIMA, 2021, p. 50).

The constant presence of the white background can be seen as an allusion to a large portion of artworks produced/disseminated by white artists, and the performance can be understood as

Ativismo visual de Grada Kilomba na obra *Ilusão, Narciso e Eco* minimalist, as it features only a bench and a ladder during the staging. However, beyond the fact that Kilomba's presentations deviate from norms - by being performed without a designated audience space, allowing passersby in the museum to watch either the entirety or just part of the work - the message of the piece is accentuated by the contrast (black and white), as the performance foregrounds black bodies, with black actors taking center stage. At this moment, the performance reveals a social denunciation and promotes a critique of how black bodies are perceived by society (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

The scene mentioned above occurs with the aid of a video installation featuring a mirror, with the image of Narcissus projected onto a screen against a white background, symbolizing perfection and beauty, while other characters' attempt in vain to touch him. In this way, the museum is represented as a white cube, which signifies the privileges of whiteness (OLIVEIRA, 2021; CONCEIÇÃO, 2021). In this case, the mirror alludes to the absence of black representation in various spaces of power, particularly in museums and cultural spaces. In Brazil, it has only been in recent decades that we have seen artistic expression in a plural manner, driven by actions claimed by black populations who have entered universities through affirmative actions. An example of this demand was a large banner placed in front of the São Paulo museum with the phrase "Where are the blacks?" (CONCEIÇÃO, 2021).

In the performance, Kilomba asks: "How is it possible to escape this patriarchal colonial model?" Working with a two-layer illusion scenario, the artist creates a performance in which Narcissus and Echo move in an infinite white space. Kilomba stands outside, surrounded by an installation of microphones, becoming a "griot," narrating the story according to African oral tradition and recounting mythical stories with post-colonial urgency (KILOMBA, 2018, translation ours).

The artist engages with Narcissus and Echo within a contemporary context to activate memories in the viewer and reflect on the reality of a post-colonial world. She stages the myth of Echo and Narcissus with the aim of questioning a present still suffocated by a colonial past. Thus, Narcissus becomes a metaphor for a society that has not resolved its colonial history (KILOMBA, 2018, translation ours).

Kilomba's performative work can also be viewed as a metaphor for transformation proposed by Hall (2003). This author states that there are various types of metaphors that seize our imagination, prompting us to contemplate difficult issues, and if we used metaphors of

transformation, we could question and transform various hierarchies, thereby dismantling established patterns and norms, which would eradicate colonial thought.

The recreation of reality in the performance Narcissus and Echo is complemented by several microphones used to capture the sound and voice of the actors. The meaning produced by these objects scattered throughout the scene can be interpreted as a way to give voice to the black population that needs to be heard, as in a theatrical piece, voices are typically captured by sound amplifiers (MORAES, 2021). This can be explained by Hall when he states that “[...] the meaning depends on the relationship between a sign and a concept, which is fixed by a code. Meaning, constructivists would say, is relative” (HALL, 2016, p. 52).

Moreover, the critical perspective of visual culture concerning the educational field understands that “social dynamics, institutional structure, and the curriculum contribute to developing attitudes, behaviors, preferences, and values that facilitate individuals' adaptation to the structures and interests of capitalist societies” (MARTINS; TOURINHO, 2011, p. 59). We see what we want to see; when we focus our gaze on a particular artifact, we trace our visual repertoire in our minds, and the meaning we attribute to it relates to our life experiences (MARTINS; TOURINHO, 2011).

Similarly, the predominant narrative within the educational sphere is oriented toward colonial thinking, constructed through the binary of “us” and “them” that is, the culture that does not belong to us, the hegemonic group, belongs to others, the counter-hegemonic groups. This leads to the naturalization of the fact that Afro-Brazilian and African culture becomes unviable in the school environment (HERNANDES, 2007).

In this sense, Grada Kilomba's performance emphasizes both visual reading and the subjective positions that produce the images that make up the narrative. Thus, images and visual representations act as mediators of discursive positions and can contribute to thinking about the world from the perspective of black individuals as subjects (HERNANDEZ, 2014). “Visual culture is a reference for critically thinking about the historical moment we live in and revising perspectives based on their visual representations” (HERNANDEZ, 2014, p. 336). In other words, the function of representation through images is directly related to how each person interprets a given image (HERNANDEZ, 2014).

For Kilomba, the issue of being “other/otherness” is directly related to racial issues. The other, the “black body that cannot occupy spaces as it is always subject to fantasies, violence, erasures, and invisibilities, serves as a justification for colonial demands” (MORAES, 2021, p. 58).

Regarding otherness, Kilomba (2019) argues that black individuals represent everything that white individuals desire “not to be”.

Whiteness reaffirms colonial thoughts, asserting its privileges. This underscores how Western civilization records histories of exclusion and power relations that serve the dominant elite. This power is constituted by the intersections of race, class, and gender, influencing the symbolic death of groups considered other, all to meet the desires of a white, patriarchal society (MORAES, 2021). Moreover, “[...] we become what we are not” (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 17).

The term colonization “essentially refers to the destruction of knowledge, know-how, and diverse cultures not assimilated by white/Western culture” (MORAES, 2021, p. 59). The colonial past has been “memorized” in the sense that “it has not been forgotten.” Sometimes, we prefer not to remember, but in reality, what cannot happen is forgetting” (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 2013). Power and knowledge are intertwined in the academic field. “Any form of knowledge that does not fit within the Eurocentric order of knowledge has been continually rejected on the grounds that it does not constitute credible science” (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 53).

Bhabha (1998) comments that colonial discourse demands the articulation of sexual and racial differences, and thus we consider that the body is simultaneously inscribed in the economy of pleasure and desire, as well as in the economy of discourse, domination, and power. He argues that what should be questioned is the mode of representation of otherness. Therefore, the objective of colonial discourse is to present the colonized as degenerate types based on racial theory in order to justify conquest and establish systems of administration and instruction. Thus, “[...] colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality that is at once the ‘other’ and yet entirely apprehensible and visible” (BHABHA, 1998, p. 111).

In this way, colonialism was responsible for changing the ways of thinking of various peoples and cultures, altering the power relations. The process of colonization meant the extermination of the culture of humanity and of Black people (SANTOS B, 2020). “It is possible to define colonization as a system of brutality, not only physical and political but also identity-related” (SANTOS, B 2020, p. 478), and it is the task of memory to reconstitute these traumas experienced both individually and collectively. The function of memory is to recall a past from a present moment (SANTOS B. 2020).

The idea of “forgetting” the past becomes, in fact, unattainable; for daily and abruptly, like an alarming shock, we are caught in scenes that evoke the past but are, in reality, part of an

irrational present. This configuration between past and present is capable of depicting the irrationality of everyday racism as traumatic (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 213).

The performance *Ilusão* represents a way of reclaiming silenced and marginalized cultures. The cruel game of colonization was used by Europe as a means of cultural and ideological domination in the Americas, Asia, and Africa (MORAES, 2021).

We live in a “white cube” that reproduces itself as the norm and as normality (KILOMBA, 2019, p.19)

In addition to cultural domination, there was also economic domination. Bento (2022) argues that Africa was rich while Europe was poor, and with the enslavement and exploitation of the African continent, there was an inversion. The very enslavement brought wealth to Europe and poverty to Africa.

At the end of the performance, Grada Kilomba repeatedly uses the verb “to know,” emphasizing that in the plural we know what it means. However, despite being known, the verb “to know” seems to relate to forgetting. Nevertheless, when we connect the verb “to know” with the name of the exhibition “Poetic Disobediences,” we become aware of the need to disobey a poetics that excludes all other forms of understanding and knowledge. Below are the artist Grada Kilomba's final phrases using the verb “to know,” highlighting that with this speech, the artist concludes the performance.

What role do we choose to play?  
The role of Narcissus, who does not know.  
The role of Echo, who does not want to know.  
The obedience of both,  
That should not be known.  
Or to know what we have long known.  
Thus,  
I conclude with the same words...  
I was invited to come here today.  
But I feel that  
there is nothing new  
that I can say.  
Often I feel  
that everything has already been said.  
I feel that  
we already know everything,  
but we tend  
to forget

The contact of white individuals with the performance *Narcissus and Echo* can lead them to reconsider their positions of power, and perhaps they can navigate through guilt, shame, recognition, and reparation, thereby changing power dynamics. When Black individuals engage with the exhibition *Poetic Disobediences*, they may experience recognition of Blackness as a journey of transformation and healing, addressing the trauma inflicted by whiteness. (LIMA, 2020).

In this way, the performative studies of the artist Grada Kilomba, as well as those of various cultural scholars, commonly engage in exercises that denounce the relationships of domination of hegemonic cultural forms, among which are the imagery that propagates values, practices, and standards of beauty restricted to privileged groups (BALISCEI, 2020, p. 34).

## Final considerations

Through the analysis of the performance *Illusion I, Narcissus and Echo*, it becomes evident how the black population is invisibilized in various social spaces and perceived as different an "otherness" due to the normativity regulated by the Eurocentric society in which we live. There is a questioning of the Eurocentric standards imposed by contemporary society, as well as a critical examination of the truths interpreted through Greek myths, truths that are only seen according to Eurocentric standards.

The performative work *Narcissus and Echo* is part of the exhibition "Poetic Disobediences," and we believe it is necessary to disobey; it is essential to break with the macho, sexist, Eurocentric, and patriarchal society. We cannot allow the pact of whiteness, as discussed by Bento (2022), to be consummated without questioning the absence of black individuals in the various social spaces, especially in cultural and artistic arenas, and this is well problematized by the work *Illusion* and the myth of *Narcissus and Echo*.

In this sense, disobedience means breaking a logic constructed according to colonial thought that excludes and causes trauma to everything that deviates from the norm. We understand that the work *Illusion*, represented by the myth of *Narcissus and Echo*, presents educational potential and can be addressed not only in museums but also in classrooms to question the Eurocentric beauty standards normalized by whiteness and consequently promote discussions about episodes of racism.



Colonial thought and the inferiorization of the black population are still present in our society, which underscores the importance of bringing artistic works such as Illusion, Narcissus and Echo into classroom discussions. This contributes to the implementation of Law 10.639/03 and the rupture with a curriculum that privileges white works and artists. This rupture is guided by the National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture (2004).

Moreover, discussions about the privileges of whiteness are also welcome in educational settings, as these are related to identity issues well explored in the myth of Narcissus and Echo, since myths often explore symbolic imaginaries that require questioning.,

Therefore, discussions about the myth of Narcissus and Echo are essential for rethinking our identity and reflecting on ethnic-racial relations and the role of performative art in the decolonization of colonial thought. Disobedience is necessary, urgent, and essential.

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