

The Orphan Brotherland¹: Rap's Civilizing Effort on the Periphery of São Paulo

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In addition to a fascination with the poetic effect that the lyrics produce in me, my interest in the work of the Racionais MC's, one of the most important Brazilian rap groups, relates to what I consider this group's civilizing effort in relation to living conditions and a call for pleasure among poor youth in São Paulo's periphery. This civilizing effort is characteristic of rap in general, and more specifically of that produced in the context of urban poverty in Brazil. The origin of rap, as is well-known, lies in the young residents of ghettos typical of the social and racial segregation of North American society. In my opinion, the Racionais are the most expressive of the many groups that have proliferated in Brazil for the last ten years.

In order to understand this civilizing effort of still uncertain outcome, we will examine how the Racionais present themselves before their immense audience, largely composed of poor black youth from the urban peripheries of Brazil. The four young people who form the group—Mano Brown, Ice Blue, KL Jay and Edy Rock—refuse any identification as pop stars, despite the one million copies sold of their last CD, *Sobrevivendo no Inferno* (*Surviving in Hell*). To them, the issue of recognition and inclusion is not resolved through the ascension offered by the logic of the market, according to which two or three exceptional individuals are tolerated for their talent and can even rise above their miserable origins, narcissistically endowed by the star system. These individuals then offer themselves as objects of adoration, identification, and consolation for the great masses of fans, who individually dream of one day themselves becoming the exception.

The members of the Racionais address the multitude of peripheral youth from another location: the place of the similar. For this reason, they necessarily plays little stake in and concede little to the media. "We are not a commodity, we are artists," says KL Jay in an interview with *Jornal da Tarde* (8/5/98), explaining that this is why they refuse to appear on Globo Network (a station that supported the military dictatorship and "makes the population continuously more ignorant") and on SBT Network ("how can I go to 'Gugu' if his program only shows naked girls shaking their hips or exploring the bizarre?"). Even the label of artist is questioned, in a rejection of any type of "domestication:" "I am not an artist. Artists make art. I make weapons. I'm a terrorist" (Mano Brown).

The name *mano* ("brother") is not gratuitous. It indicates an attempt at equality, a feeling of fraternity, a *horizontal* field of identification as opposed to a mode of vertical identification/domination of the mass audience in relation to the leader or idol. The lyrics are appeals to similar individuals, to brothers: join us, increase our force. Stay aware, stay conscious—don't do what they expect of you, don't be the "limited black" (the title of one of Brown's songs) that the system wants, don't justify the "racist suckers" prejudice (the title of another song). Rap groups' force does not come from their ability to exclude, to place themselves above the masses and produce fascination and jealousy. It comes from their power of inclusion, from the insistence on equality between artists and audience, all black, all poor, all victims of the same discrimination and scarcity of opportunity. Rappers do not want to exclude any young person who is similar to them. "I am merely a Latin-American guy / supported by more than fifty thousand *manos* / collateral effect that your system created," Mano Brown, leader of the Racionais, sings in "Capítulo 4, Versículo 3" ("Chapter 4, Verse 3"). Unlike hard rock bands, they do not offer their audience the masochistic pleasure of being insulted by a millionaire pop-star masquerading as an outsider. The designation *mano* makes sense: they seek to expand the great brotherland of the excluded, transforming "consciousness" into a weapon capable of turning the tables of marginalization. "We are the most dangerous blacks in the country and we are going to change a lot of things around here. Until recently we weren't aware of this" (KL Jay).

To what danger is Jay referring? Judging from some statements to the press and the great majority of the tracks on the Racionais' CDs, there is a change in attitude, originating from the rappers and seeking to transform the

self-image and behavior of all poor blacks in Brazil: the end of humility and of the feeling of inferiority that pleases the elite, accustomed to benefiting from docility. In other words, to benefit from the fear of our “good people of color.”

—Interviewer from the magazine, *Raça*: “When you speak with a guy, what do you expect to happen afterwards?”

—Brown: “That he lift up his head, lose his fear, and face it. If he gets punched, that he returns it.”

—*Raça*: “And what would happen if all blacks from the periphery acted this way?”

—Brown: “Brazil would be a more just country.”

The Racionais’ messages for those who listen to and buy their CDs are the following: “I would like them to place value upon themselves and to like themselves” (Mano Brown). “Ideology and self-valorization” (KL Jay). “Dignity should be their motto” (Ice Blue). “That they listen to the Racionais, of course. And peace!” (Edy Rock) (interview with *DJ Sound* 15, 1991).

The Racionais call for the consciousness of each individual, for changes in attitude that can only result from individual choices; yet the self-valorization and dignity of each black person, of each rap listener, depends on the production of a discourse in which blacks’ place is different from that indicated by the Brazilian tradition. Here emerges the difference between the Racionais and another young and very charismatic black musician, our other Brown, this one Bahian. “Some people say that São Paulo rap is sad (*Raça*’s reporter). Carlinhos Brown said that this means not knowing how to prevail over misery.” —Mano Brown: “In Bahia, they have to hide misery in order for the tourists to come, to bring money to the guys there, including Carlinhos Brown. São Paulo is not a tourist destination. And the comment on prevailing over misery, you can’t accept misery. But I do think that what he does for his community is valid.”

It seems that the Racionais aren’t interested either in prevailing over misery (and what would this be? a more seductive form of domination?) nor in hiding misery *para inglês ver*.² Their targeted audience is not the tourist, but rather poor blacks like them. No, they do not exclude their peers, nor do they consider themselves superior to the anonymous groups of the periphery. If they exclude anyone, it is me, it is you, middle-class consumer—“boy,” “bourgeois,” “dope,” “racist sucker,”—he who enjoys the Racionais’ sound on the CD player of an imported car “and who feels like he’s part of the

banditry" (KL Jay). In other words: they are not selling a slice of marginal life—*malandragem*—to alleviate middle-class youth's tedium.

Thus, it is difficult to like them if you are not one of them. Even more difficult to discuss them. They do not authorize us to, they do not open the doors to us. "We" are from the other side. On the side of those who have everything that they do not have. On the side of those they envy, almost admittedly, and of those they also hate, openly. But above all, on the side of those they disdain. On this point, the limit of the rappers' civilizing effort is placed in question: the emancipation they propose to the *manos* runs the serious risk of colliding with the segregation that they themselves produce by closing themselves off to everything and everyone that differs from them. I will deal with this question at the end of this essay.

How does one like this music that allows for no happiness, no exaltation? How does one listen to the intimidating, accusatory, and frequently authoritarian lyrics, wrapped up in a rhythm that suggests a forced labor camp or a prisoners' march around a courtyard, to which young people dance with heads down, faces almost hidden by the hoods of sweatshirts and dark glasses, hunched over, as if they still had the shackles of slavery around their feet? Where is the identification that breaks the barrier of segregation and crosses an abyss of differences produced, making rich adolescents listen in order to (and why not?) understand what the Racionais are denouncing? What makes a middle-class adult woman like myself take rap's violent slap in the face not as an insult but as a shared relief, not as an affront *pour épater*, but as a denunciation that immediately binds me to them?

If they do not authorize me, I will have to make a forced entrance. Identification facilitates things for me; I gamble on the virtual, symbolic and potentially inexhaustive space of the brotherland and I pass over to the side of the *manos*, without forgetting (nor could I) my difference. It is from another place, from "my" place, that I listen to and can speak of the Racionais MC's. It is because they directly address the discomfort that I feel living in a country that daily reproduces, with the speed of an industrial assembly line, the violent exclusion of thousands of young people and children who encounter no opportunities to escape the marginalized state in which they find themselves, despite current neo-liberal discourses that emphasize individual competence and effort. It is the ability to symbolize the experience of abandonment of these millions of urban periphery residents, to insist that their faces be definitively included in the current portrait of the country (a

portrait that still passes for well-behaved, polite, miscegenated). It is the ability to produce a significant and new language on exclusion, that makes the Racionais MC's the most important mass musical phenomenon in the Brazil of the 1990s.

The orphan brotherland

60% of youth from the periphery with no police record have suffered police violence / For every 4 people killed by the police, three are black / Only 2% of students in Brazilian universities are black / Every four hours a black youth is killed violently in São Paulo / Speaking here is Cousin Black, yet another survivor. ("Chapter 4, Verse 3").³

The listener who pays attention to the extensive lyrics of rap will probably feel uncomfortable with the tone with which these discourses are pronounced. It is a tone that could be called authoritarian, a mixture of warning and accusation. The voice of the singer/narrator directly addresses itself to the listener, sometimes assuming him to be another *mano* and advising, warning, trying to "raise consciousness," sometimes assuming he is an enemy and, in this case, accusing him unambiguously. Faced with such a threatening voice, with a discourse that invites us to "exchange ideas" yet does not exchange anything, does not negotiate its point of view and its position (an always moral, but not always moralizing position, as we will see), it is left to the listener to ask: but how does he authorize himself? Who does he think he is?

Brazil is a country that traditionally considers itself to be orphaned of a father. We do not honor our Portuguese ancestors; we do not respect a governing elite that does not even respect the law, society, or itself; we have no great heroes among the founders of our current society, capable of providing symbols for our self-esteem or identifying ideas for the masses. Our "national heroes" are not historical figures linked to some foundational myth of our society, but characters emerging from the world of sports and popular music. These figures are much closer, then, to the position of more talented or astute brothers than to that of an exemplary (totemic) father linked to a myth of origins.

Our passage from "state of nature" (which is how Indigenous cultures are mistakenly symbolized) to "state of culture" was not accomplished through the arrival of a group of Puritans carrying the project of founding a religious

community, as in the United States, but through the emptying out of a band of exiles by the Portuguese Crown onto the land which is now Brazil. They came not to civilize, but to benefit, and, primarily, to usurp. This is how the arrival of the Portuguese to Brazil is popularly interpreted at least, with a large dose of irony.⁴ Thus, we have the myth of the “*pátria-mãe-gentil*” (“kind motherland”) that Caetano Veloso correctly called “*mátria*,” followed by a request: “*quero fratria!*” (“I want a brotherland!”), which authorizes everything, tolerates everything and in which everything is possible.

It is obvious that the myth of facile abundance led to exploitation, to a concentration of wealth that places us first in the ranking of “world shame” and misery. It is obvious that symbolic orphanhood led not to an absence of paternal figures but to an excess of *real*, abusive, arbitrary and brutal fathers like the father of the primitive horde of the Freudian myth. What is lacking in Brazilian society is not another bossy and pseudo-protective godfather (such as Antônio Carlos Magalhães and Getúlio Vargas, for example), but a strong *brotherland* that believes in itself and is capable of supplanting the power of the father of the horde and of instating a symbolic father, in the form of a just law that considers the needs of all and not the voracity of a few. It is brothers who realize the paternal function, voluntarily renouncing the pleasures that were once the privilege of the father at the cost of the servitude of all his sons.

In a country also accustomed to authoritarian paternalism for fraternal formations in their function of creating signifiers and citizenship, a question is raised: how to avoid a new usurper, in the figure of a hero, from being produced from the act of *collective* courage that eliminates the age-old domination of the omnipotent father and institutes a new civilizing pact? On the other hand, how can a consistent discourse supporting and legitimating social formations produced in the horizontality of democratic relations be maintained in the absence of the concentrated hero of collective speech (think of Roland Barthes: “myth is stolen speech” in *Mythologies*)? How can the “orphan letter,” in Jacques Rancière’s expression for the new forms of language produced through horizontal exchanges that attempt to communicate experiences that make sense between like individuals, produce value and suggest a “minimum program”(9) of necessary renunciations in order to sustain an ethic of shared living?

In the two texts in which he relates collective formations to the assassination of the primitive father,⁵ Freud suggests that the hero who

constructs himself as the only author of a collective act is the epic poet himself. It is he who creates the myth of the assassination of the tyrannical father, placing himself at the center of his own narrative. "Myth constitutes the step with which the individual separates from collective psychology" (2605). Thus, the poet is someone who simultaneously maintains the unity of the brotherland around the memory of a (fictitious) act of origins while psychologically detaching himself from the collective.

The Racionais' speech oscillates between the communal place of the *manos* and the place of the exemplary poet/hero, slipping from here to the place of authority, speaking in the name of a "father" who knows more, who can counsel, judge, advise. Why "Racionais?," a *Raça* reporter asked. Edy Rock replied, "It comes from reasoning, right? A name that relates to the lyrics, that has to do with us. *You think in order to speak.*" Brown: "At that time rap was really silly. Rap to mislead, understand, *mano*? It didn't make you think." Later, responding to the question of why rap is political, Brown answered:

You were already born black, descendant of slaves that suffered, son of a slave that suffered, you keep taking the police's abuse, you keep living among drugs, drug-traffic, alcoholism, with all the crap that other people brought in here. It was them who brought it here to us. So it's not a matter of choice, just like the air one breathes. So rap talks about that, about why life is like that.

I will address one of the many examples from their lyrics that illustrates this double insertion of the subject, who on the one hand "thinks in order to speak"—produces his own speech differentiated from the discourses of the Other—but who on the other hand could not speak of any other thing "because life is like that." In other words, the subject's thinking and critical autonomy is not confused with an arbitrariness of references, like the delirium of self-sufficiency typical of the subjective alienation of consumer societies. The distancing necessary to think before speaking comes from immersion in one's own history (we are "descendants of slaves who suffered") and from an active and non-acquiescent acceptance of one's condition. It also emerges from belonging to a place and a collectivity that both strengthens enunciation and delimits the field from which the subject can speak, making an escape into fantasies of adherence to imaginary formulas of seduction or of consolation difficult.

I don't know if they / are or aren't authorized / to decide what is right or wrong / innocent or guilty spoken portrait / does justice no longer exist or am I mistaken? / If I were to cite the names of all who are now gone / I would have no time to say anything else... / and I will remember that it remained at that / and then what security is possible in this situation / how many will have to suffer for steps to be taken / or are they just going to sit around and watch what happens / and surely ignore the provenance / Sensationalism is the greatest to them / they love to get rid of the delinquents / as long as its not a relative, of course / or their own children are next... Ei Brown, what's your attitude going to be? / Change will be in our consciousness / practicing our activities coherently / and the consequence will be the end of fear itself / since who likes us is we ourselves / like, why won't anyone take care of you / don't get involved without thinking / don't provide a motive to die / honesty will never be too much / your morale is not won, it's made / we are not masters of the truth / this is why we don't lie / we feel the need for improvement / our philosophy is to always communicate / reality as it is / Racionais MC's. ("Panic in the South Zone")⁶

In the last lines of "Júri Racional" ("Rational Jury"), the group condemns a black *otário* ("sucker") who "passed over to the other side," refusing to identify with the *manos* in exchange for acceptance from the *playboys* ("rich kids").

What I want is to recover our value, that the other race stole / That is my point of view. I'm not racist, understand? / And though many of our people have warned you / but you, unfortunately / don't even show interest in freeing yourself / That is the question, self-valorization / that is the title of our revolution. / Chapter 1: / The real black has to be able / to row against the current, against any sacrifice. / But in your case it's difficult: you only think of your own benefit / Since the beginning, you showed me signs / that your skills are unoriginal vices / artificial, too whitened / White sheep of the race, traitor! You sold your soul to the enemy, denied your color; / Refrain: But our jury is rational, it makes no errors / Why? we are no fans of scoundrels!; Conclusion: by unanimous vote / the jury of this court declares the following sentence / and considers the defendent guilty / of ignoring the struggle of black ancestors / of scorning ancient black culture / of humiliating and demeaning the other brothers / as a voluntary pawn of the racist enemy / Case closed.⁷

The authoritarian bent of these verses, which utilize the image of a court as a form of upholding the law that demands the renunciation of pleasure

("but in your case it's difficult: you only think of your own benefit"), has at least three determinants. First, the certainty that a collective cause is at stake: that of stopping the flow of blood from many generations of black people, of impeding discrimination without denying the marker of race. No more lowering one's head, acting like a "black with a white soul" that the elite have always valued. Also, no more attempting, for example through the rapid ascension made possible by drug-traffic, to cross over "to the other side." It is a matter of creating an improvement in life on the periphery. In order to do this, however—and here the second reason emerges—it is necessary to communicate "reality as it is." This is because the greatest threat does not come necessarily from police violence nor from the indifference of the "boys." Rather, it emerges from the hoax produced by the appeal of advertising and by the confusion between consumer and citizen established in neo-liberal Brazil, making peripheral youth, fascinated by the signs of bourgeois power, abandon their own culture and devalue their peers and their origins. This despite the fact that it is frequently the very ostentation of these signs of economic power that guarantees some respect, recognition, and citizenship in Brazil. It is for precisely this reason, Brown's lyrics indicate, that the individual is misguided.

Here the third determination emerges, making it clear that the predominantly moral discourse of the Racionais should not be confused with moralizing, since it does not speak in the name of any universal value beyond the preservation of life itself. The lyric's authoritarian tone warns the *manos*: where the "law of the jungle" reigns, the death sentence has already been handed down without prior judgement. Faced with a life constantly in danger, one cannot take any wrong steps.

Terror, not power, provides the exasperated tone of these lyrics. Crime and drugs are an enormous temptation, further exacerbated by the lack of alternatives. Clearly, rap does not offer any material escape from misery; it also does not wager on transgression as a means of self-affirmation, as is common among middle-class youth (an example of this is the success of the group Planet Hemp). Much less does it bet on direct confrontation with what is according to rap the primary source of threat to youth's lives, the police themselves. Acquiescence or wisdom? Most likely a little of both—that is if the *manos'* cynicism in regards to the possibility of facing police institutions in Brazil can be considered acquiescence.

The threat of the police is not the only reason that the Racionais speak out against the consumption of drugs. Drugs are seen as destructive, not only to the body but also to self-esteem, and also deliver the addict into the hands

of the worst type of savage capitalist—the drug-dealer. Drugs represent the epitome of individualism, with their appeal to solitary and immediate pleasure, and the kings of the drug-traffic are not differentiated from the violent police or from the great capitalist speculators. They exploit children and youths, addicts and petty drug-dealers. They do not suffer the living conditions of the periphery, but rather take advantage of them.

On the other hand, the straight side of consumer society, the fetish for merchandise, also produces alienation and can lead to crime. Rap seeks to promote individual attitudes founded on a collective reference.

If I were that guy who humiliates himself at the stoplight / for less than a real, my chances would be few / but if I were that kid wearing a mask / who cocks and thrusts a gun barrel into your mouth / all of a sudden, you and your girl, naked / one, two, didn't even see me! I already disappeared into the fog / But no! I'm still alive, I follow the mystique / 27 years *contradicting statistics* / Your TV commercial doesn't fool me / I don't need status, nor fame / Your car and your money don't seduce me / nor your blue-eyed whore / I'm merely a Latin-American guy / supported by *fifty thousand manos* / collateral effect that your system produced. ("Chapter 4, Verse 3," my emphasis)⁸

The call seems simple: to stay alive “contradicting statistics,” following an unexplained “mystique,” yet also suggests the need to adhere to values shared by “more than fifty thousand *manos*.” Producing a lifestyle, a style of speech, a location from which to speak, without reproducing advertising clichés. This is not a simple task when one is destined, by the Other, to be the “collateral effect that [its] system produced.”

Father's functions, *manos*' inventions

The fifty thousand *manos* create support—but where's a father? What is the signifier that is capable of subsuming a law, a prohibition of pleasure, when the only compensation is the right to continue “contradicting statistics,” fighting for survival? Surprisingly, Mano Brown “uses” God for this function. Although at no time does he speak of any particular church, God is mentioned—but for what reason?

Brother, the devil fucks up everything around you / on the radio, newspaper, magazine, and outdoors / He offers you money, calmly converses / contaminates

your character, steals your soul / then he throws you into the shit alone / he turns a “preto tipo A” into a *nequinho* / My word soothes your pain / lights up my soul, blessed be my Father / who doesn’t allow the *mano* here to go down the wrong path / ah, not even lay a finger on any scoundrel / But no son of a bitch ignores my law. (“Chapter 4, Verse 3”)⁹

God is mentioned as a reference that “doesn’t let the *mano* go down the wrong path,” since all other references (“radio, newspaper, magazine, and outdoor”) are there to “turn a *‘preto tipo A’* into a *nequinho*.” God is mentioned as the father whose desire indicates to the son what it means to be a man, a *preto tipo A*; since it is necessary that the Other loves one in order for one to love oneself. The Other must point to a place of dignity (which cannot be known, though culture never stops producing trails for it to be imagined), so that the subject feels worthy of occupying some place.

I will not venture an interpretation of the personal, intimate religiosity of the members of the group. But I do suggest that the Father who appears in some of these raps (along with the Orixás: see “A Fórmula Mágica da Paz” (“Magical Formula for Peace”) in which Mano Brown says: “I thank God and the Orixás/I stopped in the middle of the trip and looked back”), in addition to symbolizing the Law, has the function of conferring meaning upon life, which for a common *mano* “is worth less than his cellular phone and his computer” (Brown/Jocenir, a prisoner in the São Paulo penitentiary, “Diário de um detento”). As far as the law of men, these youths indeed are already excluded, even from the minimum program of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man.” The imminent modern symbolic alternative to God would be “society,” this being an abstract, over-arching entity that should symbolize common interest among men, insisting that you be a “good” person, and offering in exchange protection, opportunities, and even some alternatives for pleasure.

But according to rap lyrics, society does not seem willing to alter its system of privilege to include and consider their rights. Society does not enforce the law for everyone—the portion of the renunciation necessary to sustain the social bond is always demanded from the *other*. The return to God (from a philosophical point of view) makes sense within the context of extreme social injustice, considering that the alternative is a return to barbarism. It is worth mentioning—am I being optimistic?—that Brown’s God does not produce acquiescence, faith in a magical salvation, or the

devalorization of this life in the name of any eternal happiness. God is present as a symbolic reference, to keep the lives of these rebellious young men, who speak of a revolution here on earth and who always remind us that the one “who likes us is we ourselves” (“Panic in the South Zone”), “from going down the wrong path” (“God is with me, but the revolver also accompanies me”—Ice Blue to *Jornal da Tarde*).

However, do not confuse this “liking ourselves” with an assertion of self-sufficiency, of an individualism that only sustains itself (hypothetically!) in cases in which it is possible to carry out the conditions imposed by consumer society, such as the acquisition of goods whose function is to fill the gaps in the “narcissistic fortress” of the self, the alienation of the “master’s” position, which does not allow him to discover his own dependence on “slave’s” work, and the presence of money as a fetish capable of obscuring from the subject a consciousness of his own destitution. The Racionais’ command “like yourself” could not be an encouragement of individualism even if it wanted to, since these conditions are very far from being attainable given the situation of permanent destitution and concrete lack that characterizes life on the periphery, with the exception of the barbaric face of drug-trafficking and consumption, of course.

In Brown’s and Edy Rock’s lyrics, the trafficker represents the barbaric face of bourgeois individualism: the guy who could not care less about anyone else, who only defends what is his, who has no scruples about addicting young people and exposing children to danger by having them carry out the delivery of drugs. The other face is that of the sucker, the “limited black,” who has no attitude and who deceives himself into thinking that he can distinguish himself from his peers by denying his race, etc.: “I don’t want to be the most correct / but rather the most astute *mano*,” Brown responds to the “limited black.” Yet again, a moral posture grounds itself in the extreme threat of extermination. The “astute *mano*” knows that the choice of alienation—which on the periphery can only be sustained through drugs—is subject to a death sentence, to the Brazilian police’s law of the jungle or that of the savage capitalists who own and operate the drug-traffic:

The second choice is the fastest path / it’s easy, death travels the same road, yes / inevitable / they plan our restriction, that is the title / of our revolution, according to verse / read, study, realize yourself, remember / before uniformed racist suckers with atrophied minds / blow your brains out and everything is over / Careful / the

Bulletin of Incidents with your name in some book / in any archive, in any district
/ case closed, no more than this. ("Limited Black")¹⁰

The insignificance of life, of the emptiness that our passage through the world of the living will leave after our death—we who always bet on leaving the mark of our presence with a work, a word, an immortal memory—that which psychoanalysis identifies as the precariousness of the human condition and that for which a middle-class neurotic so needs work in order to support, is provided in the day-to-day concrete living in the "peripheral hell" (Edy Rock) from which they come. Thus, the possibility of a narcissistic-individualist delirium is excluded unless one faces the consequences of opting for crime.

I wasn't even paying attention, nor taking anything seriously / I admired the older
thieves and rogues / but wake up, look around you, and say / after all that, who
was left, I don't know / a lot of funerals between then and now / who's the next
mother to cry / it took a while but today I can understand / *that true roguery is
living* / I thank God and the Orixás / I stopped half-way down the road and
looked back... (Brown "Magical Formula for Peace," my emphasis)¹¹

The other option—the first according to the lyrics of "Limited Black"—is the appeal to the other as a partner in the construction of other references, in the invention of symbolic spaces that allow for some independence from the seduction of the crime-consumerism-extermination circuit. Thus, the edict "like yourself" does not sound as an isolated command or as a closing in on oneself as an answer to all problems. Conversely, the sentence sounds as an *appeal* to the other to recognize and value the traits that mark the similarities between them.

I do not ignore that, in its extreme form, the attempt to adhere to a collectivity in order to escape from solitary confrontation with one's own desire can produce a blind obedience to the group, fanaticism, extreme forms of alienation, the fruit of what Contardo Calligaris called the "passion of instrumentality" (1991). The question remains as to what is the mark of difference between the two modes in which the fraternal reference operates: the first that strengthens the subject in his difference in relation to the desire of the Other; the second that produces the shared illusion of an "Other's Other" whose desire is exposed and who the subject blindly obeys, taking pleasure in the imaginary possibility of causing the Other pleasure. The

always present possibility of passage from one mode of operating to the other attests to the fragility of fraternal formations, but does not authorize us to dismiss their importance in the production and renewal of social ties.

It is important to stress that the brotherland is not summoned to operate only in the absence of the father. But when no one in that life embodies the civilizing father and the will typical of the “father of the primitive horde” prevails, when it is necessary to appeal to the “Father” in order to imagine that “someone” (in the vertical axis of subject formation) loves you and keeps you from being abused, the recognition among brothers becomes essential. Even simply to sustain the existence of this God who, if he weren’t the signifier of a symbolic (therefore collective) formation, would otherwise be the central element in a psychotic delirium. In addition, in the absence of the recognition of a father, it is the libidinal circulation between the members of the brotherland that produces the place from which the subject views himself, seen through the gaze of the other(s). Proof of this is the great importance that the creation of nicknames acquires in adolescent groups as indicators of a “second baptism,” for example, from other identificatory fields in which the subjects can move, broadening the narrow limitations rooted in the unitary aspect of identification with the paternal ideal. Horizontal identification may permit the passage from the illusion of an “identity” (in which the subject believes himself to be identical to himself, fixed to his own name given him by his father) to the precariousness of secondary identifications, made from other locations the subject occupies in relation to his peers, and that the nickname given him by the group may reveal. Horizontal identification allows the subject to travel from the imaginary prison of an “identity” (which supposes an impossible subjective agreement of the subject with himself and produces, as a result of repression, the haunting ghost of the other in the form of the *double*) to more mobile possibilities of circulation through a field of identifications.

At this point, it is worth asking: when the Racionais call for the *manos* to identify with the cause of blacks, are they proposing a field of identification—with its diversity of singular manifestations—or the production of an identity, with its subjective straitjacket?

I like Nelson Mandela, I admire Spike Lee / Zumbi, a great hero, Brazil's greatest /
They are important to me, but you laugh and turn your back / so I think I know
what kind of shit you like: / dressing like a *playboy*, going to discos / pleasing the

rogues, watching soap-operas every day / what shit / If that's your ideal / it's a shame / its probable that you screw yourself often / that you destroy yourself and want to include us in it / but, I don't want to, I won't go / I'm black, I won't adopt it / What are expensive clothes worth, if you have no attitude? / and what is negritude worth, if you don't put it into practice? / The principal tactic, heritage of our Mother Africa / the only thing that they couldn't steal! / if they knew the value that our race has / they would dye the palm of their hands to be black also! (Brown "Rational Jury").¹²

The issue is complex. Once questioned about his identification with Judaism, Freud responded that if anti-Semitism didn't exist, he wouldn't bother to circumcise his own sons; however, faced with prejudice, he had no other choice but to assert himself as a Jew. Perhaps the Racionais' call for an "attitude" supporting self-love among blacks in opposition to the feeling of inferiority produced by discrimination can be interpreted in this way. The "attitude" is directed through the affirmation of race—this dubious signifier that produces discrimination as it points to difference.

Who knows, however, if this imaginary limitation can be surpassed, this physical support—skin color—that simultaneously produces identification and racial discrimination? Who knows if the multitude of rap groups' admirers aren't trying to say, like the Parisian students in May of 1968 when the government tried to remove Daniel Cohn-Bendit with the allegation that he was not French—"we are all German Jews!"—and explode the barriers of race and segregation through identifications with cultural formations: are we all black *manos* from the periphery? If the assertion of identificatory fields (I am intentionally rejecting the term *identity*) does not produce social bonds, elective affinities that include the similar within difference (making traits of race, or sex, for example, obsolete), it will always lead to isolation between groups, and in some way or another, discrimination. That peripheral black youths' self-esteem and dignity do not depend on acceptance from the white elite does not mean that they do not produce other ties, other forms of communication, including those with groups more or less marginal to this same elite. In this case, identification, originally based on skin color, is broadened to include other meanings: exclusion, indignation, repudiation of violence and of injustice. It also entails the identification with a style—music, dance, rhythm-and-poetry—as well as with the "attitude" the rappers proclaim. It produces aesthetic effects that affect the social reality. We are not "all" poor blacks from the periphery, but we are much more than they supposed when they began to speak.¹³

Notes

¹ “Brotherland” is my translation of *fratria* in an attempt to capture the sense of fraternity between brothers within a social formation taking the place of a “fatherland” and dialoguing with this term. (Translator’s note)

² A common expression among Brazilians, used to describe a behavior, which consists in officially holding a position that is never truly accomplished. (Translator’s note)

³ 60% dos jovens de periferia sem antecedentes criminais já sofreram violência policial. A cada 4 pessoas mortas pela polícia, 3 são negras. Nas universidades brasileiras, apenas 3% dos alunos são negros. A cada 4 horas, um jovem negro morre violentamente em São Paulo. Aqui quem fala é Primo Preto, mais um sobrevivente. (“Cap. 4, Versículo 3”)

⁴ See the article by Contardo Calligaris, “Este País não Presta,” introduction to *Hello Brasil* (São Paulo: Ed. Escuta, 1991).

⁵ *Totem e Tabu* (1912) and *Psicologia das Massas e Análise do Eu* (1920/21).

⁶ Eu não sei se eles / estão ou não autorizados / a decidir o que é certo ou errado / inocente ou culpado retrato falado / não existe mais justiça ou estou enganado? Se eu fosse citar o nome de todos os que se foram / o meu tempo não daria para falar mais... / e eu vou lembrar que ficou por isso mesmo / e então que segurança se tem em tal situação / quantos terão que sofrer pra se tomar providência / ou vão dar mais um tempo e assistir a seqüência / e com certeza ignorar a procedência / O sensacionalismo pra eles é o máximo / acabar com delinquentes eles acham ótimo / desde que nenhum parente ou então é lógico / seus próprios filhos sejam os próximos (...) Ei Brown, qual será a nossa atitude? / A mudança estará em nossa consciência / praticando nossos atos com coerência / e a consequência será o fim do próprio medo / pois quem gosta de nós somos nós mesmos / tipo, porque ninguém cuidará de você / não entre nessa à toa / não dê motivo pra morrer / honestidade nunca será demais / sua moral não se ganha, se faz / não somos donos da verdade / por isso não mentimos / sentimos a necessidade de uma melhoria / nossa filosofia é sempre transmitir / a realidade em si / Racionais MC’s. (“Pânico na Zona Sul”)

⁷ Eu quero é devolver nosso valor, que a outra raça tirou / Esse é meu ponto de vista. Não sou racista, morou? / E se avisaram sua mente, muitos de nossa gente / mas você, infelizmente / sequer demonstra interesse em se libertar. / Essa é a questão, auto-valorização / esse é o título da nossa revolução/. Capítulo 1: / O verdadeiro negro tem que ser capaz / de remar contra a maré, contra qualquer sacrifício. / Mas no seu caso é difícil: você só pensa no próprio benefício. / Desde o início, me mostrou indícios / que seus artifícios são vícios pouco originais / artificiais, embranquiçados demais. / Ovelha branca da raça, traidor! Vendeu a alma ao inimigo, renegou sua cor; / Refrão: Mas nosso júri é racional, não falha / por que? não somos fás de canalha!; Conclusão: Por unanimidade / o júri deste tribunal declara a ação procedente / e considera o réu culpado/por ignorar a luta dos antepassados negros / por menosprezar a cultura negra milenar/por humilhar e ridicularizar os demais irmãos / sendo instrumento voluntário do inimigo racista / Caso encerrado.

⁸ Se eu fosse aquele cara que se humilha no sinal / por menos de um real, minha chance era pouca / mas se eu fosse aquele moleque de touca / que engatilha e enfia o cano dentro de sua boca / de quebrada, sem roupa, você e sua mina / um, dois, nem me viu! já sumi na neblina/. Mas não! permaneço vivo, eu sigo a mística / 27 anos contrariando a estatística. / Seu comercial de TV não me engana / eu não preciso de status, nem fama. / Seu carro e sua grana já não me seduz / e nem a sua puta de olhos azuis. / Eu sou apenas um rapaz latino-americano / apoiado por mais de cinqüenta mil manos / efeito colateral que seu sistema produz. (“Capítulo 4, Versículo 3”)

⁹ Irmão, o demônio fode tudo ao seu redor / pelo rádio, jornal, revista e outdoor / Te oferece dinheiro, conversa com calma/contamina seu caráter, rouba sua alma / depois te joga na merda sozinho, / transforma um preto tipo A num neguinho. / Minha palavra alivia sua dor, / ilumina minha alma, louvado seja o meu Senhor / que não deixa o mano aqui desandar, / ah,

nem sentar o dedo em nenhum pilantra. / Mas que nenhum filho da puta ignore a minha lei. ("Capítulo 4, Versículo 3")

¹⁰ A segunda opção é o caminho mais rápido / e fácil, a morte percorre a mesma estrada, é / inevitável. / planejam nossa restrição, esse é o título / da nossa revolução, segundo versículo / leia, se forme, se atualize, decore / antes que racistas otários fardados de cérebro atrofiado/os seus miolos estourem e estará tudo acabado. / Cuidado! / O Boletim de Ocorrência com seu nome em algum livro / em qualquer arquivo, em qualquer distrito / caso encerrado, nada mais que isso. ("Negro Limitado")

¹¹ Não tava nem aí, nem levava nada a sério/admirava os ladrão e os malandro mais velho / mas se liga, olhe ao redor e diga / o que melhorou da função, quem sobrou, sei lá / muito velório rolou de lá pra cá / qual a próxima mãe a chorar / já demorou mas hoje eu posso compreender / que malandragem de verdade é viver (grifo meu) / Agradeço a Deus e aos Orixás / parei no meio do caminho e olhei para trás. (...) (Brown "Fórmula Mágica da Paz").

¹² Gosto de Nelson Mandela, admiro Spike Lee, / Zumbi, um grande herói, o maior daqui. / São importantes pra mim, mas você ri e dá as costas / então acho que sei de que porra você gosta: / se vestir como playboy, frequentar danceterias / agradar os vagabundos, ver novela todo dia, / que merda! / Se esse é seu ideal, é lamentável / é bem provável que você se foda muito / você se autodestrói e também quer nos incluir / porém, não quero, não vou / sou negro, não vou admitir! / De que valem roupas caras, se não tem atitude? / e o que vale a negritude, se não pô-la em prática? / A principal tática, herança da nossa mãe África / a única coisa que não puderam roubar! / se soubessem o valor que a nossa raça tem / tingiam a palma da mão pra ser escura também! (Brown "Júri racional")

¹³ A longer version of this essay was published as "A Fratria Órfã." I have worked with the concept of "função fraterna" in the introduction of *Função Fraterna*.

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