
Daniel Lima – Casting a flash of multiplex consciousness?

Ricardo Rosas

One of the foremost authorities on Afro–Diasporic culture from the last century, North American W. E. Du Bois, saw in black culture and thinking what he called “double consciousness”, a strange sensation, “that of always looking at yourself through the eyes of others”¹. This world, according to Du Bois, “yields him (a black person) no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world”, since, being American and black, he shares duplicity, two souls, two minds, two irreconcilable forces. Perhaps too schizophrenic in its anticipatory veracity, Du Bois’ idea of a “double consciousness” did not prosper in studies undertaken at the beginning of the twentieth century, his era, but came to acquire a more noteworthy receptivity in today’s post-colonial studies of virtual realities and post-structuring. Notions of double consciousness have something to say in times where identity movements start to be confused with the struggles for specific market niches where ideas such as post-identity can be heard.

Not unlike the *queer* theory in gay and lesbian studies, which question the heterosexual compared to homosexual binomial, the hypothesis of double consciousness also questions notions of single identities, proposing a versatility equal to the arduous and difficult adaptation of black citizens in a post-slavery world. In a way, it has also generated a theory that continues to attract more adepts in studies aimed at black ethnic groups. Based on several facets of more popular black culture, even pop, such as the practice of “signifying” (stating one thing and meaning just the opposite), or even the bizarre and subversive apparitions of science fiction in many contemporary black culture productions, be it in black music as a whole, ranging from jazz to hip-hop, to techno, and drum’n’bass, or in manifestations such as graffiti, this theory has been called “AfroFuturism”. Hardly conventional, in principle, AfroFuturism leans towards trans-disciplinarity and crosses fields as different as fiction, cybernetics, music and cinema. One of its most well-known theoreticians at the present time is Paul D. Miller, or DJ Spooky, who published the book “Rhythm Science” in 2004, where, among other things, he takes the concept of double consciousness to subsequent stages by defending the thesis that in reality blacks no longer experience a double consciousness but a multiple consciousness.

In the context that we are increasingly plunging into and being defined by the data that surrounds us, in this culture of information flows and identity dispersion, “to affirm a multiplex consciousness is not to negate the racial oppression that motivated Du Bois’ initial interest in duality”². Foremost, it dealt with the recognition of patterns subjacent to social, informational and cultural process itself in that it brought about the insertion of a segregated population in which the superimposed dualities create layers where environments of social engineering, multiple narrative threads and identity as a social cipher are tropes within a culture where the city centrifuges cultural conflicts and exclusions, and where the “rhythmic science” of black music adds several layers of complexity, be it in DJ cultures, hip-hop or in the practice of sampling.

But why deal with all these issues concerning Afro-diasporic, double or multiplex consciousness, when the objective here is to approach the work of artist Daniel Lima? Perhaps because this exhibition deals with Afro-diasporic themes, maybe even because Daniel being a son of this Diaspora himself, is not tied to the identity precepts of a descendent of this Diaspora, either through the recuperation of supposed African roots, nor even to some more abstract example of a double consciousness. Maybe it is because we can find in his work certain types of insertion, of semiotic interference, which violate and subvert certain concepts in which identity, narrative, technology and information can be shuffled and confused.

We could accompany this in some of the artist’s previous work, such as “Scribe” and “Pichação Laser”, where he produces virtual graffiti with a portable laser, transferring street language, graffiti, to other spaces by using an uncommon technological support in lieu of its street equivalent.

Daniel has also taken part in a few collective initiatives. He is one of the founders of the group A Revolução Não Será Televisada (The Revolution Will Not Be Broadcasted), whose video programs effected a collage of video-art experimentation with a certain political activist hue where the leading thread was a narrative in OFF given by an urban guerrilla fighter with existential doubts. The group’s programs subverted the seductive aesthetics of MTV, for example, with a political intentionality unthinkable for the aforementioned broadcaster. With its arsenal of images, the group also participated in the Mídia Tática Brasil in March of 2003.

Still in 2003, Daniel presented his work in Rotterdam, in the Gear Inside exhibition, in which he hung from an extremity of a drawbridge, exactly when it was being raised to allow a ship to pass, "Everything up high is like that below, Everything which is below is like that up high" is the title of his work and the phrase repeated by the artist during his performance, in a reference to Hermes Trimegisto sung by Jorge Ben. Lima invades a space, without any apparent proposition, calling the attention of the local police.

At the end of 2003, at the 8th Havana Bienal, Daniel once again violated certain protocols by locking up a fenced public square at night by placing chains and padlocks at the entry and exit gates, to bring local controls into evidence. The "agents", responsible for guarding the park were locked inside, they themselves being to find an "escape route" out. The event was filmed by the artist and, as a climax, Daniel, along with his brother, the hip-hop DJ, Eugenio Lima and the musical producer Noizyman, gave a party/spectacle with a lot of hip-hop music and images of the violation-intervention on large screens. The event is part of a series called "Sem Saida" (No Way Out).

Another of his manifestations, apparently senseless, was a series of photos called "Blitz", where he asks the police to photograph him smiling alongside other policemen, a series that would later be exhibited on the façade of the 7th Military Police Battalion in São Paulo. Given the often denounced truculence of São Paulo police officers when dealing with blacks, the work undoubtedly contains a certain ironic coloring which Daniel's grin cannot hide.

But it was also this often denounced police truculence with the black population that motivated one of the last activities undertaken by Lima in 2004. On the occasion of the event "Zona de Ação" at SESC Paulista, he and his group "A Revolução...", along with activists from the Frente 3 de Fevereiro movement came together in a series of activities and interventions questioning police racism. The "Zona de Ação" ended in a true theatrical and hip-hop performance that staged, among other things, the assassination of the young black lawyer Flávio Sant'Ana by the São Paulo military police.

Daniel did not abandon his laser ray research either. After presenting the first version of his work with light "Coluna Infinita" at the National Art Exhibition Center of Belo Horizonte, it was at the Sonarsound Festival in São Paulo, in 2004, that he exhibited his "Coluna Infinita II – Opostos", where he builds a bridge, even if a virtual one (or using only laser) between the *favela* (shantytown) and the São Paulo financial district. In the same manner, "Coluna Laser III Mar" intends to lose itself at sea headed for Africa, leaving Solar do Unhão towards the baía de Todos os Santos.

A virtual bridge, crossing centuries of separation and Disapora, the ray of laser light may, who knows, suffer a certain comparison here with those of the virtual towers which, at New York's ground zero, are intended to substitute the Twin Towers. After all, weren't these several "September 11's" that victimized the black population throughout the history of the Americas? Although utopian, a laser bridge might just unite a fragmented history, kidnapped by invading aliens, in a forced Disapora.

In our age of simulations and duplications, of samplings and revisions, Daniel Lima is not tied to fixed identities, he does not cultivate roots, but re-mixes techniques, in conceptual unstabilizing activities. We might be able to see in him, like in other contemporaries of his, a shattering of identities, and not the blind protection of same. Not unlike the thoughts of Kodwo Eshun, one of the luminaries of the theory of AfroFuturism, AfroFuturism "unstabilizes what people thought black identity was, what pop identity and cultural identity was"³. Perhaps, we should, also in Daniel's case, primarily see identity as an intermittent fluctuation, like the focusing point of diverse vectors which cross in a multi-polar and multiplex consciousness

1. DU BOIS, W. E. B. "As almas da gente negra". Rio de Janeiro, Lacerda Editores, 1999, p. 54.
2. MILLER, Paul D. (aka DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid). "Rhythm Science". Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2004, p. 61.
3. LOVINK, Geert. "Interview with Kodwo Eshun" on Nettime July 25, 2005. Accessed on January 17, 2005 : <http://www.nettime.org/nettime.w3archive/200007/msg00112.html>