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- 1 Cristopher Cozier is a visual performer, intellectual, essayist, critic and curator from Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies. *Blue Soap* was a pioneering piece of filmed performance and happening in the country. The project was first previewed in Trinidad at the Acquerela Gallery in Woodbrook, Trinidad (TT) in 1994, and was then presented at the Havana Art Biennale the same year. This article deconstructs his first video installation, *Blue Soap*, 1994, which was the first video performance in the history of Trinbagonian art.

Fig. 1. *Blue Soap* in the yard of a house, 2014, Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies.

Photo © Maica Gugolati.

- 2 Through an ethnographic investigation of the testimonies of the artist and of his performers and collaborators, contextualized with the local newspapers of the time and the audience's comments left at the art gallery that showed the artwork, the article describes both the video performance and the socio-political context the artistic work sprang from and dealt with. Most of the meetings were held with the artist at his studio in Trinidad, which houses the archives of the installation and the artist's private art journals of the time. These exchanges are supplemented by recorded discussions with his collaborators, who for this contribution wanted to maintain anonymity. At the art gallery, today called Medula, that housed the installation, I was able to consult its archives, the articles in local magazines, and the survey of the reactions of the public present at the opening.
- 3 Artistically, *Blue Soap* appeared at a time when art investment was based on the construction of a modern stereotypical and 'picturesqued'¹ national imagery. From the time of the country's independence (1962), local art history was expected to 'serve' the creolized nation freed from the colonial empire (Wainwright 2013: 431). From the postcards that were left as commentaries by the public during the exhibition at the Trinidadian art gallery, it could be seen that some attendees understood the artist's critique and shared his feelings with positive and supportive comments, while the majority accused him of being egocentric and not artistic, since they regarded art practice as something exclusively pictorial and celebratory. The video installation-happening *Blue Soap* was therefore an affront to modern figurative art which still depicts the country in colorful naturalistic patterns, with the highlighting of stereotypical tropical landscapes and motifs.
- 4 Along with the dominance of nationalized art in post-independence Trinbagonian society, *Blue Soap* focuses on issues in the country that are still relevant today. It offers a warning to the contemporary Caribbean society of Trinidad and Tobago about

questions of social categorizations incorporated by the postcolonial subject; it questions the borders between institutional nationalized culture and its existing different subcultures; and it considers the topics of gender, colorism² and class representation, together with the issue of diasporic displacement. All of these issues are discussed in this paper.

- 5 Christopher Cozier returned to Trinidad following his university education in the United States and Europe at the end of the 1980s. In the early 1990s, the period of *Blue Soap* project, the artist created a series that he will entitle in 1995: 'Cultural Autopsy', made of notebook doodles, performances, and conceptual objects that questioned the construction of the nation's status-quo (Paul 2003). In 1991, he presented a performance entitled: 'Conversation with a Shirt-Jac' where he questioned violence, reputation, and formal power structures in the process of decolonialization (Cozier & Tancons 2012). Another performance from the same year was the 'The Whip/Tamarind Rod: System of Organization' that dealt with authority, evoking the colonial mindset in Caribbean schools. These works were 'pieces' of Cozier's (2004) larger *Blue Soap* project, where he decided to investigate the narrative of Independence. This work was an attempt to culminate the 'Cultural Autopsy' series.
- 6 The artwork *Blue Soap* was planned at the beginning of the 1990s; it highlights the stress and unrest associated with integration and visibility and the self-acceptance of Trinbagonian citizens who continue to confront a postcolonial society, while at the same time enjoying economic comforts thanks to the country's oil and gas industries.
- 7 In the 1970s the oil and gas boom brought economic and social change to the country. The nation adopted the motto of Prime Minister Eric Williams: 'money no problem', with people adopting a more consumerist lifestyle (Yelvington 1995) resulting in widespread corruption. Since this boom, the middle class has dominated the national scene numerically and culturally. The consumerist habits of the citizens did not end with the economic crises that occurred in the same decade and continued in the 1980s. The 1990s, when the artwork *Blue Soap* appeared, saw an attempted coup led by the local extremist Muslim group Jamaat al Muslimeen under its leader Yasin Abu Bakr. Economic decline led to a diasporic movement mainly in the direction of North America and Canada. Culturally this decade is characterized by the reenactment of the national identity of the country not only internally, but also on the international scene and among the diaspora (G.T. Ho & Nurse 2005).
- 8 The *Blue Soap* installation consists of a video shown on four television screens arranged in a circle; the same video is repeated on a loop on the four screens running approximately twenty seconds apart from one another. The artwork confronts the visitor with a multidimensional experiential stimulation. The desired effect is to recreate the daily atmosphere of the island in its urban soundscape.

Fig 2. Sketch of the installation, 1994.

© Christopher Cozier. Courtesy of the artist.

- 9 In the video performance, the voices are superimposed, projecting the viewer into a noisy crowd as if in the middle of a market in the capital, where everybody speaks loudly, and where the deafening noise of the traffic mingles with the music of the sound systems on the streets. The intention is to create a sonic space where the audience is pushed to adopt an attentive posture, listening to multiple voices.
- 10 At the time of the opening of the show, the artist added the presence of a 'doubles man', a seller of *doubles*, the local street food made of chickpeas and Bara bread, in the middle of the gallery room where the artist's drawings were hung. The figure of the vendor recalls the national, popular side of the artwork, and the drawings that surround him represent figures of power such as the businessman, the politician and the bishop. In addition, a character called 'Icarus' is represented, symbolizing the mythic statement of rebellion incorporated in the desire for freedom expressed by the actors in the video. 'You can tie my hands and feet, but you cannot stop me from flying'.³ The video shows how the characters are like Icarus, as it charts their attempts to revolt which end in their having to deal with their own 'collapses', their own failures.
- 11 The video is divided into two parts that develop the sociocultural issues of the time, which are still relevant today. The first part presents local and international reflections on issues of multiculturalism and ethnicity. The second denounces the incorporation of power in postcolonial contexts.

The first part

Fig 3. Details of *Blue Soap* artwork, 1994.

© Christopher Cozier. Courtesy of the artist.

- 12 The time when *Blue Soap* was created coincides with a period when political nation-building relied on stressing the multicultural and diverse heritage of the nation. Political propaganda appropriated the notion of a 'rainbow society' from a definition given by the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu when he visited Trinidad in the 1980s. In historical and political terms from the time of independence, the cohabitation of the different ancestral groupings in the country (originating in colonialism and immigration), developed into a sense of national creolization that rejected ethnic discrimination in the name of common territorial belonging (Williams 1964). According to Crichlow and Northover,⁴ creole identity, at the time of the constitution of the independent nation of Trinidad and Tobago, refers to the notion of an independent national citizen. In cultural practices, however, those identified in nationalist thought as 'creole', and taken to be the national archetype in post-independence period, were mainly people of African descent.
- 13 At the time of independence, the government led by the PNM—People's National Movement—party, tacitly favored the condition of the creole population, leaving the other categories of the population at the margins. Even though politics were destabilized in the 1970s by the presence of the black power movement (Gates & Appiah 2007), the PNM stayed in power until 1986, when one of the opposition parties, the NAR—National Alliance for Reconstruction—won the election. By pursuing policies embracing colorism, the NAR sought mainly to appeal to the part of the population of Indian descent.

- 14 According to the artist in his art journals 1990-1992: 'the history of our art is the history of a search for the truth [...] it's a history of people that are waiting to become people [...]'. Cozier's statement addresses the postcolonial process, and the desire for personhood that has continued to conflict with the construction of nationhood since independence.
- 15 In the first part of the video the artist is the protagonist. It expresses his social existence, which is situated in a zone of passage, of non-conformity to a stereotype of colorism.
- 16 The video shows him washing himself with blue soap while a chorus lists the properties of the soap. The artist declares: 'Blue Soap is used in a number of ways as punishment, as a ritual protection, for making things white, for washing tongues of rude children, for bathing your mongrel [...] to bathe myself with blue soap addresses issues related to people like myself of mixed ethnicity and also the status of the artist in society, as a "rude tongue"'.⁵
- 17 The artist superimposes his voice on that of the chorus, recounting his sense of ambiguity about his identity and stating:
- 'I come from a place where my French creole friends don't trust me, I have a name like them but I look different.
My Indian friends think I look like them but I don't share their culture. They don't trust me either.
My African friends don't trust me because I look like an Indian, I have a French creole name and I'm not dark enough. I feel like I am everything and nothing simultaneously'.⁶
- 18 In his statement he defies the principle of the non-contradictory nature of postcolonial citizens in the tropics, who cannot be fixed in one unique sense of identity due to their intrinsic ethnic mix, even though they are expected by their post-colonial society to do so.
- 19 The intimate narrative of the character is intertwined with the sound of the chorus. The iteration of the voices and their repetition refers back to religious litanies, healing payers and Hindu mantras, bringing the chanting closer to the spiritual power of the blue soap which is known locally to protect from the evil eye or *maljo*. In the country any kind of pain and discomfort can be blamed on a *maljo*, and several rituals are used to ward off evil spirits: for example, by placing blue Milk of Magnesia bottles at the corners of properties, or through the actions of Obeah and Ojha practitioners, both from the Afro-Creole and Hindu magic traditions (McNeal et al. 2014).
- 20 Through this repetition, the artist criticizes the government-supported forms of multicultural categorization that, while they admit of plurality, essentialize differences by imposing structures upon them. In terms similar to Spivak's (1991), he denounces a national auto- and allo-orientalism, that celebrates not 'the other' but rather the 'national self' in an exotic way.
- 21 When the artist declares, as he is washing himself: 'I feel like I am everything and nothing simultaneously', he expresses the counterpoint of the lived experience of the Caribbean being who, to quote Benitez-Rojo (1997), sometimes feels 'in excess and lacking' in established social rules and etiquettes of identity. The artist partakes in an ongoing dialogue with the construction of 'otherness' adopted by the post-independent nation. In representing his loud inner narration, he shows the heterogeneous facets of the heterotopic (Foucault 1966) other that he himself is. Heterotopia, etymologically

from *héteros* (other) and *topos* (place), is a concept that describes spaces that bring multiple different juxtaposed other spaces together simultaneously. I identify its presence in Cozier's work, when he refers to himself as a simultaneous plurality of etiquettes and identities that provokes the illusory idea of having a fixed authentic identity imposed upon him by society, to be maintained in perpetuity.

The second part

Fig 4. Details of *Blue Soap* artwork, 1994.

© Christopher Cozier. Courtesy of the artist.

- 22 The second part of the video performance denounces imperialist and colonial structures, as well as those of post-independence taken on by postcolonial states.
- 23 Blue soap is a well-known item in Trinidad loaded with popular symbolic meanings. It is not a widely-advertised product, unlike Lux soap in the late 1980s, which was promoted by a campaign featuring the Italian actress Ornella Muti and extolling the fine quality of that body soap. On the contrary, blue soap is a pure soap, odorless, used to wash objects rather than bodies. It is a raw soap that symbolizes belonging to a less well-off class, disdained especially by the middle classes who, in the face of globalization, are looking for modernization and sophisticated objects.
- 24 The artwork raises questions, posed by the protagonists, about institutional arrangements and postcolonial social expectations based on aesthetics, style and class.
- 25 There are three characters, two humans (a woman and a man) and a nonhuman named TheFuckUpMan, represented only by a head that pivots on itself. This last character evokes the artist's memory, drawn in his personal sketches, of the head of Marlon Brando coming out of the water in *Apocalypse Now*. TheFuckUpMan 'symbolizes anger [...] the anger that immobilizes instead of motivating. And it becomes a trap' Cozier declares in his arts journals, 1990-1992. It is the icon of both leadership and class belonging; it symbolizes the frustrations of characters from the post-independence era.

- The head turns, embodying the symbolism of hierarchy by invoking the law of magnetic attraction which causes people to move around it. It does not leave the human characters free: the woman recognizes it as the cause of physical and psychological restrictions, while the man remains unconsciously dependent on it.
- 26 In the second part, the human characters find themselves developing monologues about social structures; by revealing their marginality, they show the public their despair and their desires, as if they were giving voice to a stream of consciousness.
 - 27 The chorus here recites a litany composed of the national motto 'discipline, tolerance, production' which is superimposed on the voices of the two protagonists by removing the superimposition of the voices present in the first part). This new iteration once again assumes the function of creating the feeling of national belonging through self-persuasion.
 - 28 Through the two human characters the artist approaches the question of gender. The female character in the video states, somewhat prophetically in light of recent events: 'I can't breathe', because of a feeling of suffocation, a social and cultural suffocation. She does not know what direction to give to her life, and she just feels as if she wants to escape from the oppression without knowing how to. According to a collaborator of *Blue Soap*, this character represents what is at stake when desire for female independence has no possibility of being realized. She is a 'rasta red woman'; her skin color in Trinidad is defined as 'red,'⁷ an icon of sensuality par excellence. Colorism does not simply define the color of the skin, but also influences status and recognition, as well as social expectations that must be met: 'the goal of the daily scene [is] to perform a function', as one of the performers stated (personal interview 2015). This function, of a professional, behavioral, stylistic and linguistic order, is a label that allows recognition and acceptance by society. The 'red' person in Trinidad can appear in multiple social groups based on her mixed phenotype. 'She is mobile [and] she is inscribed everywhere. She is a symbol of a new world experience [...] She feels lost and badly connected, in search of something, but she does not know what. Even if she imposes herself with her radical look [with the dreadlocks], she is vulnerable and powerful', a *Blue Soap* colleague of the time stated (personal interview 2015).
 - 29 The male character, on the contrary, demands order; against chaos and anarchy, he is obsessed with the need for laws. The notion of order, according to the artist, brings about the internal semantic structure of the culture of the new worlds: 'the culture is tied to the idea of order [...] [in] new societies as our own—over which order was imposed—not to [...] create a living space but for a field of work, where the relationship between works and builders of society was not an option for all interested parties. Our lack of commitment is linked to our lack of connection [...]', Christopher Cozier stated at the end of his notes (1990-1992).
 - 30 The male character embodies 'a system of gaze' specific to TheFuckUpMan; and in his suit 'is a symbol of the perfect class: the teacher, the politician' the artist added while talking to me (personal interview 2015). The stick that he holds in his hand alludes to the memory of control: hierarchy, punishment, directions, attention, summed up in the expression 'hands up, hands out, hands down' voiced in the video that links to the same motto repeated in the disciplinary measures of local schools.
 - 31 The male character walks around TheFuckUpMan, insisting on the disciplinary symbolism of the head, while the female figure is immobile and inert. The head's gaze here is a reminder of the panoptic surveillance and control (Foucault 1975) inherited

from the colonial plantation economy. The plantation societies were organized systems in which people were divided into units and marched through a regimentation of supervisory surveillance (Smith 1967). In Cozier's work, in the period when Trinidad was independent, the FuckUpMan continues to monitor the characters, perpetuating a system of control. According to one of the *Blue Soap* collaborators, the head leads people to understand the limits of 'what [a person] can and cannot do' (personal interview, 2015). The character in the video says, 'What we need are the laws; [and] people who understand the laws and what they mean'. Yet it represents a nihilistic power that is itself neutralized by the impossibility of redemption: 'Why is order so difficult to maintain?' the tormented male character keeps asking. As he speaks, the chorus continues its litany with the national motto, accompanied by the sound of the teacher's cane whipping the air in a rhythmic accompaniment to the recitation of the multiplication tables.

- 32 The male character embodies the label of Afro-Saxon (Maharajh 2000): a Caribbean of African descent who has studied abroad, usually in the ancient colonizer England. By assimilating the norms of respectability of the 'white' man, he aspires to social acceptance once he has returned to his own country: 'he dresses himself in the ill-fitting suit of the departed colonizers, takes up their rod of correction, recites their rules, mimics their methods seeking control' (Ganese 1994: 33).
- 33 The head, maintaining the authoritarian gaze of surveillance inherited from colonial history (Thompson 2007), stares at the human characters, establishing a system of power and expectation of the performance of the citizens of the independent country. At this moment of the video the characters of the performance are simultaneously the subject and object of the head, thus gaining an existential recognition. In the end, the two human characters flee, trying to break free from the restrictions; as they run into the darkness, the superimposed voices are silenced.
- 34 The questions that arise at this stage of the video are: where are they running? in which direction? towards what? By running, they compulsively maroon themselves. At the end of the artwork, it is clear that, just like the flight of Icarus, their escape is futile because despite their running, they always end up near TheFuckUpMan.

Fig 5. Sketch for the artwork, Private journals of C. Cozier, 1992-1995.

© Christopher Cozier. Courtesy of the artist.

- 35 According to the artist, the coexistence of light and darkness in the video also symbolizes the inconsistency of the characters: this performance 'is like a miner [...] in the tunnel of our consciousness' (Cozier's notes, 1990-1992). The work can also be interpreted as a parapraxis, where the subconscious feelings of the characters sabotage their official social functions as 'social and artistic wrestling' (ibid.) between the tensions and expectations of post-independence. The realities of the characters are explained through cross-references to their needs, and visually through their 'light-dark' presence. The characters are detached from each other, although they occupy the same space, without any reciprocal communication.
- 36 At the very end of the video the woman pushes the head (TheFuckUpMan) to the ground and the video ends, followed by a quotation from Octavio Paz (1990): 'I am a history, a memory that invents itself'.
- 37 This final quote evokes the postcolonial subject's desire for invention, the creation of a counterculture by imagining oneself (Juneja 1996). The artwork asks for proof of the act of reconstruction of the postcolonial 'broken narratives' and for the desire for legitimacy through the reinvention and the re-representation of oneself. The artist, evoking the memory of the past ('history' and 'memory') and the desire for the future (the action of 'inventing oneself'), concludes his artwork by emphasizing the capacity for self-affirmation through an ontological imagination that brings together the past and the future.

Theoretical issues common to the first and second parts

- 38 'Every Trini goes through phases' one performance collaborator argued during our discussions (personal interview, 2015). This next section puts forward, through the symbolism of the blue soap, some of the 'phases' that each person goes through.
- 39 All the three human characters experience a desire for recognition that is linked to that for respectability. In Trinidad, the fact of being noticed as well-groomed is used to show a visual and existential presence: 'It is me. What you see is my true self. [...] To show people that you have made an effort!' exclaimed Marlon Griffith, a Trinidadian contemporary artist based in Japan, when talking about the meaning for him of *Blue Soap* (personal interview 2014). The action of cleaning with a blue soap bar is also evoked by the Trinidadian writer V.S. Naipaul in his novel: *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), where Mr Biswas uses it to clean the house meticulously. In Trinidadian contemporary society, the sense of bodily care, and the act of presenting a public display of a clean and neat style of dress provide a public statement of self-respectability (Neptune 2007). The relation between seeing and being seen is linked to the psychoanalytical notion of visibility, the fetishist gaze (Mulvey 1975) and the notion of respectability, where the act of showing oneself as respectable and behaving in a respectable manner is linked to the personal, family and social context. The characters are categorized according to a broken visibility where the visible and the invisible are based on social dynamics. They wish to redeem their sense of invisibility by seeking a social recognition that occurs via a 'representative affirmation' (Foucault 1983: 50) of their social expectations. Through the social performances of the two human characters—the red woman and the Afro-Saxon man—they simultaneously affirm their simulacrum while adopting an inner distance between what they really feel and what they represent. They show a paradoxical kind of double existence: the one that society expects to see in them contrasting with the conflicted inner existences that they feel.
- 40 A topic inherent in the blue soap project is the denotation of the class dimension. 'Blue Soap reminds people of a time when washing machines were not for everyone; when people washed their clothes along the rivers' said one of the *Blue Soap* collaborators (personal interview 2015). The act of whitening clothes along the rivers might still evoke the colonial figures of the *blanchisseuses*, or washerwomen. Blue soap is still used today for washing by hand, but following the economic boom of the 1970s, washing machines spread to become an indispensable object in middle-class homes. 'Today, most Trinis disdain blue soap' the collaborator concluded (personal interview 2015). The soap bar became part of folklore and a symbol of social class: at the time of independence, when not everyone had running water in their homes, people 'bathed around standpipes with blue soap [...] until they become "white"'. The artwork *Blue Soap* evokes the issue of class in the country linked to the structure imposed by colonial colorism that still affects the society nowadays; according to the interpretation of one collaborator, the working classes using blue soap nowadays wash themselves as 'objects' seeking to become 'white'. The soap, according to Stuart Hall (1997), symbolizes a domestication of the colonized world, turning the soap's properties of cleaning and purifying into a fetish-object for the colonized subject. In imperial and colonial advertisements the soap was 'capable' of washing and whitening not just objects, but also bodies and race.

- 41 Another issue common to the three human characters is the feeling of alienation. The artist inserted into the installation a plaque on which are inscribed the words Alien-Nation, which refer to the ontological status of alien as well as to that of being alienated by the nation itself. It refers indirectly to the emotional state of the individual who decides to return to their native country after leaving it. It refers to a native (a national citizen) subjected to multiple changes, taking place on departure but also once they are back in their biological context or on native territory. This sense of alienation is different from the general experience of displacement described as a mixture of a feeling of dispossession, and placelessness because of the act of leaving a motherland (V.S. Naipaul analysis in Rai 2017). What the artist evokes is a reverse journey of somebody that comes back to their 'native land' from abroad while finding themselves again a foreigner in their own country of origin.

Fig 6. *Blue Soap* Installation, Christopher Cozier, 1994.

© Christopher Cozier. Courtesy of the artist.

- 42 This otherness is not only geographical and biological, but also psychological. The alien dimension is evoked by the characters of the two parts of the installation through the paradoxical sensation of simultaneous ubiquity and change of scene.
- 43 In the first part, the artist himself explains his hybrid identity and mixed origins. The artwork *Blue Soap* was born after his return 'to the born country' (Césaire 2001 [1939]) following his university studies abroad.
- 44 In the second part, the woman feels 'alienated' from herself at the mercy of an inner discrepancy between her social image of a mixed person who can fit in many social categories and her feelings of inadaptability. The male character is also what one might call an 'alien and a native'; in his categorization of Afro-Saxon, he reflects on and responds to all the social expectations of respectability, at the cost of a nebulous interior chaos. Both characters incorporate the paradoxical role of both executioner and scapegoat victim.

- 45 Aimé Césaire (2001) saw the Caribbean man as spurred to move from the position of 'sitting' (a metaphor for the state of enslavement) to that of 'standing'" (symbolically the state of freedom: 'standing and free' (2001: 54)). By contrast, the characters in *Blue Soap* rebel against the plantation mentality (Best 2000), as shown by the woman pushing TheFuckUpMan to the floor, and both independently run away, but always come back to a kind of 'rewind' moving image, where we see them around the head as if their emancipation had never happened. The characters thus remain in a state of somnambulism or zombification (Paolini 1999) between dichotomies, which does not allow for the possibility of establishing a difference from Aimé Césaire's movement from 'subordination' to 'freedom'.
- 46 The last common notion this artwork deals with is that of the sense of trust, linked to that of social and aesthetic conformity. A lack of trust involves community and social mistrust: 'When you do not conform, people do not trust you [...]. It is not only a question of skin color, but also of ideology or political position' a collaborator of *Blue Soap* stated in the personal interview, 2015. Both parts of the video performance address this notion of mistrust.
- 47 The wooden circle on which the artist washes himself in the first part is also the one enclosing the young girl in the second; it symbolizes the sense of conformity. The paradoxical redundancy of self-representation is reminiscent of Magritte's 1928 painting *The betrayal of images* (Foucault 1983). The desire for existential recognition representing their function becomes the proof of the ontological existence of the characters who incorporate the social subject by denying the Magrittian statement: 'This is not a pipe'. The characters ask boldly for recognition, as if in Magritte's painting one were instead to find the affirmation: 'This is a pipe!'. In this case, the representation and re-appropriation of visibility show that the subjects embody a performative osmosis between their social representation and their existence. The characters are victims of a fictional representation that torments them with a feeling of an impossible match between wants, needs and social expectations.
- 48 The impossibility of conforming to socially imposed categories is present in the first part of the artwork, with the artist himself struggling with the categorization of colorism, and in the second part with the woman and male characters fighting for social representability and recognition.

Conclusion

- 49 Cozier's work proposes a challenge to the idea of 'finding oneself' linked to the post-independence socio-political context of the country. *Blue Soap* changes perspectives on postcolonial traces by asking artistically: 'Who is the master now?' (Cozier's notes, 1990-1992). It is a form of dialogue for and with a generation born under independence, 'whose parents exchange the white uniform for that of black massa'.⁸
- 50 The political re-representation or re-enactment of the 1990s responded to the 'you do it as well' motto, as one of the performers argued (personal interview, 2015), by developing the debate about originality and repetition to recreate an established 'independent national identity'. The three human characters are in the middle of this indefinable place of passage. The themes of gender, culture, ethnicity and self-representation are displaced in the dynamic between margins and centers that

characterizes the reproduction of a poetic post-independence and postcolonial existence.

- 51 Increasingly, video performance refers to the question of putting the post-independence subject into words, and the need for legitimacy that comes from the background of the current postmodern context. The *Blue Soap* artwork and its analysis take on a significance that is not limited to the local nationalist context but may be applicable, from a symbolic and deconstructionist perspective, to any postcolonial context.
- 52 In conclusion, Christopher Cozier's critique extends right up to his most recent works. In 2020 at the 3rd Industrial Art Biennial, in Pula, Croatia, he proposed a continuation of this same 'Cultural Autopsy' series with the work 'When you miss me—I gone', which is about the undelivered promises and violence of the State. He continues to carry on the process of archiving and producing 'counter memory' (Fernandes Campa 2013) that challenges the ideological apparatus behind the representation of the Caribbean, contradicting and revising the official history and the construction of nationalism.

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NOTES

1. Pictorialism is an international aesthetic movement that dominated photography and landscapes painting between the 19th and 20th centuries. It emphasizes the beauty of its subject matter and its composition, rather than the documentation of reality. Pictorialism in the West Indies has been guided by an aesthetic of tropicalism: a complex visual system through which the landscape was imagined for tourist consumption (Thompson 2007).

2. Colorism highlights the structure of nuances of skin color among the citizens, nuances that are maintained in oral discourse even after independence. Colorism derives a social hierarchy from the system of enslavement, where distinctions of individual status were based in part on skin color which defined 'melanin hierarchies' (N'Diaye 2006: 52).

3. Interview with the artist published by the *Trinidad Guardian*, March 29th, 1994.

4. Patricia M. Northover & Michaeline A. Crichlow, "Power and its Subjects: Development Dilemmas, Post-colonial Re-structuring of Rural Spaces/Places/Identities and State Reconfiguration in Contemporary Globalization Processes," communication at the Eleventh World Congress of Rural Sociology, 2004.

5. "Have a Taste Of Blue Soap," *Sunday Express*, March 13th, 1994, p. 39.

6. Ibid.

7. A red woman or a red man are people with a mixed fair tone skin complexion, and embody the stereotype of desirability and privilege (Mohammed 1998).

8. Interview of the artiste by the "Washing with blue soap," *Trinidad Guardian*, March 29th 1994, pp. 19-20. *Trinidad Guardian*, March 29th, 1994.

ABSTRACTS

This article analyzes Christopher Cozier's multichannel video installation of mixed media contemporary art entitled *Blue Soap* (1994). The article employs the leitmotif of the artwork, blue soap—a raw soap used in the Caribbean—to construct an aesthetic and socio-political critique of Trinidad and Tobago.

Using a selection of visual material from the video installation and drawings of *Blue Soap*, the article considers reports from national newspapers on the art event, and integrates these reports with analysis of audience comments from its exhibition opening in 1994, in Port of Spain, the capital of the country. This data analysis is supplemented by in-depth ethnographic interviews I

conducted with the artist and collaborators on the work, and includes a study of Cozier's sketches in his art notebook at that time.

This article dissects the scenes and symbolism in the artwork, problematizing the soap's metaphorical cleaning/cleansing action in society. It shows the colonial connections related to the use and symbolic values of the soap, which were inherited by Trinidadian society after independence, and it connects them with some of the current critical issues that society is dealing with.

Following the structure of the video art, the contribution contextualizes these issues socio-historically, and develops a temporal excursus, linking the same topics to society today. The aim is for the reader to understand the local issues of the time, and allow her/him to relate these issues to other post-colonized societies of the Americas and the world.

The article develops its contents in three parts: the first two explain the topics of the video installation and contextualize the issues socio-historically; the third part develops theoretical frameworks for the issues previously described.

The first part relates to post-independence social and psychological issues that Trinbagonian citizens were experiencing and questioning. Here the artist is the main protagonist and reflexively explains issues of racial identity from personal experience. Moreover, this part of the paper discusses the broader topics of self-affirmation as an independent nation, but one that still depended upon the variable economic waves of oil and gas incomes. The attempted coup d'état that occurred right before the release of the artwork is also discussed in this part of the text.

The second part treats concerns surrounding institutional arrangements and the postcolonial social expectations based on aesthetics, style and class articulated by the protagonists of the video installation. Each of the characters expresses some of the topics highlighted in the video, namely, the borders between institutional nationalized culture and its different existent subcultures, the complexity of gender stereotypes, postcolonial hierarchical structures of colonial colorism and social expectations, and issues of visibility and social representability.

The third part of this article assembles postcolonial theoretical frameworks in accordance with the artwork itself, exposing the identity issues of post-colonized, contemporary citizens. It looks at questions of trust and conformity within established group structures, concluding with a discussion of the issue of migratory and diasporic displacement, which many countries like Trinidad and Tobago have faced in their history.

Cet article analyse l'installation vidéo multicanaux de Christopher Cozier intitulée *Blue Soap* (1994), une œuvre d'art contemporain qui mélange différents types de médias. L'article revient sur le leitmotiv de l'œuvre d'art, le savon bleu – un type de savon brut utilisé dans la Caraïbe – pour proposer une esthétique et une critique sociopolitique de Trinité-et-Tobago.

À travers une sélection de matériels visuels tirés de l'installation vidéo et de dessins de *Blue Soap*, l'article se penche sur la couverture de l'événement artistique par la presse nationale, et intègre ces articles aux analyses des commentaires du public lors du vernissage de l'exposition de 1994 à Port of Spain, la capitale du pays.

L'article dissèque les scènes et le symbolisme de l'œuvre, problématisant ainsi l'action métaphorique de ce savon qui nettoie et purifie la société. Il s'agit aussi de montrer les connections coloniales liées à l'usage et aux valeurs symboliques de ce savon, dont la société trinitadienne a hérité à l'indépendance. Celles-ci sont à leur tour connectées avec certaines des questions actuelles auxquelles est confrontée la société de Trinité-et-Tobago.

Après avoir rappelé la structure de l'œuvre vidéo, l'article propose une contextualisation sociohistorique des questions qu'elle soulève et développe un excursus chronologique dans lequel ces thématiques sont liées à la société d'aujourd'hui. L'objectif est de faire comprendre au lecteur les problèmes locaux de l'époque et de permettre aussi des comparaisons avec d'autres sociétés postcoloniales des Amériques et du monde.

L'article se présente en trois parties : les deux premières expliquent le sujet de l'œuvre vidéo et en contextualisent les enjeux ; la troisième partie développe les cadres théoriques liés aux questions précédemment décrites.

La première partie concerne les enjeux sociaux et psychologiques propres à la post-indépendance que les citoyens de Trinité-et-Tobago ont dû affronter et questionner. L'artiste est alors le principal protagoniste de l'œuvre et explique de façon réflexive les enjeux d'identité raciale issus de sa propre expérience. En outre, cette partie de l'article aborde les thèmes plus généraux de l'auto-affirmation en tant que nation indépendante, celle-ci étant toujours indexée aux changements économiques liés aux aléas pétroliers et aux revenus du gaz. La tentative de coup d'État qui a lieu juste avant que l'installation ne soit dévoilée au public est aussi abordée dans cette partie du texte.

La deuxième partie du texte concerne les compromis institutionnels et les attentes sociales liées à la situation postcoloniale : les protagonistes de l'œuvre posent en effet des questions relatives à l'esthétique, au style et à la classe. Chacun des personnages exprime certains des enjeux abordés dans la vidéo, à savoir les limites entre la culture nationalisée et institutionnalisée et les différents types de sous-cultures qu'elle peut contenir, la complexité des stéréotypes de genre, les attentes sociales et structures hiérarchiques coloristes postcoloniales, et les problèmes de visibilité et de représentativité sociale.

La troisième partie de l'article réunit les cadres théoriques postcoloniaux et situés, afin d'expliquer les problèmes d'identité des citoyens colonisés contemporains. Elle aborde les enjeux de confiance et de conformité au sein de structures collectives établies, et conclut sur une discussion sur le phénomène migratoire et diasporique, que d'innombrables pays ont dû affronter au cours de leur histoire, à l'instar de Trinité-et-Tobago.

Este artículo analiza la videoinstalación multicanal de Christopher Cozier llamada *Blue Soap* (1994), una obra de arte contemporáneo que mezcla diferentes tipos de medios. El artículo retoma el leitmotiv de la obra de arte, el jabón azul –un tipo de jabón bruto utilizado en el Caribe– para proponer una estética y una crítica sociopolítica de Trinidad y Tobago.

A través de una selección de materiales visuales tomados de la videoinstalación y de los dibujos de *Blue Soap*, el artículo repasa la cobertura del evento artístico en la prensa nacional, e integra esos artículos en los análisis de los comentarios del público en la inauguración de la exposición de 1994, en Puerto España, la capital del país.

El artículo diseña las escenas y el simbolismo de la obra problematizando la acción metafórica de este jabón que limpia y purifica la sociedad. Se trata también de mostrar las conexiones coloniales vinculadas con el uso y los valores simbólicos del jabón, que la sociedad heredó tras la Independencia. Estos son a su vez conectados con ciertas cuestiones actuales a las que está confrontada la sociedad de Trinidad y Tobago.

Tras repasar la estructura de la obra, el artículo propone una contextualización sociohistórica de las cuestiones que plantea y desarrolla un excursus cronológico en el que estas temáticas son vinculadas con la sociedad de hoy. El objetivo es hacer entender al lector los problemas locales de la época y permitir comparaciones con otras sociedades postcoloniales de las Américas y del mundo.

El artículo se presenta en tres partes: las dos primeras explican el tema de la videoinstalación y contextualiza sus desafíos; la tercera parte desarrolla los marcos teóricos en relación con las cuestiones descritas precedentemente.

La primera parte remite a los desafíos sociales y psicológicos propios de la post-independencia que los ciudadanos de Trinidad y Tobago tuvieron que enfrentar y cuestionar. El artista es entonces el principal protagonista de la obra y explica de manera reflexiva los desafíos de la identidad racial desde su propia experiencia. Además, esta parte del artículo aborda los temas más generales de la autoafirmación en tanto nación independiente, siempre sujeta a los cambios

económicos vinculados con las fluctuaciones petroleras y los ingresos del gas. El intento de golpe de Estado que tuvo lugar justo antes que la instalación fuera presentada al público también se aborda en esta parte del texto.

La segunda parte tiene que ver con los acuerdos institucionales y las expectativas sociales respecto a la situación postcolonial: los protagonistas de la obra plantean cuestiones relativas a la estética, al estilo y a la clase. Cada uno de los personajes expresa ciertos desafíos abordados en el video, a saber los límites entre la cultura nacionalista e institucionalizada y los diferentes tipos de subculturas que ésta puede contener, la complejidad de los estereotipos de género, las expectativas sociales y las estructuras jerarquizadas coloristas postcoloniales, así como los problemas de visibilidad y de representatividad social.

La tercera parte del artículo reúne los marcos teóricos postcoloniales y situados con el fin de explicar los problemas de identidad de los ciudadanos colonizados contemporáneos. Aborda los desafíos de confianza y de conformidad dentro de estructuras colectivas establecidas, y concluye en torno a una discusión sobre el fenómeno migratorio y las diásporas, que innumerables países han debido enfrentar durante su historia al igual que Trinidad y Tobago.

Este artigo analisa a vídeo-instalação multicanal intitulada *Blue Soap* (1994), uma obra de arte contemporânea que mistura diferentes tipos de mídia. O artigo considera o leitmotiv desta obra de arte, o sabonete azul – um tipo de sabonete cru usado no espaço caribenho – para construir uma estética e uma crítica sócio-política de Trindade e Tobago.

A partir de uma seleção do material visual da vídeo-instalação e de desenhos de *Blue Soap*, o artigo examina a cobertura do evento artístico pelos jornais nacionais, e integra estas reportagens na análise da recepção do público na abertura da exposição em 1994, em Port of Spain, a capital do país. A análise destes dados é completada pelas extensas entrevistas etnográficas que eu fiz com o artista e seus colaboradores neste trabalho, incluindo um estudo dos esboços de Crozier no seu diário da época.

O artigo dissecas as cenas e o simbolismo da obra, problematizando a metáfora do sabonete e sua ação de limpeza/purificação da sociedade. Trata-se de mostrar as conexões coloniais relacionadas com o uso e os significados simbólicos deste sabonete, herdados pela sociedade independente de Trindade, conectando-os com os problemas atuais enfrentados pela sociedade.

Seguindo a estrutura desta instalação visual, esta contribuição situa estes problemas no seu contexto social e histórico, e desenvolve uma excursão cronológica, onde os mesmos tópicos andam ligados à sociedade de hoje. O objetivo é levar o leitor a entender os significados locais da época, permitindo relacionar estes significados com outras sociedades pós-coloniais das Américas e do mundo.

O artigo está organizado em três partes: as duas primeiras explicam o tema da vídeo-instalação, restituindo o seu contexto sócio-histórico ; a terceira parte desenvolve o quadro teórico dos problemas previamente descritos.

A primeira parte refere os problemas sociais e psicológicos que os cidadãos de Trindade e Tobago experimentam e questionam. Aqui, o artista é o principal protagonista, reflectindo sobre a questão da identidade racial a partir de sua experiência pessoal. Por outro lado, esta parte discute o tópico mais geral da auto-afirmação enquanto nação independente, que continua a depender dos fluxos económicos ligados aos rendimentos do petróleo e do gás. A tentativa de golpe de Estado que ocorreu antes da apresentação pública desta obra também é abordada nesta seção do texto.

A segunda parte trata dos arranjos institucionais e das expectativas sociais pós-coloniais. Os protagonistas da obra colocam problemas estéticos, de estilo e de classe. Cada um dos personagens expressa alguns dos tópicos realçados no vídeo, nomeadamente as fronteiras entre a cultura institucional nacionalizada e as diferentes subculturas existentes, a complexidade dos estereótipos de género, as estruturas hierárquicas coloridas pós-coloniais e as expectativas

sociais, as questões de visibilidade e de representatividade social.

A terceira parte deste artigo reúne quadros teóricos pós-coloniais e situados, em consonância com a própria obra, expondo as questões identitárias dos cidadãos colonizados contemporâneos. Examina o problema da confiança e da conformidade no seio de estruturas coletivas estabelecidas, concluindo com uma discussão da questão da deslocação migratória e da diáspora, que muitos países tiveram que enfrentar na sua história, como Trindade e Tobago.

INDEX

Mots-clés: art contemporain, performance artistique, savon, Trinité-et-Tobago, Antilles, post-indépendance, critique sociale

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Art Performance, Soap, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies, Post-Independence, Social Critique

Palabras claves: arte contemporáneo, performance artística, jabón, Trinidad y Tobago, Antillas, post-independencia, crítica social

Palavras-chave: arte contemporânea, performance, sabonete, Trindade e Tobago, Antilhas, pós-independência, crítica social

AUTHOR

MAICA GUGOLATI

PhD, affiliated researcher at IMAF, Institute of African Worlds, France