

Domínio Público: Performing the Brazilian Conservative Turn

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It is March 29, 2018, and the audience at the Reitoria Theatre of the Federal University of Paraná is waiting for the curtains to open to one of the most anticipated productions of the Curitiba Theatre Festival, *Domínio Público* (2018). Under the theme “Se é de corpos e cidades que devemos falar,” festival curators Márcio Abreu and Guilherme Weber commissioned four artists who had never worked together to devise this piece. More than any artistic resonances, what connected these artists was the fact that each of them had been attacked over the previous year by far-right groups that have increasingly policed artistic practice in the context of the current conservative turn in Brazil. Wagner Schwartz’s performance piece *La Bête* (2015) had been the target of vicious attacks and accusations of pedophilia, after a video of a child touching the naked performer during a presentation at the São Paulo Modern Art Museum (MAM) was widely disseminated online. Renata Carvalho’s *O evangelho segundo Jesus, rainha do céu* (2016), in which she plays Jesus Christ as a trans woman, had been the target of extensive criticism and even censorship. Maikon K had been violently arrested for obscenity during a performance of his piece *DNA de DAN* (2013) as part of the SESC Palco Giratório Festival in Brasília. The final performer in the production is Elisabete Finger, the mother of the child who appears in the infamous video with Schwartz and a choreographer and performance artist in her own right.

As we sit in the theatre, the stage is flanked by security guards. This is highly unusual, raising all sorts of questions about the nature of the piece we are about to see. Why were the guards necessary, and how would the performers choose to respond in the piece to the violence and injurious language they had been subjected to over the previous year? In the aftermath of the widespread protests of June 2013, a New Right has risen that closely aligns neoliberal economics with social conservatism. This New Right was

instrumental in the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and continued to show its force in the municipal elections that same year, finally leading to the election of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. Social media platforms have been instrumental in this growth, disseminating propaganda and hate speech and mobilizing protests, specifically targeting progressive policies in the areas of gender politics, human rights, and cultural production. Were the guards there to prevent any additional violence against the performers?

The level of anticipation was palpable. More than any other year, and amid the conservative turn that has swept through Brazil, attending *Domínio Público*—described in the program as a reflection “em torno da liberdade de expressão, censura e limites na arte”—felt like a gesture of resistance. The urgency of this piece reflected the new direction in which curators Márcio Abreu and Guilherme Weber had taken the Festival since 2016. Established in 1992, the Festival de Curitiba was treated since its inception as a commercial enterprise; it has probably the most heterogeneous audience of any national festival. Including the Fringe—an uncurated program modeled after Edinburgh—in 2018 alone over 200 thousand people watched over 400 shows throughout the 12 days of the Festival (Moser). When festival organizer Leandro Knopfholz invited Abreu and Weber, two theatre artists who began their careers in Curitiba and had grown to national recognition, the curators took it as their mission to simultaneously speak to these heterogeneous audiences, establish an active dialogue with the city in which they had started their careers, and to continue to attract the most interesting and cutting-edge theatre artists working in Brazil today.

In an interview I conducted with them, the curators defined their role as organizing each edition around specific questions; the 2018 theme was based on the first sentence from the medical report following the assassination of Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini. In their curatorial statement, “Se é de corpos e cidades que devemos falar,” Abreu and Weber quote an essay by José Guilherme Pereira Leite, in which the author argues for the importance of remembering this homophobic crime at a time in which Brazil “parece renovar suas bodas com a violência como forma de resolução de conflitos políticos e ideológicos” (5).

If the audience came to the theatre hoping for a performance of resistance, however, their expectations are not met. When the curtains open, the stage is completely empty, except for a giant reproduction of the Mona Lisa, hung center stage and emphasized by the lighting. After a few seconds, Wagner Schwartz, the performer who triggered one of the most intense conversations

on nudity in performance art Brazil has ever seen, steps on stage, neatly dressed in khaki pants and a button-up shirt. Wearing an ear set microphone and with a script in his hand, he addresses the audience:

Setembro, 1911. Um pequeno retrato está pendurado em uma galeria renascentista. No fim do dia, quando o museu fecha as portas, um trabalhador manual, chamado Vincenzo Peruggia, retira o quadro da parede e o encapa cuidadosamente em um pedaço de pano. Na manhã seguinte, Peruggia retorna para sua casa com o embrulho debaixo do braço. Um dia inteiro se passa antes que alguém suspeite do roubo. Até aquele momento, a obra era mais conhecida entre os especialistas. Da noite para o dia, vira notícia. (Finger et al.)

Schwartz continues to calmly tell this story, not of the attacks suffered by him or his colleagues, not of the rise in political tensions in Brazil, but of how the Mona Lisa became one of the most famous portraits in the world. He eloquently argues that it was the media sensation around the stealing of the portrait that made it into an icon and a masterpiece. In the aftermath of the crime, says Schwartz, hundreds of people flocked to the Louvre to see the empty spot where the painting once hung. “É Peruggia quem cria o vazio,” says Schwartz, “Graças a Peruggia, hoje, o valor de Mona Lisa é incalculável.”



Elisabete Finger in *Domínio Público*. Photo by Humberto Araújo.

Schwartz's arguments are convincing, yet the theatrical conflict lies not between the elements on stage, but between what the audience is witnessing and the expectations with which they entered the theatre. The audience is well aware of why Schwartz has been invited to be part of this production, and it is certainly not due to his knowledge of the Mona Lisa. On September 26, 2017, Schwartz, a well-known name within the tight circles of contemporary Brazilian dance and performance art, opened the 25th Panorama de Arte Brasileira at MAM with his piece *La Bête*. Since 2015, Schwartz had performed this piece ten times in Brazil and Europe. *La Bête* is an homage to renowned Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's *bichos*, a series of hinged sculptures created from 1960 to 1963 and designed to be manipulated by the viewers. Clark's *bichos* were only complete when activated by the audience, and it was as a response to seeing one of these *bichos* confined to a glass box in a museum in France that Schwartz first had the idea to create the performance. "Em 2005, ao ver um *Bicho* preso, prometi a ele mesmo que iria retirar seu corpo de dentro daquela caixa de vidro, para que a relação entre o objeto e as pessoas fosse retomada" (quoted in Brum, "Fui morto na internet"). In *La Bête*, the joints of Schwartz's naked body stand in for the hinges of Clark's *bichos*, as the performer invites the audience to rethink the passivity of their experience as museum visitors and mold his body into different positions.



Wagner Schwartz in *La Bête*. Photo by Humberto Araújo.

A few days after the performance at MAM, Schwartz was surprised by an avalanche of hate mail. He soon found out that an audience member had shared a video on the internet of a child, escorted by her mother, touching Schwartz's hand and ankle during the performance. That video had been picked up by far-right groups, who shared it over social media and accused Schwartz of incentivizing pedophilia. Both the mechanisms through which the outrage spread and the accusations were familiar. Earlier that month, the Santander Bank Cultural Center in Porto Alegre announced that it was closing the exhibit *Queermuseu: Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* (2017) following a wave of conservative protests spearheaded by similar far-right groups. Advertised by curator Gaudêncio Fidélis as the first major retrospective on queerness and difference in Brazilian art, the exhibit included over 250 works by 85 artists, ranging from established names such as Flavio de Carvalho, Lygia Clark, and Adriana Varejão to new and emerging artists such as Felipe Scandelari and Bia Leite. Led by the Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL), conservative Evangelical and Catholic groups stimulated a media campaign accusing the artists of promoting pedophilia, zoophilia, and child pornography. As would become increasingly common, these protests were organized over social media, yet the incident was covered by all the major national, and several international, news outlets.¹ As a result of the pushback, Santander issued a public apology and closed the exhibit, a very unusual move in a country in which cultural institutions named after major banks form a significant part of the support for the arts.

Even though there is nothing particularly new about the alliance of social conservatism and right-wing politics in these cases, the attacks on *Queermuseu*, *La Bête*, and many other artistic practices over the last few years mark a new moment in Brazilian politics. Brazil entered the Pink Tide—a wave of center-left and left-wing governments across Latin America—with the election of Lula in 2002. A China-led international commodities boom provided the conditions for the Workers' Party to implement targeted cash-transfer programs that produced a significant decrease in poverty across the country.² At the same time, the party made significant advances on progressive policies on several fronts, including gender politics, human rights, and cultural production. As Jeffery Webber argues in *The Last Day of Oppression, and the First Day of the Same*, during the Lula years, due to the flow of money from the international commodities boom, the Workers' Party was able to simultaneously address some of Brazil's endemic problems and feed the corruption schemes that have always been part of the political machine, all

without changing the underlying neoliberal class structure of Brazilian society. As the global economic crises hit and China's demand for raw material diminished, however, there simply was not enough money to keep all of it going. Given this dilemma and faced with the inevitability of making cuts, Lula's successor Dilma Rousseff consistently privileged neoliberal austerity over progressive policies, angering her diminishing left-wing base, at the same time as the party was increasingly attacked from the right for their involvement in a massive corruption case, revealed by the *Operação Lava-Jato*.

Amid this new scenario, Rousseff's approval ratings plummeted. When on June 20, 2013, over one million people took to the streets in over one hundred different cities throughout the country, signs could be seen calling for everything from the end of government corruption and police brutality to more investments in public health and education, the impeachment of Rousseff, and even the return to military dictatorship. As Webber argues, if in 2013 the mobilizations "involved popular sectors appropriating public space, occupying streets and plazas, questioning the existing forms of institutional representation in Brazil's capitalist democracy, and demanding and practicing new forms of direct democracy with mass participation" (56), by the end of the year most of that momentum had already been captured by "a new anti-party, populist right" (57). Rousseff never had Lula's political ability to maneuver Brazil's complex multi-party system and the Right seized this opportunity to topple a project they were never happy with in the first place. In April 2016, a Congress that was neck-deep in corruption scandals of their own forged an anti-corruption narrative based on a fragile legal technicality to impeach a democratically elected president against whom there was no evidence of personal enrichment or direct involvement in corruption.

The Workers' Party has insisted on framing Rousseff's impeachment as a "coup," yet the municipal elections later that same year confirmed that something much larger was underway. In a widespread defeat of left-wing candidates across the country, voters overwhelmingly elected politicians who combined neoliberal policies with conservative agendas. These newly elected mayors included Marcelo Crivella, a former bishop of the neopentecostal Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, in Rio de Janeiro, and João Doria in São Paulo, a businessman who ran on an explicit "non-politician" platform and pulled a surprise first-round win over internationally acclaimed Workers' Party mayor Fernando Haddad. Haddad went on to become Lula's chosen candidate for the 2018 presidential election, in which the country

overwhelmingly confirmed the conservative turn by electing a far-right military candidate, Jair Bolsonaro.

Since the election of Lula in 2002, mainstream right-wing and center-right candidates had concentrated on economic arguments and had not made social issues a central part of their campaigns. This New Right, on the other hand, has specifically considered progressive policies in gender politics, human rights, and culture, as targets to be eliminated along with the Left. Following his landslide victory in the first round of the Brazilian elections, Bolsonaro publicly declared that, in his government, those he referred to as “red marginals” would be imprisoned or banned from the country: “It will be a cleanup the likes of which has never been seen in Brazilian history” (Phillips). In doing so, Bolsonaro was echoing a trend that has grown exponentially since 2013, that of justifying the elimination of the Left not only based on economic arguments, but mostly by labeling it as ideologically dangerous. This strategic demonization of the Left operates on three simultaneous fronts: by presenting neoliberal policies and social conservatism as intrinsically and necessarily coupled; by promoting the elimination of politics and replacing it with a constant state of policing; and by strategically and anachronistically implementing Cold War era hate speech.

In her recent book, *Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism*, Patricia Ybarra defends the use of the term *neoliberalism* as an ideal descriptor for “the historical specificity of the form of capitalism that much of the world suffers under today” (5). Although capitalist accumulation has been in place for several centuries now, its contemporary version is marked by the precarization of working conditions in much of the Global South, the global dismantling of the welfare state, and the concentration of economic prosperity in the hands of “an ever smaller elite group of speculative professionals.” Yet Ybarra maintains that the neoliberal regime necessarily operates “at the level of ideology, policy, and subjectification, meaning that we are evinced to act as neoliberal subjects not only in our actions in response to employment conditions and shifts in social welfare policy, but in all aspects of our lives, including through our quotidian utterances and practices” (5). It is precisely because of neoliberalism’s simultaneous operation at the level of ideology, policy, and subjectification that its global implementation has produced, and continues to produce, a closure not only of economic possibilities, but also of epistemological possibilities, of ways of being, in favor of the so called “diversity” of neoliberal globalization.

This closure is further aided by the labeling of any position that falls outside of neoliberalism as “ideological,” and therefore prone to elimination. As groups such as the MBL specifically and increasingly targeted gender politics, human rights, and cultural production, they continuously insisted that they were not themselves ideologically motivated and refused to be recognized as political actors. This refusal actually reinforces a crucial dimension of their intervention, that of privileging policing over politics. In “The Paradoxes of Political Art,” Jacques Rancière draws a distinction between these two orders. The police is that which constantly and forcibly assigns specific individuals and groups to specific positions, to specific “ways of being, seeing and saying” (139). Politics, on the other hand, is “the activity that breaks with the order of the police,” by inventing new subjects, new forms of collective enunciation, new ways of making sense of the sensible, new distributions of time, new bodily capacities (139). It is telling that this New Right has decided to so vigorously police artists who, according to them, step outside of the border of what art is supposed to do, since, as Rancière notes, “doing art means displacing art’s borders, just as doing politics means displacing the borders of what is acknowledged as *the* political” (149). The elimination of difference—gender, racial, cultural, artistic—thus walks hand in hand with the substitution of endless policing for politics.

As in many other iterations of the conservative turn throughout the world, minoritarian subjects are always the primary targets of the increase of policing and the elimination of difference. The second monologue in *Domínio Público* is delivered by Renata Carvalho, a transgender actress from the city of Santos. Carvalho enters the stage, neatly dressed in white, ear set microphone and script in hand, and continues to discuss the Mona Lisa:

Ela está entre nós, ela está no meio de nós. O homem da Renascença. Os admiradores se referiam a ela como “O divino Da Vinci,” acreditando que a criatividade era uma inspiração divina. Quebrou todas as normas, transformou o status da artista, segundo suas palavras, em “senhor e deus.” E de qualquer ponto que você olhar para seu rosto dentro deste anfiteatro, ela também estará olhando para você.
(Finger et al., italics in original)

The slippages in Carvalho’s speech are evident, as the gendered nature of Portuguese makes it hard to define who is the “*ela*” in these lines. Is Carvalho referring to the Mona Lisa here, or to Da Vinci himself? These slippages increase in importance as Carvalho begins to discuss theories regarding the gender of the model who posed for the Mona Lisa:

Com vestimentas tipicamente femininas, cabelos compridos, seios, nome e documentação que entendemos pertencer ao universo feminino, por que especialistas insistem em dizer que Mona Lisa é um homem? [...] Seria Mona Lisa um autorretrato da transgeneridade?

The differences between the ways in which Schwartz and Carvalho approach the same object demonstrate the devised methodology of *Domínio Público*. “Cada um entrou com suas armas, com a sua escrita, de como a gente disseca essa Mona Lisa,” Carvalho said, in an interview I conducted with the four performers. “Eu vou para o lado do machismo, do patriarcado, que liga com o da Bete [Finger], o Wagner [Schwartz] vai para uma coisa da pedofilia, mas é muito mais sutil, cada um mexeu no texto do outro.” When asked about their choice of the Mona Lisa as a means of addressing the violence to which the four of them had been victims, Carvalho compared it to the underground cultural production that existed in the country during the military dictatorship: “como na ditadura militar, quando aparecia uma receita de bolo, a gente sabia que alguma coisa estava errada.” Carvalho stresses that the main work is done not in the text, but in the concrete presence of these bodies, the bodies that were victims of such an intense level of violence and attacks on and off stage. For those familiar with her work, it is no surprise that Carvalho would place so much importance on the sheer presence of a trans body on stage in a main production of the largest theatre festival in the country.

Renata Carvalho has been one of the most active voices in Brazilian theatre in the fight for transgender rights and representativity. She founded Coletivo T, a collective of trans artists, and co-authored the manifesto *Representatividade Trans Já* (Trans Representativity Now). She is extremely active on social media, many times reposting stories about the presence of trans people in everyday life with the slogan “Representatividade Trans é Importante SIM.” In 2016, along with director Natalia Mallo, Carvalho decided to stage a Brazilian version of Scottish playwright Jo Clifford’s *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven*, which first played as part of the Glasgow! Festival in 2009. This was no easy task. Brazil has one of the highest rates of violence against LGBTQ+ people in general, and trans people in particular, in the world. In 2017 alone, watchdog group Grupo Gay da Bahia reported that 445 LGBTQ+ people died as victims of homophobia (Cowie). According to Transgender Europe’s 2017 Trans Murder Monitoring, of the 325 worldwide cases of killings of trans and gender-diverse people recorded over a one-year period, 171 took place in Brazil. Yet, in a highly Catholic and increasingly Evangelical country, the topic is widely considered taboo.



Renata Carvalho in *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus, Rainha do Céu*. Photo by Lígia Jardim.

O Evangelho Segundo Jesus, Rainha do Céu first opened as part of the Londrina International Theatre Festival in 2016 and toured several cities across Brazil. The play was met with resistance since its first performance, but the opposition grew exponentially over 2017. In Taubaté, a medium-sized city in the state of São Paulo, police had to be called in to protect Carvalho from protestors. As the tour went on, Carvalho and Mallo began to receive death threats over social media. Finally, when the play was scheduled as part of the fourth Week of Sexual Diversity in the city of Jundiaí, also in the state of São Paulo, a local court blocked the performance, alleging that it “went against Christian dignity, ridiculing symbols such as the cross and the religiosity it represents” (Assunção). There were subsequent attempts to block the play in Salvador, Porto Alegre, and particularly Rio de Janeiro, where Mayor Crivella ordered the cancelation of the entire *Mostra Corpos Visíveis* just to stop this one play from being performed.

In *Domínio Público*, as Carvalho leaves the stage, and the next performer steps in, it has become clear to the audience that this will probably be the general structure of the play until the end. This is a shock. The performance styles that each of these four artists operate in could not be any further from the well-dressed and highly discursive bodies we now see on stage. The contrast

is particularly stark in the case of Maikon K, a local Curitiba artist with a long trajectory in performance art and experimental body art. Maikon K had been invited to join the group due to an incident involving his piece *DNA de DAN*. In this performance, the artist stands motionless for three hours in a huge plastic bubble while a gelatinous substance that covers his body dries. The audience is then invited to join Maikon K inside the bubble, as the now dry substance slowly sheds from his skin. *DNA de DAN* was funded by a highly prestigious Funarte Klauss Vianna Award and in 2015 it was selected by Marina Abramović as part of her “Eight Performances” exhibit in São Paulo. In 2016 and 2017, it was selected as part of the SESC Palco Giratório, a circuit that allows important performances to tour to different cities in the country.

It was as part of SESC Palco Giratório that Maikon K was in Brasília in July 2017 to present *DNA de DAN*. As he stood naked, waiting for the substance to dry, the performer began to notice some police activity around the plastic structure that houses the performance. “Até esse momento, eu pensava, parado, ‘logo o produtor do SESC vai explicar a eles e esse mal entendido vai acabar,’” said Maikon K. After all, this was not the first time the police had approached this performance as they toured throughout the country. Yet the police were not satisfied with the documentation and violently tore into the plastic structure, dragged the performer still covered in the substance to



Maikon K in *DNA de DAN*. Photo by Victor Takayama.

the police car, and arrested him for committing an “ato obsceno” (“Performer tem sua obra interrompida”). In a subsequent interview (Reis), Maikon K attributed his arrest to a new political climate: “Já apresentava esse trabalho há três anos, e a questão da nudez nunca tinha sido um problema [...] Todo esse transtorno começou em 2017, devido a um contexto político que se tornou propício a este tipo de distorção e de moralização, e que instaurou uma histeria coletiva.”

In *Domínio Público*, Maikon K addresses this violence indirectly by going through a long list of attacks on the Mona Lisa, since Peruggia’s robbery of the portrait in 1911 all the way through 2018, culminating in this description:

Mona Lisa está atualmente numa sala de segurança máxima. Além do vidro blindado, ela é mantida distante das pessoas por um cordão de isolamento e sempre há funcionários do museu ao seu lado. Monitorada por uma rede de 8 câmeras com infravermelho, está sob vigilância 24 horas por dia.

The connections between the text of the play and the performance pieces that brought these four unlikely artists together are subtle, but that is precisely the point. In the interview I conducted with them, Elisabete Finger, who delivers the final monologue, summarizes the way in which the group decided to deal with audience expectations: “O espetáculo já está feito, quem quiser é só digitar os nossos nomes na Internet, o espetáculo está lá.” The repercussions of the MAM incident were so intense that Evangelical senator and major Bolsonaro supporter Magno Malta called both Schwartz and Finger to testify in a hearing, the “CPI dos Maus Tratos.” When called to testify, Finger decided to plead her right to remain silent: “O opressor só ganha o papel do opressor se as vítimas se reconhecerem como vítimas, se não ele vai continuar falando sozinho.” For Finger, a response to the attacks would actually confer constative value to the “performative injuries” that were being used to attack them. In light of this, she refused to speak.

In *Excitable Speech* (1997), Judith Butler draws on the Austinian performative to analyze hate speech, particularly the iterability and citationality of injurious speech. According to Butler, “When the injurious term injures (and let me make clear that I think it does), it works its injury precisely though the accumulation and dissimulation of its force” (52). The person who utters the hate speech, then, is citing that injury. Butler argues that when someone utters a racial slur, for example, “One chimes in with a chorus of racists, producing at that moment the linguistic occasion for an imagined relation to an historical

community of racists.” In this sense, the injury “does not originate with the subject, even if it requires the subject for its efficacy, as it surely does” (80).

Unlike the other performers in *Domínio Público*, Elisabete Finger did not become the target of injurious speech because of her own work. Finger is indeed a performer and choreographer in her own right; her work has been presented in Brazil and abroad and supported by major Brazilian and European institutions, including Itaú Cultural, the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, the Goethe Institute, and many others. At the time of the incident, she was working on a new piece called *Monstra* (2018). A friend of Schwartz, Finger decided to take her daughter to the opening at MAM, where, familiar with the interactive nature of both Clark’s and Schwartz’s work, mother and daughter participated in the performance exactly as intended, by manipulating the joints of the performer and rearranging him in space. This was the moment that was captured and shared on social media by an audience member. As a consequence, Finger had her credentials both as an artist and as a mother called into question. She began receiving extensive death threats and was accused of promoting pedophilia.

The accusation of pedophilia has become a common theme across these attacks. As in other versions of the global turn toward conservatism, nothing is new about this strategy, and yet everything is new. As Brazilian journalist Eliane Brum has argued in “Gays e crianças como moeda eleitoral,” the



Monstra, choreography by Elisabete Finger. Photo by Debby Gram.

New Right obviously did not invent the idea of using morality as a bargaining chip. Something did change, however, around the 2010 elections, when certain political actors realized that the rapid growth of Evangelicals, and particularly Neopentecostals, created a new opportunity to reintroduce the topic of abortion into politics. Dilma Rousseff, who in the past had spoken favorably of legalizing abortion, suddenly felt cornered into writing a letter to declare she was “personally against abortion.” “Desde então,” writes Brum, “o corpo de mulheres e de gays, lésbicas, travestis e transexuais tornou-se uma das principais moedas de barganha eleitoral.”

It is important to ask why cultural production has become such an important target for far-right groups. It is not as if these groups suddenly became interested in attending contemporary performance art, academic panels, and queer exhibitions. Yet, suddenly, writes Brum,

O problema do Brasil já não era a desigualdade nem a pobreza que voltou a crescer. Nem mesmo o desemprego. Nem a crescente violência no campo e nas periferias promovidas em grande parte pelas próprias forças de segurança do Estado a serviço de grupos no poder. Nem o desinvestimento na saúde e na educação. Nem a destruição da floresta amazônica e o ataque aos povos indígenas e quilombolas pelos chamados “ruralistas.” Nem projetos que mexem em direitos conquistados na área trabalhista e da previdência sendo levados adiante sem debate por um governo corrupto. Não. De repente, na semana passada, o problema do Brasil tornou-se, para milhões de brasileiros, a certeza de que o país é dominado por pedófilos e defensores do sexo com animais. Agora, são artistas que devem ser perseguidos, presos e até, como se viu em algumas manifestações nas redes sociais, mortos. E não só artistas, mas também quadros e peças de teatro. O problema do Brasil é que pedófilos querem corromper as crianças e transgêneros querem destruir as famílias. (“Gays e crianças como moeda eleitoral”)

In a later piece, “Como fabricar monstros para garantir o poder em 2018,” Brum concludes: “Os pedófilos de hoje são as bruxas de ontem. E são tão pedófilos quanto as bruxas eram bruxas.” What these groups have realized is that, by demonstrating their capacity to mobilize the masses to whatever topic they choose, they become valuable to ambitious politicians. This mobilization then forecloses the possibility of politics, replacing it with a constant policing by agents who, until this day, Brum argues, were completely uninterested in the events they now voluntarily police.

The accusation of “pedophile,” then, carries as much constative weight as another common injury constantly deployed by the New Right, that of “communist.” It is important to clarify that this particular accusation carries a double fallacy. In the first place, there is no trace of actual communism in the progressive developmentalism that marked the Workers’ Party’s platform during its thirteen years in power. Second, the force of this accusation, the way in which it establishes “an imagined relation to an historical community”—to go back to Butler’s terminology (*Excitable Speech*, 80)—draws from Cold War era geopolitics, which has no actual resonance in the current configuration of powers in the continent.

It is productive, then, to think of the accusations of “pedophile” or “communist” as Althusserian interpellations. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser proposes interpellation as a crucial apparatus for the exercise of power by the state. The classical example he provides is that of the policeman who hails the subject, “Hey, you there!” Yet, it is when the subject voluntarily turns to the policeman and identifies himself as the object of the call that interpellation is established (86). When the accusations of “pedophile” or “communist” operate as interpellations, what is the process through which Brazilian subjects in the twenty-first century could possibly recognize themselves as the objects of this injury?

In the Brazilian context, the accusation of “communist” thus operates not as an ideological identification grounded on a specific historic-geographic conjuncture, but as an interpellation that acts with the purpose of calling upon, borrowing from Butler, a historically constituted community of anti-communist hatred. Less a misjudgment in interpretation, the anachronistic nature of this injury is actually what allows the one who produces the utterance to participate in the Latin American iteration of the Cold War, a period dominated by dictatorships, in which the accusation of “communist” was reason enough for the elimination of speech and of individuals by torture, imprisonment, disappearances, and death. In a similar manner, the accusation of “pedophile” yelled at people as diverse as museum curators, performance artists, a mother who takes her daughter to the museum, and in fact Judith Butler herself,³ operates less as a constative, a statement of the nature of the actors in play, or of any actual concern over pedophilia itself, and more as a call to mobilize a chorus of haters.

In line with the other three monologues in *Domínio Público*, Finger only obliquely addresses her particular role in the recent controversies. In the interview, she argues that, in the end, the format they arrived at was not so

much about what had happened, but about the way in which it had happened, about “as ficções que a gente cria sobre o mesmo fato, como isso adere ou não adere, o que eu escolho observar nessa imagem.” In her monologue, Finger exemplifies this obsession by discussing at length different interpretations of Mona Lisa’s smile:

Em 2002, o quadro é interpretado por um computador da Universidade de Amsterdam, recorrendo a um software para o reconhecimento detalhado de emoções humanas. De acordo com esta análise, Mona Lisa está 83% alegre, 9% angustiada, 6% assustada e 2% chateada. A conclusão é de que a mulher no quadro de Da Vinci é uma mulher feliz. (Finger et al.)

The randomness of the numbers used to substantiate such an authoritative claim on the Mona Lisa raises awareness about how different versions around the same story are created. As Maikon K mentioned in the interview with me, in anticipation of the opening of *Domínio Público*, local Curitiba newspaper *Gazeta do Povo* published a poll according to which 83% of Brazilians did not agree with Finger taking her daughter to participate in *La Bête* (“Peça Que Une Maiores Polêmicas”). The randomness of this claim is not even questioned as the story is violently reproduced through social media. Yet, the consequences of injurious language are all too real. In each individual case—the performance of *La Bête*, the arrest of Maikon K in Brasília, the attacks and censorship of Carvalho’s production—the performers were abstracted from their embodied experiences and circulated as capital in a political dispute. Living with the death threats and accusations, however, was a very real experience for each of them, as it continues to be for other Brazilian artists.

The choice of topic by curators Abreu and Weber for the 2018 edition of the Festival was prescient. “Esse cadáver do Pasolini como o gay assassinado reverbera numa cidade como Curitiba,” said Weber in the interview with me, “a quantidade de artistas gays assassinados em Curitiba é uma loucura, é uma característica em si da cidade, da violência; porque onde tem movimento queer, onde tem ativismo LGBTQ, tem violência na mesma proporção.” Bolsonaro was elected, in large part, thanks to a widespread movement of organized and unfounded accusations disseminated through social media.⁴ Yet these campaigns reach far beyond the digital space of privately shared messages and have deeply embodied consequences for the minoritarian subjects of Brazilian society. Even before Bolsonaro won the second round of the elections, at least fifty hate crimes were reportedly committed by his supporters throughout the country in just ten days (Maciel et al.). If the decision

by these four performers on how best to respond to the violence committed against them frustrates the audience's desire to see them fight back, the gesture of refusing to respond, both in content and in form, is a gesture of extreme courage. The irony of *Domínio Público* is that it is probably the one production in all the Festival with the least chance of triggering the kind of violent response that each of these four artists were victims of. Yet the way in which *Domínio Público* challenges us to think not only about what information we share, but about how we think what we think seems even more important in the dangerous era into which Brazil is now being violently thrust.

The advances made not only by the Workers' Party, but also by the New Latin American Left in general, were not limited to the very real reduction of poverty. In their timid challenge to neoliberalism, they created conditions in which epistemological diversity was allowed to thrive. The New Right, on the other hand, seeks above all else the substitution of politics for a state of constant policing, which translates into attacks against not only specific modes of knowing and being, but against difference itself, against the very possibility of an ecology of knowledges that would make actual politics possible.⁵ The accusations of "communist" or "pedophile" must, therefore, be read from the iterability of their performative dimension, as an effort to anachronistically transport us to terrible periods in our history, when the elimination of the Left was not just the desire of groups or individuals, but an actual policy of the state. This is why performance serves as a primary target for this culture of hate. At the same time, it is performance that opens up spaces of possibility in which to understand and practice resistance.

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Notes

¹ For more on the Queermuseu case, see Darlington, "Brazilian Art Show Sets Off Dispute."

² As Laura Carvalho writes in her excellent analysis of the Brazilian economy from 2006 to 2016, "Na contramão do ocorrido na maior parte dos países ricos no mesmo período, esse crescimento no Brasil e em outros países da América Latina foi marcado pela redução em diversos indicadores de desigualdade e expansão no nível de emprego formal" (*Valsa Brasileira*). Kindle version.

³ Butler herself was attacked by these hate groups in November 2017, when she was in São Paulo for an event titled "The Ends of Democracy." In her own account of the facts, Butler mentions her bewilderment with pedophilia being included among the accusations mentioned by the attackers (see Jaschik).

⁴ On October 18, 2018, *Folha de São Paulo* journalist Patrícia Campos Mello uncovered a massive scheme of illegal corporate sponsorship of an anti-Workers' Party campaign over WhatsApp.

⁵ I draw the concept of the “ecology of knowledge” from the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007).

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