

ART AND POLITICS: ARTIVISM AS A WORLD CHANGING LANGUAGE AND FORM OF ACTION¹

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DOSSIER WORLDS IN PERFORMANCE: 20 YEARS
NAPEDRA

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ABSTRACT

In a present described as one of crisis and uncertainty, different people and groups question themselves and seek answers about how to inhabit a world that is crumbling at the hands of extractivism, productivism, progress and consumerist dissatisfaction. Alternative horizons are proposed to this global necropolitics, where new encounters and ways of being-with-others can be established. And, in the meantime, art(ivism) is

1. This text was written based on, among other sources, the dialogues that poured into the roundtable discussion *Art and politics: activism as language and world transforming action*, for the 20th anniversary of NaPedra – Seismology of Performance, which took place from November 22 to December 10, 2021. The panel discussion took place on November 30, 2021, and was coordinated by Paulo Raposo, professor at the *Instituto Universitário de Lisboa* [University Institute of Lisbon – ISCTE] and researcher at the *Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia* [Centre for Research in Anthropology – CRIA], and Vi Grunvald, professor at the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul* [Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS], coordinator of the *Núcleo de Antropologia Visual* [Visual Anthropology Group] at UFRGS and president of the Pierre Verger Award (2022-2023). The roundtable counted with the interventions of Luana Raiter (PhD in Scenic Arts by *Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina* [Santa Catarina's State University – UDESC], director and actress of the performance activist street group *ERRO Grupo de Florianópolis*), Julianna Rosa de Souza (creator of the Rede Quilombo website, a bisexual, black woman from the urban periphery, born in Florianópolis, PhD in Theatre by UDESC), member of the *Núcleo de Estudos Negros de Santa Catarina* [Santa Catarina's Black Studies Group] and researcher at the Black Women's Observatory at the *Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia* [Southwest Bahia State University – UESB], Gustavo Bonfiglioli (MA student of Anthropology at ISCTE, communications officer and consultant, non-binary *artist* at the

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assumed as a concrete device “to postpone the end of the world,” for life and for other possible worlds. What idea of future stimulate artistic projects and performances, collective or in soliloquies? What new meanings in contemporary art practices connect people and worlds, create ecologies and environments for interventions, and formulate desires in the generation of new political communities? Like politics, art is a matter of life and death, but perhaps by opposing arguments. Can it change destiny as an aesthetic of confrontation?

DISCLAIMER

I cannot resist opening this text by showing my enthusiasm for being able to share with other colleagues a dossier celebrating 20 years of NaPedra. Nor can I resist saying that NaPedra was one of the first academic, artistic, and militant spaces – because this is how I interpret NaPedra’s power: as this trilogy – that welcomed my research work and reflections with interest and partnership. I also cannot resist saying that John Dawsey was one of the most affectionate and welcoming, most attentive and careful, most stimulating and thought-provoking colleagues I have ever met in academia, and that he introduced me to so many other researchers in this collective and to the far reaches of Brazil. From my very first moments of exchange and dialogue with the theoretical and critical production of Abya Yala, NaPedra and John were, and still certainly are, privileged partners in this eternal *capoeira* circle that is Anthropology of Performance. As I am writing this text, Brazil is living difficult and expectant times, immensely hopeful times too. For it is from this moment, and from the Global South in general, that the most hopeful and attentive gazes and reflections have come. It is from there, for a long time now, that people have known how to postpone the end of the world – where they have always known, in fact, that end of the world was appropriated by the “civilized” and imperial world with the invisible hand of capitalism and under the dark motto of progress. And NaPedra has known precisely how to be a safe space of existence/resistance, and creativity to think and act in the world. A place for other possible worlds. A place where I feel truly at home.

Axé, NaPedra! And many turns of the sun for us!

collective A Revolta da Lâmpada, of São Paulo), Celia Asturizaga Chura (Bolivian lawyer and independent artist, indigenous woman and defender of the rights of native peoples) and was moderated by Carolina de Camargo Abreu (anthropologist, lecturer at the University of São Paulo (USP) and member of NaPedra). I thank everyone for their thought-provoking contributions to this debate, which I seek to expand upon in this article. This article was funded by *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia* [Foundation for Science and Technology – FCT] under CRIA’s strategic plan (UID/04038/2020).

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF ART

Art should make the world unbearable by showing how unbearable the world really is. And it is by showing how unbearable the world is that one can give energy and inspiration to others to make it more bearable, more beautiful (Louis and Loach 2022, 83, our translation).

I want to begin by evoking two vignettes connected to controversial artistic events, from different geographies and of international relevance. Stories that might help to clarify the ways in which art and politics are intersections of a same being. One of these stories comes from the Tropic of Cancer, from Brazil, and the other from the heart of Old Europe, from Germany. I'm referring to *Queermuseu - Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* [Queermuseum - Cartographies of Difference in Brazilian Art], an event held in Porto Alegre in 2017, and to the most recent edition of *Documenta*, which happened in 2022 in Kassel.²

The exhibition *Queermuseu* at the Santander Cultural Center of Porto Alegre, after being open for about a month, was closed on a Sunday, September 10, 2017, by initiative of the main sponsor – a European bank with a strong presence in South America. The show, curated by Gaudêncio Fidelis, brought together 270 pieces by 85 artists dealing mostly with LGBT themes, such as gender issues and sexual diversity. The artworks – which span the historical period from the mid-twentieth century to present day – were made by widely renowned and some lesser-known artists of the Brazilian art world. The exhibition, however, became the target of unusual protests on social media and at the gallery site itself, led by fundamentalist religious movements and by the political party Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL) [Free Brazil Movement].³ The latter practiced very aggressive far right cyberactivism and were particularly active in the aftermath of the so-called *Jornadas* or *Protestos de Junho* [June Days or June Protests].⁴ These voices from the conservative right were demand-

2. I would like to thank Laura Burocco, my colleague and friend, a researcher at CRIA, who introduced me to this particular case in detail and who was present at the event. I would also like to thank Scott Head, my colleague and friend at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, who worked with me in his postdoctoral period in Lisbon (2021 – 2022). The many conversations, debates and writing partnerships Scott and I shared reverberate in this text.

3. Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL), positioned on the right of the political spectrum, was created in November 2014 and is believed to have been one of the main organizers of protests against Dilma Rousseff's government, which occurred in several Brazilian capitals on March 15th, April 12th, August 16th, and December 13th of 2015 and March 13th of 2016, along with the *groups Revoltados Online* [Outraged Online] and *Vem Para a Rua* [Take to the Streets].

4. On this topic many papers and reflections have been accumulating, both in the media and in academia. One of the most stimulating books on this theme, one that inspired me greatly, is *Cidades Rebeldes. Passe livre e as manifestações que tomaram as ruas do Brasil* [Rebel Cities. Free passes and the demonstrations that took over Brazil's streets], a collective work, published in 2013 by Boitempo publishers. With texts by a variety of authors, the work reflects on how *Movimento Passe Livre* (MPL) [Free Pass Movement]'s protests have brought out “a series of unresolved agendas, contradictions and paradoxes,” as explained by Raquel Rolnik in the preface. These very protests ended up bringing another populist and

ing the closure of the *Queermuseu* exhibition claiming that it included degenerate and ideologically dangerous art.⁵

In an initial public note posted on the Facebook profile page of the bank that promoted the exhibition, it was argued that the works that were the target of criticism were “precisely to make us reflect on the challenges we must face in relation to issues of gender, diversity, violence, among others” (Souza and Zamperetti 2017, 260). A few days later, however, the note would be deleted, and under enormous pressure from social media, from the city government, and from religious and ultraconservative groups - most of whom complained that some of the works promoted not only blasphemy against religious symbols but also incitement toward zoophilia and pedophilia – the Santander board and the gallery decided to close the exhibition by issuing a new note that read:

We have heard the complaints and we understand that some of the works of the *Queermuseu* exhibition disrespect symbols, beliefs, and people. This is not in line with our worldview. When art is not able to generate inclusion and positive reflection, it loses its higher purpose, which is to elevate the human condition (Santander Brasil 2017, our translation).

Santander bank then decided to close the exhibition, which was due to run until October 8th. The note published at the time by the bank is still accessible today on the bank’s Facebook profile.⁶ Curiously, the exhibition was moved a few months later to Rio de Janeiro, upon initiative of the *Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR)* [Rio de Janeiro’s Art Museum]. However, the local Mayor, the ultraconservative evangelical Marcelo Crivella, filed a lawsuit to have it suspended. He succeeded for some time, but after an appeal action in court and the largest crowdfunding campaign in Brazil, which gathered around 1 million Brazilian *reais*, the exhibition finally opened at Parque Laje on August 18, 2018, under the State Secretariat of Culture of Rio de Janeiro and the School of Visual Arts, with free access.

nationalist movement to the surface, one that, with street demonstrations and political agendas behind the scenes of State institutions and the judiciary, would shape President Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process, the prosecution of former President Lula da Silva, as well as the rise to power of the far-right conservative politician Jair Bolsonaro. The *Movimento Brasil Livre* [Free Brazil Movement], made out of young university students, business people and ultraliberal cyberactivists had a crucial role in this process of social unrest.

5. YouTuber with close affiliation to the MBL with 2.63 M subscribers and over 400,000 views, argues about what he calls a “doctrinaire leftist agenda” – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiSNvXJYmP4>. More details on the critical positioning to the Exhibition can be seen in several news reports of the time in *Folha de S.Paulo*, *Globo*, *El País Brasil*, or in this one published by *Veja* <https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/rio-grande-do-sul/nao-vejo-censura-diz-coordenadora-do-mbl-sobre-fim-de-mostra/>

6. Available on: <https://www.facebook.com/santanderbrasil/posts/10154720373470588/>

As Édouard Louis and Ken Loach (2022) reminded us, art must make the world unbearable, by revealing to us how much the world we live in, the real world, is also unbearable. It is under this very light that I understand the proposal of the *Queermuseu*. It may serve to awaken the eyes of a disparate and general public to the dissidence of bodies⁷ and sexualities who are subjected to countless discriminations and even criminalization, and who nevertheless share the world we all live in. While also allowing these bodies to take possession of an energy and inspiration that might make their experience more bearable and beautiful.⁸

The second case I would like to recall is much more recent, but it also revisits a context of censorship, this time produced by agents of the state apparatus, sponsors, and organizers of an international art event with wide resonance, with clear impact on the public sphere. On September 11, 2022, the Indonesian artistic collective ruangrupa,⁹ a group of curators who, every 5 years, are invited to the exhibition *Documenta XV* (in Kassel, Germany), reacted to a public statement of a so-called “scientific advisory committee” formed by a political scientist, a sociologist, a psychologist, a lawyer, and a historian, experts in Semitic and Jewish issues. The committee’s statement had been issued the day before,¹⁰ as a result of months of media and public pressure about an alleged radical and ideologically questionable bias the curatorship of the exhibition was revealing.

7. Translator’s note: the author uses feminine versions or gender-neutral versions of masculine nouns in Portuguese, in a political statement to match that of the artists and activists he is writing about. The word “body” is a masculine noun in Portuguese (“corpo”). The author uses “corpa,” a feminine word, absent from Portuguese dictionaries. In the same manner, the author uses the word “todes” (a gender-neutral form of “all,” which does not exist in Portuguese dictionaries). Since these words are gender-neutral in English, the translator has used them in their original form.

8. In Brazil, during the Bolsonaro government, a legislative initiative came into effect in several states and cities aimed to ban what they called “gender ideology” (and by extension the “school without party”) from education. Municipal and State parliaments across Brazil and the most conservative and evangelical members of the National Congress have used political tools to weaken or ban sex and gender education in the country in recent years. These findings can be read in the report published by Human Rights Watch in May 2022, available at this link: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/05/brazil_lgbt0522pt_web.pdf. This restrictive position aimed to ban any discussion or education on gender and sexuality from the Brazilian educational curriculum. In this sense, the *Queermuseu* exhibition, by exposing dissident bodies – or rather, *corpas* – and plural sexualities, explicitly confronted these conservative and restrictive assumptions that claimed to be non-ideological, neutral and emblematic of family and sexual “normality” and of gender binarism. For this reason, the use of non-binary and plural terms such as *corpas* and *todes* in this article intends precisely to value this index of resistance to these initiatives of legal repression.

9. As can be read on the collective’s website: “ruangrupa was appointed as curator of the world art exhibition *Documenta* in Kassel, Germany. The grand exhibition will take place from 18 June to 25 September 2022. Never before has an Indonesian – or, in fact, Asian – art curator reached as high an achievement as ruangrupa. *Documenta* is considered as one of the most prestigious high-quality global art events by citizens of the art world”. (Accessed September 19, 2022, <https://ruangrupa.id/>).

10. Available on: <https://www.documenta.de/en/press#press/3047-press-release-from-the-undersigned-members-of-the-scientific-advisory-panel-of-documenta-fifteen>

The reaction of this collective of Indonesian artists and activists stemmed, then, from a climate of delegitimization and curatorial persecution, based on accusations of racism, racial discrimination, anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and being anti-Israel. Such accusations were allegedly instigated by Israeli officials who had, for some time, been claiming that the curatorship was being targeted by artists and collectives participating in the so-called BDS – boycott, divestment, and sanctions of the state of Israel. It took on unusual proportions when a particular work – People’s Justice¹¹ – a mural, a triptych on canvas, by another Indonesian collective, Taring Padi,¹² was exhibited at the opening of that event on 18th June 2022. This pressure eventually became unsustainable for the event’s director, Sabine Schormann, who resigned from her position after the German Minister of Culture, the Director of the Anne Frank Institute and other German political agents voiced their very critical positions towards the mural publicly. The curators of *Documenta XV* were also referred to in several media and in the contemporary art scene for their radical avant-gardism, their critical questioning of the contemporary art world and markets, and for their engagement and provocativeness regarding artistic practices and art production.

However, for the collective of curators, the work, the mural, is part of a campaign against the militarism and violence that Indonesia experienced during the 32 years of Suharto’s military dictatorship, and whose legacy continues to have an impact today. They have also stated in various press releases, interviews and public statements that there was no intention to link it to anti-Semitism. They have expressed dismay that details on the billboard have been understood so differently from its original purpose. They even ended up apologizing for the pain caused in this context and said that the covered piece of work will become “a monument of mourning for the impossibility of dialogue at this time” and “this monument, we hope, will be the starting point of a new dialogue”.¹³ This dialogue, however, did not come to be and, on the contrary, the air became unbreathable, culminating in the creation of the aforementioned scientific commission of consultants and its extremely critical statement. And not even the recognition by the Indonesian collective that the use of a caricature with features that were once attributed to Jews by Nazi propaganda and that the use of the acronym SS, in the German context, had not been fortunate choices; nor did they recognized the need to reflect on this uncritical importation of models, even if it was known that the billboard had a

11. Cf. News by Spanish newspaper El País (online): <https://elpais.com/cultura/2022-06-22/polemica-antisemita-en-la-documenta-cubren-con-tela-negra-un-mural-que-incluye-figuras-ofensivas-para-los-judios.html>

12. Cf.: <https://www.taringpadi.com/>

13. These phrases can be read in several news items in different media during the running period of *Documenta XV* (from 18 June to 18 September 2022).

very particular history related to the criticism of the “Western” support to the dictatorial regime of Suharto in Indonesia, more than 30 years ago.

Meanwhile, the title of ruangrupa’s response statement illustrates well the painful and tense process, and the assertiveness of their reaction to the public judgement of its curatorship by the so-called “scientific advisory committee”: “We are angry, we are sad, we are tired, we are united”.¹⁴ Laura Burocco, a researcher of contemporary art and cultural industries, who was present at the exhibition explained this process clearly in a recent article published in the Italian online newspaper *Il Manifesto*:

The suffocating scrutiny to which the curatorial team was subjected for months is reminiscent of the way in which Mrs. Sarah Baartman’s body was outrageously “analyzed” in the 19th century. A contemporary “freak show” of the art world in the heart of one of the European most active countries (especially economically) in promoting the cultural industry on the African continent and the decolonial wave on the European continent. *Documenta* shows in an explicit way the power relations that European decolonial processes want to hide. It reveals the neocolonialism of many of these experiences (Burocco 2022).¹⁵

To start with these two censorial sequences against art exhibitions that clearly establish dialogues with political issues – one, that of *Queermuseum*, potentiated by rumors and threats coming from the conservative and religious public sphere and far-right cyberactivist hacking, and the other, *Documenta XV*, backed by initiatives of the established power and by “scientific” committees that produce significant impacts on the public sphere – serves mainly to account for how the fields of art and politics are systematically populated by numerous disparate and contradictory narratives.

In the first case, the hate speeches and moralizing narratives react violently to the provocative intention of an artistic curator who intended to give visibility to dissident expressions, feelings, and meanings about bodies, gender, and sexuality. Paradoxically, or not, the visibility of this provocative and radical impetus ends up revealing contradictory effects:

14. Cf. <https://lumbung.space/pen/pen.lumbung.space/we-are-angry-we-are-sad-we-are-tired-we-are-united/> (Accessed September 19, 2022).

15. In the original: “L’asfissiante scrutinio a cui il team curatoriale da mesi viene sottoposto ricorda la forma con cui il corpo della signora Sarah Baartman veniva oltraggiosamente «analizzato» nel XIX secolo. Un contemporaneo «freak show» del mondo dell’arte nel cuore di uno dei paesi europei più attivo (soprattutto economicamente) nel promuovere l’industria culturale nel continente africano, e l’onda decoloniale in quello europeo. *Documenta* mostra in forma esplicita le relazioni di potere che i processi decoloniali europei vogliono nascondere. Palesa il neo-colonialismo di molte di queste esperienze”.



on the one hand, it bets on the growing acceptance of some social sectors of sexual plurality and even on the possibility of consumption of some of its cultural products; on the other, it instigates traditional and conservative sectors to intensify their attacks, giving rise to campaigns for the resumption of traditional family values and the moralization of customs, which may even assume manifestations of extreme aggressiveness.

It is important not to forget that in Brazil's current political context, in a time of so-called Bolsonarism, the normalization of hate speech, which is being verbalized and publicized "out in the open" against certain types of dissidence (in particular the type of bodies that do not conform to the hegemonic models), constitutes another consequence of the exploitation of the (supposedly degenerate and radical) art field as the focus of a discursive performativity that simultaneously hides and sustains an ultra-liberal economic and political program. Paradoxically, once again, this moralizing and castrating discourse classifies these artistic proposals as ideological, and therefore political, thinking of politics as something manipulative, perverse, and deviant (based precisely on this wave of populist anti-political models) and not as an agency and potency of diverse subjectivities that, in truth, they do not wish to recognize, accept, or cohabit with.

In the second case, we can almost think of a perverse process of attempted commodification, sanitization, and domestication of radical discourses, inviting the margins to the centers – be it at the level of welcoming projects from post-colonial and distant geographies or by bringing in radical creative models and powers – in order to tame their radicalizations. In the context of contemporary European art, we have witnessed the incorporation of many of the critiques produced by cultural, post-colonial, and decolonial studies in recent decades that seek to dismantle the European colonial gaze and to deconstruct its most problematic narratives. This process, however, still seems to be far from completion – evidenced, in this respect, by the controversy and the general dissensus on the issues of historical reparation in the museology field concerning the return of objects and documents, or the polemic regarding the demonstrations against monuments paying homage to colonialists and racists and to colonial acts. This supposed pacification and appropriation of non-European perspectives, practices, and works, based on a certain uncritical and ahistorical multiculturalism or on an essentialist and universalist discourse on human rights, however, turns out to be both impossible and uncomfortable for the parties concerned. Instead, the authoritarian and neo-colonial tics of a Eurocentric (in this case, German centric) narrative about non-European and non-North American projects come to the forefront. By preferring horizontal, critical, assembly-based decision-making processes and project design methods (based, for instance, on the

*lumbung*¹⁶ model that Indonesian artists brought to *Documenta XV*, these projects, practices, and collectives provoke too many breaches, fissures, noises, provocations in the still conventional contemporary European art world. I would say, again, reusing Claire Bishop's idea (2012), that these artificial hells of confrontation are neither appeased by nor submitted to the relational and sharing models of the sensitive alluded to by Nicolas Bourriaud (1998) and Jacques Rancière (2010). Or, as Denise Ferreira da Silva (2020) suggests, regarding anti-colonial artworks that seeks to dismantle and counter-attack the Western epistemic and hegemonic violence: "an anti-colonial artwork questions every mode, every form of presentation, transforming it into a confrontation – which is presentation as a refusal of representation" (Silva 2020, 291). To present instead, or rather, to avoid representing. We assume, however, as does Erika Fischer-Lichte (2019), that the nature of the performative in the work of art translates into a metamorphosis of all those men and women who participate in it, performers and spectators who, in a performative coproduction of materiality, provoke and enable the emergence of processes of transformation; an idea that also resonates with Richard Schechner's (2011) riveting argument about processes of transformation and transportation of performers and spectators.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that some alliances, thought to be unacceptable in the global north, and resulting from that enormous contingent of artists from the global south invited to that exhibition, were an unheard of until then; and, since many of them support manifestos and critical positions against certain "western" contexts, countries, and models – in this specific case, the BDS¹⁷ movement against the colonial imperialism of Israel towards the Palestinian people – all this contributed to create an unsustainable environment, a climate of tension and a constant scrutiny of any curatorial gesture, of any and all statements from the participants and especially from the Indonesian curators. In the end, censorship was imposed, and a committee not accidentally called

16. *Lumbung* is an Indonesian language word which means rice barn. But *lumbung* can also mean friendship, working well together, sharing things or caring for all the people in a group. The *lumbung* model refers, in the context of the Indonesian art collective chosen for the overall curatorship of *Expo Documenta 2022*, to communal, collective, and horizontal models of discussion and decision-making in assembly. This model was applied to the decision-making and discussion process at this important exhibition in Kassel in Germany, where the idea was formulated that that event would be like a "rice barn", bringing together diverse contemporary artists who would work together, think and decide in assembly, exchanging and sharing with each other. See the event's website and the conference *Let there be lumbung*, where the essence of this model is explained: <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/let-there-be-lumbung-talks-about-lumbung-practices-and-lumbung-beyond-documenta-fifteen/> (Accessed December 4, 2022).

17. BDS is the acronym of the movement "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions," which aims to stop various forms of support, cooperation, and international recognition to the state of Israel, given its genocidal policy towards the Palestinian people. See the movement's website here: <https://bdsmovement.net/>

“scientific”¹⁸ backed universalist, pseudo-humanist, and anti-racist narratives. And the interference of the state apparatus in the world of art finally became evident, with the lapidary phrase that ended up avenging itself, uttered by the German Minister of Culture, but reiterated by many other protagonists: “artistic freedom is reaching its limits”.

PERFORMANCES TO POSTPONE THE END OF THE WORLD

Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.
(Karl Marx on his Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach)

Elsewhere (Raposo 2015; 2022), I have developed the idea that creative imagination as a process takes on agency over the world, a creative one, one that restores behavior (Schechner 1981) in endless new possibilities. What defines us as *homo performans* is our creative ability to shape the world, and, coincidentally, what defines us as *homo politicus* is our ability to intervene in the world. I believe that “[...] creating and acting are intimately linked in our everyday lives and escape the supposedly closed meshes and seemingly insurmountable borders of the art and political worlds [...]” (Raposo 2022, 4). This porosity between the fields of art and politics is made evident in a wide set of practices that we have called, for lack of a better term, *artivism* (Raposo 2015).¹⁹

On November 30, 2021, at the roundtable discussion *Art and politics: artivism as language and world-transforming action*²⁰ for the 20th anniversary of NaPedra – *Sismologia da Performance* [Seismology of Performance], from November 22 to December 10, 2021 – Vi Grunvald, my coordinating partner for this roundtable and for so many other projects and initiatives, launched the conversation with a poem by Elisa Lucinda, *No Elevador do Filho de*

18. Once again expressing and displaying that ontological dichotomization between the scientific and humanist “West” and the rest of the primitive, barbaric, and savage world. Moreover, artistic productions often seek to suppress this dichotomy, highlighting the mutual influences, the sharing and exchange of concepts, forms, and themes and, in some cases, also the vampirization and appropriation between “Western” and “non-Western” art.
19. *Artivism* can be thought of as a complex and polysemantic neologism that covers a wide range of artistic practices with a political focus. “The use of numerous languages and platforms to expose, comment and express world views and to produce critical thinking multiplies the spectrum of *artivism* from which it is possible to intervene poetically and performatively and build spaces of communication and opinion in the political field – street art, direct actions, performances, video art, radio, culture jamming, *hacktivism*, subvertising, urban art, manifestos and demonstrations or civil disobedience, among others” (Raposo 2015, p.5, our translation).

20. That can be seen in full at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX7O10uJW0g>

Deus [In the Son of God's Lift].²¹ Elisa Lucinda is a black female Brazilian artist who, through her satirical take on everyday life, and with great irony, transports us to the idea that there is a vital intersection between art and everyday life, between her poetry and her citizenship:

We have to die so many times during our lives
I'm already getting good at resurrection
Fooled I'm dying
In my extreme drive
In my extreme unction
In my extreme mention
of waking up alive every day
(Grunvald and Raposo 2021).²²

In this poem the poet, by metaphorically linking the idea of death and resurrection with the daily harshness of resistance and survival that certain bodies experience, alludes to what we, in keeping with the thought of Ailton Krenak, may also call “the awareness of certainty”:

The window of art, in different places and contexts in the world, is a sort of outburst of an awareness of certainty, that which lives the anguish of certainty. I think it has an outburst from time to time, and it runs toward the world of creation, the world of invention, the art world, when it is unsure. That is when it is out of its mind. Because when it has its head together, when it is sober, when it is producing, it does not allow itself that. So much so that the world of work is clearly demarcated from the world of creation. The world of work is increasingly consolidated as the place of reproduction, of repetition. The world of work is when you make millions of identical pieces, millions of buildings with identical windows. All the technological stuff we share in the world today is produced in scale. It is not meant to be created; it is meant to be reproduced. Creation happens in leaps and bounds. You have a creation here, then you have a creation at a different moment. The world of work is mortifying (Cesarino 2017, p.184, our translation).

21. To listen to the poem, recited by the author herself, and read its lyrics, see this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GacBfjDxnz8>

22. In the original: A gente tem que morrer tantas vezes durante a vida / Que eu já tô ficando craque em ressurreição / Bobeou eu tô morrendo / Na minha extrema pulsão / Na minha extrema-unção / Na minha extrema menção/ de acordar viva todo dia.

Perhaps, then, what Elisa Lucinda is telling us in her poem is precisely that certain lives, under a daily reproduction of exclusion, violence, and discrimination, need to lose it, to get depressed and hide; they need to die to be reborn again, with renewed strength. Art can be this place of outbreak, of withdrawal, of creation that feeds the breath of life and confronts the politics of the daily death, the necropolitics of which Mbembe (2018) and Safatle (2020b) spoke. It is for this reason that it has been the target of countless campaigns of erasure, censorship, and criminalization.

Perhaps also the famous gesture of Tuíra Kayapó²³ – an indigenous woman who raised a knife over the face of the engineer responsible for implementing the hydroelectric project at Belo Monte, right in the middle of indigenous territory – was already a manifestation of this performative outburst, of this anguish and awareness of certainty, combining a political gesture with an aesthetic attitude, a gestural potency that in this case is shaped by ritual gestures.

As Jeremy MacClancy (1997) reminded us, the use of artistic language and communication structures to convey political messages is not a very conventional strategy on the European and Western scenes, and somehow it emerged as a possible (and even unsettling) language for groups, collectives, and bodies that could hardly guarantee presence and access to the places where political speech took place:

On August 28, 1963, a group of Yirrkala Aborigines from north-east Arnhem Land presented a petition to the Australian Parliament. In it they called for the government to reconsider their decision to allow a mining company to exploit their homelands. By those times their formal plea was not in itself unusual. What was unusual was that the petition was framed as a bark painting, showing the clan designs of all the areas endangered by the company's plans. Against a background of cross-hatching and triangular blocks of color, a series of birds, lizards, fish, turtles, snakes, and other animals surrounded the typewritten words of the paper (MacClancy 1997, 1).

Let us, then, briefly go through the interventions of the guest speakers who made up the roundtable organized by Vi Gunvald and I for the 20th anniversary of NaPedra. Each one of them is a unique testimony and a

23. For more details see: <https://amazoniareal.com.br/o-governo-nao-ira-nos-dividir-diz-lider-tuira-kayapo/> (Accessed September 19, 2022). Another significantly resonant gesture was Ailton Krenak's 1987 political performance at the Brazilian Constituent Assembly, giving a speech in a white suit while painting his face in black genipap ink as he claimed and demanded rights and respect for indigenous peoples – see here: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/gis/article/view/162846> (Accessed September 19, 2022).

reflection on poetics and performances that challenge destiny, that create utopias. They are political statements that use aesthetic devices to reflect on situations of crisis, rupture, change, transition, transformation. The panel may even, perhaps, constitute itself as a huge fabric, one that is plural and diverse, highlighting proximities at times, singularity at others, but that nonetheless still makes up an immense loom woven by many hands...

Julianna Rosa de Souza, the creator of Rede Quilombo's website, a black, bisexual woman from the periphery, born in Florianópolis, has a PhD in Theatre by the *Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina* [University of the State of Santa Catarina] and is a member of the *Núcleo de Estudos Negros de Santa Catarina* [Black Studies Group of the State of Santa Catarina] and a researcher at the Observatory of Black Women at *Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Baía* [Southwest Bahia State University]. During her intervention in the aforementioned roundtable, she curiously brought up another relevant aspect that connects with what we have just highlighted above: the resistance to a "right" way of using languages and idioms that colonized peoples and groups were forced to incorporate. To begin her intervention, Julianna recites, with enormous intensity, a poem by Brazilian slam poet Luz Ribeiro. At a certain point, we hear:

I have a loose tongue, which does not let me forget that every word for me is a remnant of colonization. Each verb that I learned to conjugate was taught with the mission of distancing me from those who came before. [...] Don't ask me to speak well! Don't ask me to speak well! *Parce que... parce que... je ne parle pas bien! Parce que je ne parle pas bien, je ne parle pas bien, je ne parle pas bien!* I cannot speak well of anything you have taught me! (Grunvald and Raposo 2021 our translation).²⁴

But immediately Julianna adds that not speaking the dominant language does not mean remaining silent. On the contrary,

[...] Silence plays into a pact. The pact of whiteness. It means that if we do not speak, if we do not bring our bodies, we will go on perpetuating this historical gap, of absence, of invisibility [...] Speaking, then, is essential, it is paramount [...] to be, to feel, to live, to place our affections, to perform, all of that goes toward transgressing a logic that is imposing a way of being, a way of dressing, a body, a way to behave,

24. To hear the poem recited by the author, Luz Ribeiro, for ONERpm and Slam das Minas, see here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZFOMInjSlg>

a way of speaking [...] A way of disagreeing [...] (Grunvald and Raposo 2021, our translation),²⁵

Julianna reinforces this idea with the notion that the tensionality and intensity of speech, of anger and protest, are distributed and signified differently, racially speaking. Thus, the white woman (and particularly in academia or in places of speech legitimized by power) is allowed anger and transgression because that means the ability to intervene and to be effectively represented, but for the black woman in protest, anger is an uncontrolled, irrational, and pointless emotion. Speech violence is obviously distributed differently according to skin color, gender, or other social markers. But Julianna also adds that in the context of Afro-Brazilian cultures, the expressive languages of song, dance, music, politics, and rituals intersect and permeate without constituting themselves as differentiating spheres with insurmountable borders. Perhaps for this reason, she ends her talk with a song about the condition of black women in Brazil and their power.

Celia Asturizaga Chura, known as Cece, a Bolivian lawyer, independent artist, indigenous woman, and an advocate of the rights of native peoples, also chooses a song to begin her intervention. An Aymara song, about and sung by indigenous women with whom she works, and which later became the political anthem of a party Cece was eventually elected to. Celia starts by bringing up a very interesting question about how laws and regulations that protect the rights of native peoples, women and other subaltern groups in Latin America are often presented with enormous pomp and prominence but end up never being effectively consolidated or applied. This same topic had been mentioned on by Julianna, when talking about the legislation to insert Black history and culture in schools in Brazil since 2013, yet with no substantial implementation.

In the case of the Aymara women's organization in Bolivia, of which Celia is one of the main driving forces, the issue of violence against women and femicide is one of the most relevant ones, and one of the issues most transposed into performances, be it on the street, on stage, or on the Internet. These issues, despite being discussed in academia and in parliaments, as Celia said, "are never addressed to us, to the majority of women..." and particularly to indigenous communities, like the Aymara. Through theatre performances, they try to debate issues, reaching indigenous communities, which are poorer and more distant from the centers of production and political power. They do not consider themselves theatre artists, they have not studied or trained in the performing arts. They are

25. To listen to and watch Julianna Rosa de Souza's whole intervention, follow the link (from minute 36'55"): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX7010uJW0g>



women from the countryside, peasants, shepherds, market traders and street vendors, mothers of many children. The discussion about gender, patriarchy, and sexism is evoked not only as a product of the colonial era, but it is also discussed within the indigenous cultures themselves, in a search to “break the interior fears accumulated generation after generation [...]” that prevent the Aymara women from speaking of their dreams, in a search to unmask taboos. Here, however, these women’s liberated speech is, through Cece’s emotional voice, very hard and painful, because it is based on lives and stories of enormous violence. Within the women’s group there were cases of young daughters who were born as a result of their mothers’ being raped by their employers. Others spoke of grandmothers that had been murdered by their husbands, of terrible situations of abuse.

Here, the paradox – and, simultaneously, the disconcerting power of these performances and of these fear-breaking, floor-taking processes – is that they emerge as small victories, small battles against death, against the necropolitics. They are political performances of a very localized dimension, but intensely poignant. They reflect and react to secular, colonial, and cultural structures of oppression and domination, even when certain indigenous politicians or politicians with indigenous slogans win and form governments which, in the end, continue to perpetuate sexist and patriarchal oppression regimes while using the image of the “indigenous” and the “indigenous woman” as trumps in their political games.

The performances Cece organizes with her fellow rural Aymara women are, for her, more than “political marketing,” they are commitments “for life” – as recalled by Ailton Krenak in his many interventions and books, in which he calls for the world and its being to be cared for as an act of “good living,” or, as suggested by Duncombe and Lambert (2021), that artistic activism actually allows for to cultivation and expression of the creativity we all possess, creativity we all take part in as beings in the world. Perhaps for this reason the collective of urban indigenous women she is currently active in decided to take the name “Mama Huaco” – in memory and in inspiration of the female warrior of Inca mythology who resists and opposes any oppressive power.

Cece ends her intervention by showing how fabric and weaving played a central role in the cultural practices and history of the original peoples of the Andean mountains. But also, how these contemporary Aymara women consider themselves as threads of wool of many colors. In their performances, they use thread to claim their history, their rights, and their dreams and aspirations. Their performances are like a cloth that is weaved by fragments of their shattered, burnt, severed histories. They hope their daughters or granddaughters can finish this cloth, this fabric,

where these stories may be kept, and above all, that it will be a cloth they can keep weaving [...].²⁶

We continue at the roundtable with the reflection of Gustrava Bonfiglioli, Master's student of Anthropology at *Instituto Universitário de Lisboa* [University Institute of Lisbon], communications officer, consultant, and non-binary activist at *A Revolta da Lâmpada* [The Lamp's Revolt] collective in São Paulo, in which they²⁷ are conducting research. This is perhaps the collective that better illustrates the intimate connection between art and politics, between performative forms of doing politics and of thinking subjectivities in the public space. *A Revolta da Lâmpada*²⁸ was created 4 years after an episode in Avenida Paulista, where, on November 14, 2010, homophobic and Nazi groups attacked a man for being perceived as gay. The use of fluorescent lamps in that aggression against bodies that do not conform to the heteronormative model is at the origin of the name of the collective – or *coletiva*, the feminine word for “collective” which does not appear in the dictionary, but which *Revolta da Lâmpada* prefer. With analogous experiences felt by different people in Brazilian society, they seek to incorporate all sorts of identity dissidence and subjectivity: gender, sexuality, raciality, serology, body, place of origin, age dissidences, etc. Gustrava, like Cece, appeals to the textile metaphor to account for these threads that are the bodies of the collective, stemming from many places, with different colors, textures, and densities, but that in this meeting place that is *A Revolta da Lâmpada* seek that possible mesh among different experiences of dissidence.

Gustrava tells us how their research, through an epistolary conversation they proposed to their comrades, strengthened the textile metaphor, and how, from that metaphor, some issues and topics became central and unifying for the group: “free body” and “hustle is also struggle”. It is within a context of parades or performative *artist* blocks mixing several artistic languages that these ideas are made explicit and that the dissident bodies in alliance become visible in the street. And what Gustrava aim to do with their research is precisely to bring this debate – this questioning that the *artist coletiva* has been doing since 2014 – into the academic field, making it the subject of scientific and critical reflection: “hacking this place to produce knowledge about intersectional collectives within academia [...]”, as they said at one point at the roundtable.²⁹

26. To watch and listen to Celia Asturizaga Chura's full intervention, follow the link (from 1:5'20"): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX7O10uJW0g>

27. Translator's note: We have chosen “they” as a gender-neutral pronoun for Gustrava Bonfiglioli, since they are a non-binary person.

28. The collective's Facebook profile: <https://pt-br.facebook.com/arevoltadalampada/>

29. To watch and listen to Gustrava Bonfiglioli's full intervention, follow the link (from 1:20'20"): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX7O10uJW0g>

A Revolta da Lâmpada, as both a collective of artists and a social movement – even if only loosely organized and with more or less temporary and ephemeral affiliations – questions the field of arts and social movements. It thus seeks a “more prismatic understanding,” one that accounts for the complexity, the encounters and the experiences of such diverse forms of marginalization and discrimination, for such plural subjectivities and for such wide-ranging political desires and aspirations. In that sense, they seek to de-binarize the discussion and the positioning that social movements and political art all too often evidence, and they do so by exposing the gaps and fissures of these gestures and attitudes – excluding through sectioning, while not intersectioning subjectivities. At the same time, however, they promote alliances with institutional activism to complexify these same categories that produce disruptions and singularities, and they enable public policies that are more representative of the complexities of the bodies and subjects that inhabit our worlds:

[...] while we reject the institution, we demand public policy from the institutional movement [...] How, then, to navigate between these many binaries is a very intense experience of *A Revolta da Lâmpada* [...]. We think politics from the point of view of dissensus. Since institutional activism has always been there at the other end, seeking consensus at any cost, even if this overruns some nuances and complexities that run over our lives, we think politics from the point of view of dissensus, but of course agreements are also necessary [...]. These tensions between product and process, between consensus and dissensus, they are part of the intersectional collective experience and there is no answer to that (Grunvald and Raposo 2021).

However, even if in this unbearable condition of (lightness or heaviness?) of art, in this unstable sensation of *artist* production to make “feel good” or “feel bad” – to borrow Claire Bishop’s argument (2012) – the proposal presented here by Gustrava triggers propositional mechanisms: of life, of complexity of lives, de-binarizing mechanisms. Because, for *Revolta*, “hustle is also struggle,” a struggle that does not simply intend to make the wounds, the pain, the victimization of these bodies visible, but one that takes the pain and the wounds “in order to *samba* in the face of” figures such as Bolsonaro or Trump, to be able to respond to the politics of death with the powers of life. Thus, in a perpetual act of questioning, this *coletiva* is evaluating and examining itself to determine when to use closed or open categories, whether to be an artistic or social movement, at what moment to open up or close down in public politics. Having to navigate between dualisms and antinomies has, in itself, already been a great “artistic making,” as Gustrava concludes: “Art can change destiny,

can reject the destiny imposed on us, can deny destiny as a finishing line, can make new destinies from the ruins of the present, can make life out of death, can transact destiny!” (Grunvald and Raposo 2021, our translation).

As Roger Sansi (2020) reminds us, for philosopher Jacques Rancière politics is the definition of a particular sphere of experience, of objects presented as common and belonging to a common decision, and of subjects who are recognized as capable of designating these objects and presenting arguments on them. Even if he insists on dissensus rather than consensus, for Rancière, dissensus has the function of producing new distributions of the sensible, by allowing political subjects to emerge, to represent themselves, by generating new collectives of enunciation (Rancière 2010). *A Revolta da Lâmpada* may, after all, be thought of as one of these *coletivas* of enunciation.

Lastly, Luana Raiter, PhD in Scenic Arts from *Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina* [University of the State of Santa Catarina], director and actress for the street activist performance group *ERRO* [ERROR], from Florianópolis, white woman, mother of two, invites us to think and deepen another segment of this issue of art as politics and politics as art: the occupation of urban space. Much like *A Revolta da Lâmpada*, Florianópolis’s *ERRO Grupo*³⁰ uses public space as a central element to its performances, but, as Catalan anthropologist Manuel Delgado defended in a recent article about the group for the newspaper *El País*, theatre in the streets and street theatre are not the same thing:

Theatre in the streets is a type of dramatic art whose action takes place out there, in freely accessible spaces, be it a street, a square, a station foyer or an underground train, adopted as stage spaces. Now, street theatre, in the most literal and also in the most radical sense, would be an activist art form for which the public arena is not a mere set of passive prosceniums, but which sees in it potential qualities to house all kinds of ruptures and fissures, signs of the vulnerability of a socio-political system that refutes and scorns and whose expressions are there, in the daily activity of these so-called public spaces (Delgado 2018).

Luana explains clearly how the purpose of *ERRO Grupo* is that of constituting itself in the street, of rehearsing in the street, of presenting itself in the street, or, perhaps more accurately, with the street, since it seeks to interrupt paths – trajectories and contexts of sociability, of work, of

30. The collective’s website: <http://www.errogrupo.com.br/v4/pt/>

informality, of regulation, etc. – of subjects in circulation in the street, “caught,” so to speak, by the creative and theatricalizing moment that the elements of *ERRO* propose or, rather simultaneously, taken as devices and triggers to activate theatrical gestures to the collective. This seems to be the essence of the proposal that Luana Raiter and Pedro Bennaton, the playwrights of the collective, made to a group of partners in 2001: to use public spaces as acting fields, but mainly as venues of everyday life intervention. Luana begins, then, by saying that:

ERRO works in the street [...], it was born in the street, and we try to work with the hybridization of languages and with something that also touched me in Vi's poem [by Elisa Lucinda], that talks of worlds that have to die [...] Of how there are things that need to die in the world and of that also being an act of creation [...] Destruction is also an act of creation. And recently there was a talk by Suely Rolnik [...] where she talked about anticipating the end of the world, a reference to Krenak and his book *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*. Anticipating the end of this world, meaning: there are worlds that need to arrive and this one needs to end. [...] *ERRO* has always brought, has always been eager to bring to urban people the possibility of other ways to live together, other possible relationships with space, other ways of thinking about life, other utopias (Grunvald and Raposo 2021).³¹

ERRO, Luana continues, seeks, then, the possibility to create other worlds. She refers to Roger Sansi's article *Utopia and Idiocy* (2020) to add that the collective is often mistaken by this condition of idiocy or madness for seeking utopias, when, in fact, taking on that dream quest makes them (makes us) more awake, more lucid, more real than the numb and reigning apathy of everyday life. This creative power of dreaming, imagining, and conceiving new worlds is, indeed, the quest to end the nightmare of everyday death that takes over our lives. Luana, then, confessed something she had never mentioned in public: that she comes from a family where suicide is very present – both her father and her brother committed suicide – and this perception of disillusionment, of impotence, the lack of a dream with which to cling to life, that is precisely the power that drove her to think and make theatre in this way. A theatre that gave people experiences and where we could glimpse an exit. Or at least try. Together.

31. To watch and listen to Luana Raiter's whole intervention, follow the link (from 1:33'00"): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX7010uJW0g>

In this sense, this theatrical proposal could well equate to Nicolas Bourriaud's (1998) definition of micro-utopias of everyday life.³² Or, even more fittingly, I would suggest *ERRO* group's use and experimentation with utopia in their street performances fits into what Blanes, Flynn, Maskens, and Tinius (2016) define as the emergence of specific spaces as interstices, as spaces of experimentation of sociality.

That *together* takes us to yet another dimension of the discussion: that of the practices of participation or participatory artistic practices. For her doctoral thesis, Luana researched this subject specifically, based on, among others, the case of *ERRO* group. The search for new forms of an intersubjective relationship in the city, even if it does not change destiny, makes the art of street theatre a space of experimentation where the performer, together with the transient audience that crosses the performance, can not only change the plot, but also be the owner of that change – which closely echoes Richard Schechner's proposal and his model of environmental theatre. Luana tells us:

It is no longer “I slipped, I made a mistake, I had to improvise”. No! It's “I want to improvise! I want to try this in a different way”. And when we take actions onto the streets, spaces that are intertwined with the city flux, with people's daily life and then provoke these people so that they may feel they really are present [...] And now, I'm not only talking about presence in theatre anymore, but about being in presence with others [...] Because I think we often pass by vacantly in our daily life, on our daily routes, and that it can also rescue this feeling, that it can take charge of the changes that occur (Grunvald and Raposo 2021, our translation).

Luana finally concludes, with a smile – because laughter³³ is an essential part of her theatrical proposal – by saying she no longer knows what *ERROR* does: theatre or politics? To which Vi Grunvald accurately answers: “Not knowing what one does, from my point of view, is fundamental to keep doing the right thing, because if one is too sure about what one is doing, it means something is not quite right!” (Grunvald and Raposo 2021, our translation).³⁴

32. Nicolas Bourriaud (1998) proposes the concept of “everyday micro-utopias” to conceptualize certain distinct characteristics of artistic practices, which he describes as collective, relational, and contextualized efforts focused on concrete interrelationships between artists and audience members.

33. Later in the roundtable, Vi Grunvald notes, on this topic, that there is an extremely powerful laughter – when someone *laughs with you* – and a discriminatory laughter – when someone *laughs at you*. The power of many of these collectives is that they are able to engage audiences in laughter with them.

34. To listen to the debate that followed the roundtable interventions, follow the link from 1:41'22”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX7010uJW0g>

SOME PROVISIONAL AND IMPRECISE CONCLUSIONS

Our time does not seem to be ripe for imagining particularly revolutionary transformations. Or perhaps, on the contrary, the growing tensions between different, explicitly antagonizing world views and projects that clash “out in the open” in daily life, and, of course, in contemporary art, may come to produce radical changes. But, alas, I have no answer to this quandary.

In fact, I believe that the present time has shown us mainly economic disasters and, more or less, global financial crises; inconceivable and undignified social asymmetries; a growth in populism and neo-fascist or nationalist ideologies, hate speeches and the most diverse phobias against minority or dissident groups or individuals. A time also marred by the sad scenarios of millions of people being forced to migrate or take refuge and of very few people accumulating fortunes in tax havens and living in bubbles of wealth and luxury; by the emergence of religious fundamentalisms of various kinds; and, perhaps even more seriously, by the multiplication of unprecedented environmental and health catastrophes. In short, the emergence of an extremely polarized world – essentially what the phrase “the 99%” ultimately amounted to or what Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) called “the process of dispossession”: of lands, of rights, of work, of food, of shelter, of protection, of security, etc.

What possibilities, then, remain for transforming this hell? And in what way can art play a central role? Can art override destiny? And what counter stream reactions might this be generating?

“There is no radical novelty. Aesthetics and politics are ways of organizing the sensible: allowing an understanding, providing to see, constructing the visibility and the intelligibility of events. To me, (that) is a permanent given” (Longman and Viana 2010, our translation). These were Jacques Rancière’s reflections in an interview with *Cult* magazine in 2010, regarding the so-called “Arab Spring” and the indignation movements that swept Europe and the United States of America and then spread to South America and other parts of the globe. Reflections that, combined with the words of Italian modernist poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, when interviewed by Pasolini in the film *Comizi d’Amore*, of 1965, reveal a kind of perennality of this transgressive dimension of art. As Ungaretti said: “I am a poet and as such I start transgressing all laws by making poetry!” (Pasolini 1965).

I would say that a certain form of artistic practice and engagement seems to have come to occupy a space that would apparently be reserved, above all, for traditional political combat, for debate in the public sphere, for confrontation in the streets and in trade union or parliamentary arenas. And that this pulsing engagement of art, this social and political turn, as

some call it (Kester 2011, Malzacher 2015, Martin 2013, Sansi 2014), although not new, also results from the surfacing of new political subjects born of or created by this new setup of subjectivities, that are a result of the times of precariousness, subalternity, and oppression, a result of neoliberal forms of the new global digital capitalism.

This new subject is no longer (or not only) the emerging proletariat in antagonism with the industrial bourgeoisie of which Karl Marx spoke of, nor the middle class with class consciousness or with aspirations of consumption of which Nestor Garcia Canclini spoke of, but rather a set of broad-spectrum oppressed people born in the scenario of global capitalism and heirs of the identity struggles of the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is the women, the black men and women, the indigenous men and women, the homosexuals and lesbians, the Trans people and all other forms of gender and sexuality deconstruction, the people living in the peripheries or marginalized zones, the migrants and the refugees, and the precarious youth. In short, a new contemporary political subject. And this polymorphic, distinctive, often paradoxical, and contradictory subject has been creating forms and practices of political engagement that entail artistic and creative experimentation. Simultaneously, however, and in tensional symmetry, we are also witnessing a conservative, populist, fascist, moralizing, and “curative” or “therapeutic” turn that has been established to confront the artistic proposals considered (again) “degenerate”. And this turn, besides revealing itself as a reaction by conservative power structures, will also draw its energy and effervescence from another type of dispossessed: the low-income pensioner, the unemployed or lumpen resulting from the outsourcing of society and industrial contraction, the impoverished middle class, the mainly white (but not only) fervently evangelical or fundamentalist Christian poor, the veterans of wars (in particular colonial ones), who now find their visibility space in the emerging populist, neo-fascist, nationalist, racist, xenophobic, conservative, and moralist mentality.

It is precisely a particular fixation on evangelical moral rhetoric and Christian conservatism that blends with the vigilante militiaman and the attentive curator of indiscipline and sentinel of the unrepentant deviants that results in this clash between emerging political subjects of contemporaneity. The current depiction of this reactionary subject resumes, in the Brazilian case, the so-called time of the “ladies of Santana” – São Paulo housewives from the Santana neighborhood who, in the 1980s, considered themselves the defenders of morality. They protested against public discussion of sexuality in television programs, such as those by sexologist Marta Suplicy or Globo soap operas, complained, and demanded political censorship. In a move of re-performance, today’s evangelical and conservative Christian performers, through protest uniquely and paradoxically

similar to those of radical movements and of progressive ideology, react violently and performatively towards contemporary political subjects and debates such as the so-called “gender ideology”³⁵ or against performances and art exhibitions in which themes like sexuality, body, or religion can be critically depicted. Below is an example of the discourse of this new conservative and puritanical thinking:

I am convinced that the devil is testing the Church to determine the limits of immorality, perversity, and dishonesty we are willing to accept in our society. The “art” exhibitions in different places presenting social aberrations disseminated by the media are nothing more than: how far and when will we go beyond Sodom and Gomorrah?! (Conti 2017, our translation).³⁶

Interestingly, we even see these artistic narrative tactics emerge in contemporary forms of political protest by the far-right, of which the assault on Capitol Hill in the US, following Trump’s electoral defeat, was perhaps its greatest expression. As suggested by Richard Schechner,³⁷ the dimension of contemporary civil protests allows us to speak of a kind of performance activism, classifying it as a new Third World of people who relate fundamentally on a performative and not solely ideological basis. That is, while the political activism of the 19th and 20th centuries, according to the same author, would have largely been ideologically based – with a strong focus on political rights and economic inequalities – contemporary activism appears to be radically relational, i.e., a collaborative social process of discovering and creating new ideas, new roles, new relationships, and new activities. And clearly this has been opening spaces for artistic practices linked to this type of ideas, proposals, subjects, and subjectivities. We could relate this to what Rancière called “the distribution of the sensible”. On the one hand, in the artistic field and in new social movements we glimpse this potency of life in the proposals of collaborative art, with the engagement of artists in particular causes, with an art focused on the contentious but absolutely necessary feminist and LGBTQIA+ issues, on the questions of blackness and racialization or of decolonial approaches, or even on topics linked to the precariousness of the youth, migrants,

35. See in this respect how Judith Butler was recently received in Brazil or how a movement of surveillance and denunciation swept through the universities and public schools in Brazil.

36. Text prepared after the controversy surrounding the performance *La Bête* by Wagner Schwartz at the opening of the 35th *Panorama de Arte Brasileira* [Panorama of Brazilian Art] at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM) of São Paulo in September 2017, revisiting works by the renowned artist Lygia Clark, and for which Schwartz would come to be accused of pedophilia, subjected to hundreds of death threats, forced departure from the country and heavy psychological suffering. The case went to court and the artist and the museum were acquitted of all charges. The first interview of the artist on this subject, 1 year after the violent defamation campaign, by Eliane Brum, is available here: https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/02/12/opinion/1518444964_080093.html

37. Proposal launched in a seminar at the 2012 event *Performing the World Conference*

refugees, or residents of urban peripheries. On the other hand, in the field of conservative and fascist reactions with persecutions, censorship, violence, and discrimination (not necessarily from the State, but actually perpetrated by *ad hoc* militias), we witness this necrophiliac desire for the act of killing that is in force in so many places.

Finally, this leads us to think – as recently suggested by André Lepecki while commenting on Eleonora Fabião’s artwork *Nós Aqui, Entre o Céu e a Terra* [Us here, between heaven and earth] (Fabião and Lepecki 2022) – on the need to transform relational strategies, strategies of distribution of the sensible, and to think of aesthetic and ethical micro-utopian antagonisms, in order to urgently assume tactics of active resistance, to have arts and social movements spread politics of life in face of these very real necropolitical ghosts, this “suicidal state” (Safatle 2020a) and this politics of death that hangs in the air... And that is also why it is absolutely necessary to continue to sow life, to postpone the end of the world, or to let this old world die so that another world, and other worlds, become possible. And that, as Lepecki mentioned, is the task of the art of the present: to suspend and create the extraordinary, and to give, to sow life. And thus, again, and finally, we are faced with the urgency of a quest: to sow life, for a confrontational art (Bishop 2012), an art that presents and does not represent (Silva 2020), an art that is deeply based on dissident, plural, and diverse daily lives that finally allows us to find strength in the wound, to find a breach in the shrapnel, to find power in the flaw (Mombaça 2021).³⁸

TRANSLATION
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Carvalho

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