

# Help – Beyond the Bolsonaro era

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**Abstract:** Through a rambling writing, a reflection beyond a dichotomous positioning is proposed to think about the possible relationships with contemporaneity, as well as the imbricated dialogues with identity politics.

**Keywords:** *Contemporary art. Politics. Brazil. Pandemic.*

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# I

## Front Commission

*...the girl looks in the mirror through the drain  
and says hello mouse sucker\*, what are you doing there?*

José Miguel Wisnik

*Brazil is a name without a country.*

Caetano Veloso

*The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of exception' in which we live  
is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history that corresponds to that idea. Only  
then will the need to provoke the real state of exception be outlined before our eyes, as  
our task; and thus our position against fascism will improve.*

Walter Benjamin

*It seemed impossible that there really existed a world and a time, except our muddy  
world and our sterile, stagnant time, for which we could no longer imagine an end.*

Primo Levi

*The rapid disappearance of our national memory seems to me to require an inventory  
of the places where it has selectively incarnated itself.*

Pierre Nora

*Meanwhile, the new sectors of the middle class functioned as the ideological support  
of the 'miracle'. It was the great euphoria of 'Nobody can stop this country': household  
appliances, the car of the year, colour TV, the 1970 World Cup, the Courage Brothers,  
buying a flat, a house on the beach, in the mountains, this, that and much more. And the  
people were very proud of themselves and their country. So there was nothing more natu-  
ral than to see, on the plastics of cars, expressions such as 'Brazil, love it or leave it'. Pro-  
paganda and publicity firmly in place, making heads: lots of laughter, lots of glitter, lots  
of asepsis, lots of perfume. A lot of party, big carnivals. Meanwhile, from the undergrou-  
nd of the regime, pestilential odours emanated, accompanied by weeping and gnashing  
of teeth. Curious that they came from young people from that same middle class.*

Lélia Gonzalez

*You, so liberal, so human, who take love of culture to preciousness, seem to forget that  
you have colonies and that in them people are killed in your name.*

Jean-Paul Sartre

*And who will dare to militate in favour of a freedom of displacement without limit, in favour of a liberty without limit? That is to say: without law? (...) The double bind concerns the fact that it would be necessary to deconstruct at the same time, theoretically and practically, a certain political ontotheology of sovereignty without calling into question a certain thought of freedom in the name of which this work is put under deconstruction. (...) The day when this double bind, when this implacable contradiction would be suspended, (...) would be paradise.*

Jacques Derrida

*A politics of post-truth is surely a huge problem, but so is a society of post-shame. How can one belittle a leader who feels no shame? Or mock those who use absurdity to succeed?*

Hal Foster

*Sooner or later in life, each of us realizes that complete happiness is unrealizable; few, however, pay attention to the opposite reflection: that complete unhappiness is also unrealizable.*

Primo Levi

*Narrating trauma, therefore, has in the first place this primary sense of rebirth.*

Márcio Seligmann-Silva

## II

### Dispersion

Trying not to write in a self-referential way is not a possible and palatable proposal these days. The year 2021 has just begun and we have the impression that 2020 still exists in a ghostly way. An overwhelming sense of presentness seems to establish an infinite circle of little movement, which potentiates once and for all the contemporary paradigm of the now as a cage, even an open one. Breathing in the last months is an arduous exercise. We are in Brazil, in public calamity in the face of a health crisis never seen in the last decades.

Although it is known that the violence through which minorities are gradually assassinated and excluded from a responsible political programme is an indelible mark of the country's own history, it is impossible to disregard the absolute lack of preparation and, above all, of desire, to safeguard a large part of the peripheral population, as well as the perversity that is established within a process of neo-liberal negotiation that gradually revisits a recent history never faced, the dictatorship.

Certainly, they are distinct situations and it would never fit here the theoretical naivety to affirm and reproduce in a clumsy way some thought that approximates such moments. However, there are coadunar elements that go through the Brazilian dictatorship (1964 to 1985) and the process of the return of this recalcitrance (2016 to the present day) that deserve attention. In an initially simplistic way, it is possible to state that it is a perverse policy that, from a welfarist practice in the worst term, ends up structuring fictions of representation and nationality that recurrently imply the elimination of otherness and difference.

Added to this, it is essential to consider the intermittent support in the maintenance and potentiation of a dichotomy, once credited as right and left, in addition to the support of considerable part of the population that, depending on the case, the circumstance of cultural and economic fragility, opts to ignore with all possible force the set of daily violence experienced and done to their neighbours and eventually, to their own brothers in the same shared community.

It is not appropriate here, even out of respect for scientific writing and research, to recall the recurrent affirmations of the current president, as well as the ironic and extremely irresponsible approach he chose to make during these 11 months, precisely when, immersed in a sensation of absolute chaos, we needed, beyond some effective gesture of seriousness and comfort, a type of management that was capable of suspending the sensation of orphanhood and drift. We choose here not to replicate such statements, easily found in newspapers and internet archives, because it is essential not to forget that this type of explicitness of the horror of a necropolitical practice, in the harshness of its genetic truth, no longer has an effect on part of the population that seems to have lost the fear of death itself, by choosing, for example, to crowd the beaches in the summer of 2021 or insist on frequenting bars promoting agglomeration, unaware of the logic of the empathic feeling before the pain of others and the galloping number of dead.

However, it is also important to consider that although other rulers of other countries, perhaps without a religiously colonial background like ours, have had the humility to recognise the slowness in establishing public health practices and the difficulty in understanding the gravity of the problem, the Brazilian government still persists and will continue to persist in fomenting an apolitical politics of skewed phallogocentric laughter which only covers up a quite right media tactic of provoking the banishment of its population, through the flood of images-signs, hysterically moving the

computer universe, involving news sites, social networks and television programs and producing content.

Such actions and recurrent statements are structured exactly so that the focus of public opinion, understood here as the collective body of citizens able to emit it, can be shifted to an anecdotal environment that, in fact, insists all the time in the allegory of the provoked banishment, but that remains, paradoxically, in the superficiality of the first discursive layer, without opening space for some deep and blunt, in a certain way, contestatory reflexion.

Certainly, one can justify such inertia by the pandemic and the impossibility of going out on the streets for some collective demonstration. Yes, this is a fact. Absurd and urgent. On the other hand, if we have some historical responsibility and interest, it is possible to remember with some recurrence that, in such devastating moments as the one we are living, the protestatory movement happened, in a two-way street, through an extremely strategic game between specific forces, public opinion and the press, to attend to demands that served for the maintenance of a coronelista structure of power and of galloping potentialization of the social and economic disparities, in the great majority of cases, with the acceptance of the collective body. It should also be remembered that, in the case of Brazil, such protest movements were always in a rambling position, choosing in a hazy and considerably fictional way their power construct to be challenged as the great Other. See the complexity of movements such as the March of God for the Family with God for Freedom (1964) and the revolts of June 2013. Thus, it is not fair to forget that dictatorships are constructed, established and supported also by political struggle, as paradoxical as it may seem.

### III

#### Choreographed rows

In 2020 and 2021, such strategies are endorsed by an apolitical public health policy that at no time made sufficient efforts to purchase vaccines, as well as by the feedback from a governmental scene that insists on ironizing the catastrophe through an approach that is unquestionably genocidal. But more than that, it is a tactic of propulsion of the daily enclosure, in order to postpone eventual public discontent, as well as to sharpen the collective anguish, inflated by political pronouncements that destroy any logic of understanding, also helping in the sensation of non-acceptance and in the inevitable entropy of the present that does not know its tomorrow. To such a surrealist aversion in the worst sense, since it holds nothing unconscious in

itself, is added a set of denialist protests that insist on refusing the vaccine and are able to ironize even those who, following a natural and lucid logic, claim, even if only in social networks, their right to health and safety, conditions supposedly resulting from the monumental payment of taxes.

It is certain that there are also deniers around the world, in the same way that there are Nazis and religious fanatics. This is not specifically a Brazilian tragedy. But at the same time it would be extremely naive not to consider the quantity and the effect of such positions within the country's scenario, which have been responsible for a rather appeasing silence before some coups in recent history, which ended up accepting the dismantling process of some desire for diminishing inequality and which culminated with the victory, once again, of a political clan that defends its own ideals and accentuates, as if in eternal return, the structural discrepancy between classes.

Obviously there was a specific legacy for such a scenario to unfold, and there would certainly be a series of other articles for the debate on such elements that were present even in previous governments that, in fact, tried to commit themselves to some democracy. But the particular situation in which we are immersed, impossible to be understood by the totality of its violence, can lead us to an impression that we live only in one more outbreak of collective ignorance that can be solved by generations through education and training.

In the Brazilian case, although education is a structural element that needs attention, since it is still weakened in several regions of the country, such a proposal is insufficient. It is not only a question of teaching, but of an ethical deformation, historically founded, which feeds back the farce of relationships in order to promote and provoke personal gain, disregarding public responsibility and the healthy return of the trust deposited in the exercise of its action that, obviously, can be micropolitical, individual, routine and minimal. There is very little escape from this symptom in these lands of here. Where, depending on the case, violence also masquerades as cordiality.

It is important to emphasize that these considerations are not intended to be party-political, although there is an inevitable lucidity in recognizing the possible and still present horror of a Brazilian extreme right that is a mockery of others around the world, due to its little theoretical foundation and its bet, perhaps because of its incapacity, in ignorance and the certainty of the unjustifiable. However, it would also be wrong to disregard the speculative backlash from some extreme left-wing groups, including those who insist on a militancy that is hardly dialogical. Besides, if we have enough desire and courage to think about our recent history, it is not possible, as some

researchers captured by the mannerism of their methods do, that we allow ourselves to fall blindly in love with what is being investigated. And being so, perhaps it is urgent that we overcome a merely dichotomous opposition so that we can structure some thought that, at least, tries to escape from its power and domination devices.

Certainly, it is not possible to forget the desire and proposal to reduce social and economic disparities of the PT governments in Brazil. And it is obvious that, in the 2018 elections, I voted for Professor Fernando Haddad. I did so, not because I am or believe in any party, but because I knew, without needing much reflection that it is unacceptable, unjustifiable and decidedly unforgivable to vote for a character without effective public actions and that during his campaign, hurt and ironized minorities: blacks, women and LGBTQIA+. Surprisingly, the majority of Brazilians. Besides being a persona that ends adhered to a retrograde militarized wing that, at no time, desired any upgrade.

However, as I write, it is not possible to forget for justice and faith still in some democracy, situations like Belo Monte<sup>1</sup>, which in fact, were not discussed enough as a case study and that brings together, paradoxically, apparently dissonant axes of politics. This debate will still need to be crossed so that we do not incur in what Daniel Aarão Reis calls the memory of silence, or the permissive habit of historical culture in Brazil: “look forward, ignore the rearview mirror” (REIS, 2019, p. 275). Moreover, it is fundamental that we also make a collective effort to recognize some tropical mannerism of the omnipresence of national-statism as a structural element of Brazilian politics and social formation, likely to be identified in some moments:

the dictatorship of the Estado Novo (1937-1945); the democratic and ‘golden’ years of Juscelino Kubitschek (1955-1960); the ‘golden and leaden years’ of the Médici government (1969 - 1974); and finally, the two governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003 - 2010). (REIS, 2014, p. 15)

In any case, it is important to clarify that there is no attempt here to equate the relations between right and left as if they were apparently opposite sides with similar domination. It is necessary to recall and propose an in-

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, here are two articles by Eliane Brum, published in El País: [https://brasil.elpais.com/eliane\\_brum/2019-12-05/belo-monte-a-obra-que-une-os-polos-politicos.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/eliane_brum/2019-12-05/belo-monte-a-obra-que-une-os-polos-politicos.html) [https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2019/10/24/opinion/1571924140\\_406343.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2019/10/24/opinion/1571924140_406343.html)

vestigation of the particularity of such governments in order to detect the remnants of specificity that still sustain such propositions. On the other hand, it is impossible to reiterate a policy that is absolutely dichotomous and extremely harsh, blinding us to wandering spaces of purposeful ignorance of its original ideologies, susceptible to co-optation.

Chantal Mouffe defends in *On the political* an approach of such differences that does not run into the naivety of a cosmopolitan democracy of good governance, since this would suppress the ineradicable character of the subjective antagonism (MOUFFE, 2015. p. 3), indicating that we do not insist on the operationalization of a liberal logic that perseveres in a discursive promotion of equality and pasteurization to be able to provoke, deep down, a process of extremely belligerent dichotomy. Chantal Mouffe suggests that the real possibility of facing such a debate is from an agonistic perspective, in which a vibrant public sphere would propitiate the confrontation of several apparently hegemonic projects. Such proposal advocates the investment of forces in a certain kind of decadence that precedes the end of ideology itself, promoting intermittent disputes that would manage to escape from the enclosure of the political in the moral sphere. (MOUFFE, 2015. p. 3)

What happens is that today the political is thrown into the moral sphere. In other words, it still consists of an us/them dichotomy, but instead of being defined through political categories, the us/them is now established in moral terms. Instead of the conflict between 'right and left' we are faced with the conflict between 'right and wrong'. ( ' ) My argument is that when there are no channels available through which conflicts could take an 'agonistic' form, they tend to arise antagonistically. Now, when, instead of being formulated as a political confrontation between 'adversaries', the we/they confrontation is seen as a moral confrontation between good and evil, the opponent can only be perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, and this does not favour an agonistic treatment. Hence the widespread outbreak of antagonisms that question the very parameters of the existing order. (MOUFFE, 2015. p. 5)

#### IV

##### Choosing the samba

Insisting on not succumbing to oblivion, it is important to detect some axial axes that were determinant for us to find ourselves in the current situation in Brazil. One of them is the repetition of dictatorial ideologies disguised in a discursive practice that defends something of a phantasmatic democracy. Or, in another way, the discursive and not necessarily effective conjunction of a democratic exercise that veils and represses dictatorial and oligarchic structures that define the country. Another possible parallel axis is the lack of organisation of some political parties in maintaining their



founding elements, thereby erasing the structural urgency of the basic reforms. This lack of commitment reveals a historical approach to the worst of neoliberal practices: the podium of power.

It is also impossible to disregard the absolute unwillingness of some sectors of society to revisit the dictatorial legacy courageously enough, a fact also justified by the military's lack of commitment to clarify their past operations, which can be seen in the reluctant difficulty of access to relevant data on the subject, together with an extremely questionable amnesty project, which resulted in a "democratic" Constitution in 1988 full of references and economic and political practices from the previous regime.

Despite the undeniable achievements of the new Constitution, the economic model of society built - and reinforced by the dictatorship - remained unchanged in it: the hegemony of financial capital, consolidated in the 1970s, supported and encouraged by the State, gestated in the context of a remarkable process of monopolization of the banking system and its articulation with commercial and industrial capital; the predation of the environment, given by the intensive exploitation of agricultural frontiers, driven by agribusiness, concentrator of land and income, expelling millions of peasant families to the peripheries of large and medium-sized cities; and also by pharaonic infrastructure works, almost always planned and executed in defiance of any control or guarantee of respect for the environment, managed by large contractors, many of them created in the shadow of the dictatorship, and which exercised a pernicious influence on subsequent civilian governments and on the very course of democratic construction of the country, financing and corrupting political parties and electoral processes; social and regional inequalities, already denounced in the first half of the 1960s, traditional in Brazilian society, but which were radicalised exponentially by the dictatorship; the chaotic dynamisation of the large cities and megalopolises, hostile to life, organised around and at the service of the individual car. (REIS. 2019, p. 279 - 280)

It is surprising how this text, produced in 2019, bluntly spells out practices that have been potentiated by the Bolsonaro government over the years 2020 and 2021, mediatically stimulating a strategic return to such antidemocratic fissures for the consolidation of a historical system that is founded by the increase of social disparities, by the absolute absence of shame in the advocacy of individual interests or specific groups, and by the narrowing of belligerence between sectors of society, not necessarily for their particular opinions and defenses.

Another reason for the current political situation in the country is the emptying and discrediting of political exercise, the result of a certain dilution of boundaries between the determining elements of some political parties that historically could take responsibility for strengthening public debate and the organization of interests around a certain reformist original vocation.

To this we can add a considerable expansion of media access and the massive use of social networks as a form of communication that is not necessarily in-depth, based strongly on its inevitable allegory and a certain lack of commitment to information and its respective sources, translating a logic of little care in the dissemination of images and news, supported by its anecdotalism and spectacularisation, capable of promoting its semblance of hospitality and promotion of individual opinions, elements which are widely used by radical militancy.

The paralysis and inability of the main reformist parties (PT and PSDB), too involved in managing the system to plan a comprehensive reform of its foundations, combined with the ostensible concentration of income and privileges, exasperated the population, who could not find complete answers to their demands. In this atmosphere, the expectations still placed in the PT and PSDB became more the result of nostalgia for the best of their years of government than transformative proposals. Tucanos and PTistas became accomplices and hostages of a system that they were incapable of changing, losing an historic opportunity that is difficult to estimate now when and if it will return. Even because the advances obtained in their governments, (...) emphasized much more the multiplication of consumers than the construction of citizenship. To expand consumption, to consume more and better, became the fundamental aspiration of the people, discouraged from participating and controlling the instruments of power and the rulers. This aspect, already pointed out but not yet evaluated in all its political consequences, potentiated without doubt, the disbelief in the political regime. (REIS. 2019, p. 283)

## V

### The parade

In his most recent book, Hal Foster poses a question right from the title: what comes after the farce? It is certainly possible to consider a first open movement that is fundamental: which farce? Which farce is he referring to, or rather, how many farces can we list within a historical process that has guided the country since its foundation? Although the author is referring to an American panorama and potentially characteristic of the North, it is curious how some initial considerations are completely appropriate for us here.

Initially commenting on the traumatic trace to think about an exhibition held from September 2011 to January 2012, at MOMA-PS1 and curated by Peter Eleey, Hal Foster problematises the work of art in its relation to the traumatic event. As the curator did not necessarily choose works that were conceived after 9/11, the possibility of spatial-temporal expansion and dilution already sounds problematic because any and every traumatic risk keeps within itself, as image and experience, elements of familiarity and strangeness that would only be unveiled a posteriori.

Hal Foster discusses in a considerable way, how it is possible that in some exhibition situations, the works and the images of the works on display, in an imbricated relationship with the curatorial proposal, may displace and empty out the founding elements of their poetics. Somehow, the author alerts us to the risk of curatorial mannerism that ends up sliding into the place, also in transit, of signifiers in fluctuation converted into forceful signifiers. (FOSTER. 2021, p.23)

In this specific case, the political transmutation proposed by the curatorship would establish another chain of signifiers that would unite such works in another directive situation proposed a priori and not necessarily legitimate. Certainly, if we were naive, we could answer that maybe this is a becoming of the curatorial practice: the establishment of conceptual, narrative, historical, formal, visual and symbolic links between the works. Indeed it is. However, what Hal Foster points out is the possibility of the exhibition as being part of a curatorial-readymade practice that disregards the structural elements of the works and insists on an urgency that is also expographic and no less media-friendly, which is ultimately supported by the security of its space of power and visibility. If in his famous text, *The Artist as Ethnographer*, the author pointed to the risk of ideological patronage of the work of art in relation to the cultural other, here the tone of the danger is different: it is an imminent risk of ideological curatorial patronage that disregards the strangeness of the trauma, by promoting it only through the more-than-pleasure of its fetishization as an image.

Certainly, it is possible to remember that this risk of using someone else who has not lived the abysmal experience of lack, here, in the case of a curatorial proposal, would be part of the responsibility of the artist's choice, as if it were possible to credit some hidden purity of the condominium domain of the meanings expressed and allocated in the work solely by the author. This hypothesis would be easily eliminated for two reasons: the first and most logical is the answer that the work, once produced, belongs to the world. What, in turn, could also come to be questioned, since we know that there are different layers of artists with different backgrounds from different social classes and that the demands that erect them are multiple and impossible to be allocated in some uniqueness. The second is that respecting the work of art in its vibratory propositions is an urgent demand of new exhibition practices that we need to deal with now, in Brazil and obviously in the world, in face of a considerable expansion of education, of the gradual opening of the production space and of the poetic visibility and as an opposite, of an avid and not less toothless demand of the art market in face of its phantasmago-

ria that mixes exoticism and historical guilt. So, in this sense and based on what Hal Foster indicates, it would not fit any accountability of the artists before the political mutability of their work, also because, depending on the case, they would lack enough strength to negotiate with a structure that is rigid and still echoes colonial powers of our most recent history. The possible perversity of blunt transmutation of a signifying chain built through a set of works is an imminent risk of the institutions, depending on how they cross the reality of their desires, and of the curator, today already aggregated to the once charismatic figure of the critic.

So that everything does not become extremely abstract, the ideal would be at this moment, to quote some examples and discuss in a responsible way exhibition situations that bumped into issues like these. However, despite the “democratic opening in the Visual Arts in Brazil”, there is a peculiar vice of considering everything from the personal sphere and the call for debate, also depending on its urgency, may culminate with possible listings of probable damages to those who still insist on proposing the dialogue.

So, reversing the game a little, it might be more useful, although dishonest, to randomly remember some exhibitions from the last five years in Brazil, and in what way eventual exhibitions also provoked a certain silencing of the voices it exhibited, presumably trying to make them visible; to make this visible that would already be in itself a paradox and an endorsement of legitimation of power regimes. Or still, to list expository and pedagogical propositions, also violent, which, by sustaining themselves on the top of their contestatory banners, reduced a considerable body of work to a specific and no less enclosed place, which is conventionally called identity. In this case, not necessarily dialogical, multiple and Brazilian. Certainly it would also be appropriate to remember the feedback of such a phantom identity promoted by the international art market, but this, at least for now, would be another subject.

Once again it is worth endorsing that we are not disregarding the legitimate process of trying to diminish a factual and narrative historical injustice in the Visual Arts that silenced a large part of a minority that, due to prejudice and unconscious habit, could not structure networks of connections sufficient for the work to circulate in a fair measure. In this sense, it would be perverse to bet on the innocuousness of some institutional policies that have invested in the possibility of rewriting even the history of Brazilian art itself, within a broader perspective, without promoting the absolute fetish of difference and of our own structural misery. And it is logical that if we consider the programs, scholarships and residencies that today invest

heavily in the promotion and in two-way learning together with the minority discourses, perhaps we can breathe a little less sorrowful before our paradoxical responsibility.

However, it is fundamental to remember that beyond the systemic readymade risk, there has been in the last years a discursive practice that perhaps without considering in depth its possible legacy, opted for the emptying of the political potency of certain works and artists, as if, by prioritizing an exercise of paradoxically spectacular pasteurization of the alterity, it fulfilled its institutional role. Certainly, institution here deserves to be understood in a broadened manner, and it would even be fitting to consider artistic practices and collective proposals that invested their forces in the production of a certain type of naive image that, in addition to meeting consumer demands, consciously opted for the structuring of an experience that is close to an imagetic-narrative kitsch logic, fundamental to the speculative campaigns that restructured national-populism today.

## VI

### Sambistas

In Kitsch, Adorno discusses the possible relations of aesthetic pasteurization through an equation between good and bad music. Although there is in the discourse itself, a judgement and a defence today already questionable of the idea of quality, what interests here is the very emptying of the forms, even dead ones, that Kitsch operates.

As for bad good music, it goes without mentioning it. She too is kitsch: unrealised and merely apparent, she lives on false sentiments. But from it the power of dead forms has completely drained away. It would be desirable to eradicate it. (...) kitsch performs a social function: to deceive them about their real conditions, to romanticize their existence, to propitiate that convincing objectives to any power appear to them with the resplendence of fairy tales. All kitsch is essentially ideology. (ADORNO. 2020, p. 47)

Although it is still controversial, the term kitsch appears here as a possibility of approaching recent poetic production that makes use of such elements to establish a bond of identification with its public, but which also, in some cases, may use such methodology to romanticise their living conditions, turning structural precariousness into a product aestheticised enough to eliminate the motor-continuum of mourning from the set that erects it. In this sense, some works in certain exhibition situations would start to operate in a logic that promotes a fundamental anaesthesia also advocated by the incessantly tragic repetition of daily life through the indiscriminate use of slogans,

emptied of what they are not capable of putting up a fight.

Hal Foster also reminds us that Milan Kundera's definition is still extremely useful for us to think about the current political-imagetic panorama:

This notion of 'fictitious feelings', common to many people but to no one in particular, led Theodor Adorno, in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), to define kitsch as a parody of catharsis. It also enabled Kundera, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), to assert that its warm and fuzzy affection has instrumental value for our 'categorical agreement with being', that is, for our acquiescence to the proposition 'that the human being is good' despite all that is 'unacceptable' in it, not least the reality of shit and death, for which 'the true function of kitsch is a screen that conceals it. In this broad definition, kitsch architects a 'dictatorship of the heart' through 'key images' of 'brotherhood among all men', a feeling of companionship which, for Kundera, is a slightly expanded version of narcissism:

'Kitsch brings forth, one after the other, two tears of emotion. The first tear says: how beautiful are children running on a lawn.

The second tear says: how beautiful it is to be moved with all humanity to see children running on a lawn.

Only that second tear makes kitsch kitsch.'

It is also what, in societies ruled by a single party, makes kitsch 'totalitarian', and, 'in the realm of totalitarian kitsch, all answers are given beforehand and exclude any new questions.'" (FOSTER. 2021, p.26)

It is interesting how Hal Foster, when quoting Milan Kundera, indicates that kitsch as an experience and as a methodological operation that is situated at the intersection of word and image, does not work autonomously. Besides being structured as ideology, kitsch needs the experience of the commotion of the other in order for the fantasy of the commotion of the self to be established. It is not entirely an individual experience and perhaps not even an entirely collective one, because it is produced in the skewed and decalcated evidence of the suffering of the other, consequently generating the emptying of abysmal power and promoting the unconscious comfort of narcissistic experience.

In *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Peter Sloterdijk, a German philosopher, opts for a considerably audacious proposal when he attempts to list eight unmaskings necessary for a critical revision of cynicism itself, understood here, including from its perspective of repudiation of the truth and

adherence to the trustworthiness of telling the truth without caring strongly about the one to whom the message is addressed. In part VIII of this unmasking, called, Critique of Private Reason, Sloterdijk indicates how the mythology of fascism reveals itself, obviously different from the Greek, distanced and shameless. (SLOTERDIJK, 2012. p. 101)

In this mythology, considerably constructed as a strategy, there is a certain tendency to a rather curious specular game between public and private that, according to the author, has suffered variations according to the narcissistic grounding of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the neo-bourgeoisie and the proletariat. According to Sloterdijk, it is in the presupposed intimacy, where the encounter with what is most intimate would be produced, that we would end up approaching what is most universal. And the class variations, beyond an economic structuring, would also be given by the form through which such axes structured the relations with their narcissisms. For the bourgeoisie, the narcissistic relation with identity and the self would be given, differently from the aristocracy, by an affirmation of labour and its social structuring from the recurrence of forgetting to question the perversity of such working methods in a close relationship between capitalists, entrepreneurs and financial agents who ended up twisting principles such as success, performance and privilege, leading to a purposeful confusion between patriotic spontaneity and political ideology in the 19th century, to bear fruit in a system of deviance in the 20th century. (SLOTERDIJK, 2012. p. 107) What seems relevant is how such narcissisms, amenable to programming and remodelling, historically were also structured, by a considerably problematic concept: identity.

The dance around the golden calf of identity is the last and greatest vertigo of Counter-Enlightenment. Identity: it is that magic word of a partly secret, partly open conservatism that wrote on its banners: personal identity, professional identity, national identity, political identity, female identity, male identity, class identity, party identity, etc. The enumeration of these essential demands of identity would at bottom be enough to illustrate the mobile and plural character of what is called identity. But one would not speak of identity if what was in question was not in essence the fixed form of the self. (SLOTERDIJK, 2012. p. 103)

It is then in this sensitive and epistemological confusion between identity and narcissism that another possible farce resurfaces, supported by the logic of celebrity and potentiated by the fictional passion of the community,

that of the brothers who will always end up murdering their leader, or the father of Freud's horde. It is an inevitable and inherent mythological ritual that never had enough courage and silence to leave this space of command and subjugation unoccupied. The leader is killed and then replaced. It is precisely because of this, because of the insistence on the recurrent re-allocation of power in the place of lack, that transgression can come to be co-opted by any and all regimes, including the most reactionary.

However, perhaps it resides there, in this other transgression, which defends the continuous emptying of its places of control, the elaboration of a tiny and infinite space, never to be completed by the desire for power, a possible bet on a new discursive regime incapable of being appropriated and tokenised, in a subversive continuity that will always deny fixity, but which will agree with a temporary adherence to its identifications in transit. Not in a naive way, but knowing that it is inevitably a mere survival strategy. And of fighting.

The "identity" of such a multiple and contradictory subject is always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of such subject positions and depends on specific forms of identification. This plurality does not, however, involve the coexistence, one by one, of a plurality of subject positions, but the constant subversion and overdetermination of one by others, making possible the generation of totalising effects within a field characterised by open and dissuasive borders. There is, therefore, a double movement. On the one hand, there is a movement of de-centring that prevents the fixation of a set of positions around a pre-constituted point; on the other hand, and as a result of this essential non-fixity, there is a contrary movement: the institution of nodal points, partial fixations that limit the flow of the signified under the signifier. But this dialectical movement is only possible because fixity is not given beforehand, for no centre of subjectivity precedes the identifications of the subject. For this reason, we have to conceive the history of the subject as the history of his or her identifications, and there is no hidden identity to be rescued apart from the latter. (MOUFFE, 1992. p. 28)

A provocation remains: how to promote the empty place of such fixity of identity power as a tactic of reflux, negotiation and struggle against the inherent pasteurization coming from globalization? Is it possible to propose another transgression of the self that, without ever disregarding historical horror and injustice, intermittently plays with a process of appearance and disappearance of such nodal points as part of an extremely astute imagetic logic, which never establishes itself or even wants to establish itself in its completeness?

Elisabeth Roudinesco in her most recent book, when quoting Sélim Abou, highlights an imminent risk that we must increasingly consider:



He also pointed out that the more economic globalisation is affirmed, the more it intensifies, in counterpoint, the equally barbaric reaction of identity, as if the homogenisation of ways of life, under the effect of the market, were to increase, together with the search for so-called 'roots'. In this perspective, the globalization of economic exchanges was therefore accompanied by a recrudescence of the most reactionary anxieties of identity: terror of the abolition of sexual differences, of the erasure of sovereignties and borders, fear of the disappearance of the family, the father, the mother, hatred of homosexuals, Arabs, foreigners, etc. (ROUDINESCO, 2021. n.p)

## VII

### Grandstand 1

Claudia Tavares, an artist from Rio de Janeiro, developed a work during the pandemic that explains and synthesises such questions in a forceful way. The title of the work is *Fale comigo*. Full of ironies, it already asks us about the very exercise of speaking/listening in current times and the inevitable variations of communicability. Starting from a series of encounters and not trying to escape the wandering nature of attention, the artist begins to perceive in the other, the environment and the inevitable intimacy that the camera indicates without pointing. In this way, the elements of the surroundings, capable of constructing the ecosystem of personal references, become the protagonists of the painting, or perhaps, of the framing game that the image is capable of offering the spectator.

And randomly, by the inevitable process of capturing the projected object that is capable of catching the one who looks, a colour is chosen. It is this colour that in fact, after the linking of the artist herself, "anthropophages" the other subject that established something of a dialogue, erasing it or in another way, shattering any possible naivety of integrity. The colour of the background opens up the inherent background of the subject assuaged itself, highlighting its presence in love with absence (and vice versa), nourished by its unquestionable and genetic phantasmagoria.

In addition to the deambulatory relation of the speech-listening relationship, here also emerges as an issue a certain emptying out of the subject, already spread out in the surroundings, as if the artist sensed the inevitable dilution of the structural certainties of a presupposed rigid and fixed identity. There remains a memory of form filled by the random choice of a colour, like a trace in transit that may come to be coloured in other circumstances and from other looks. There remains the outside. It is no longer a matter of a fixed discursive regime, but of processes of erasure and reappearance, proper to the image.

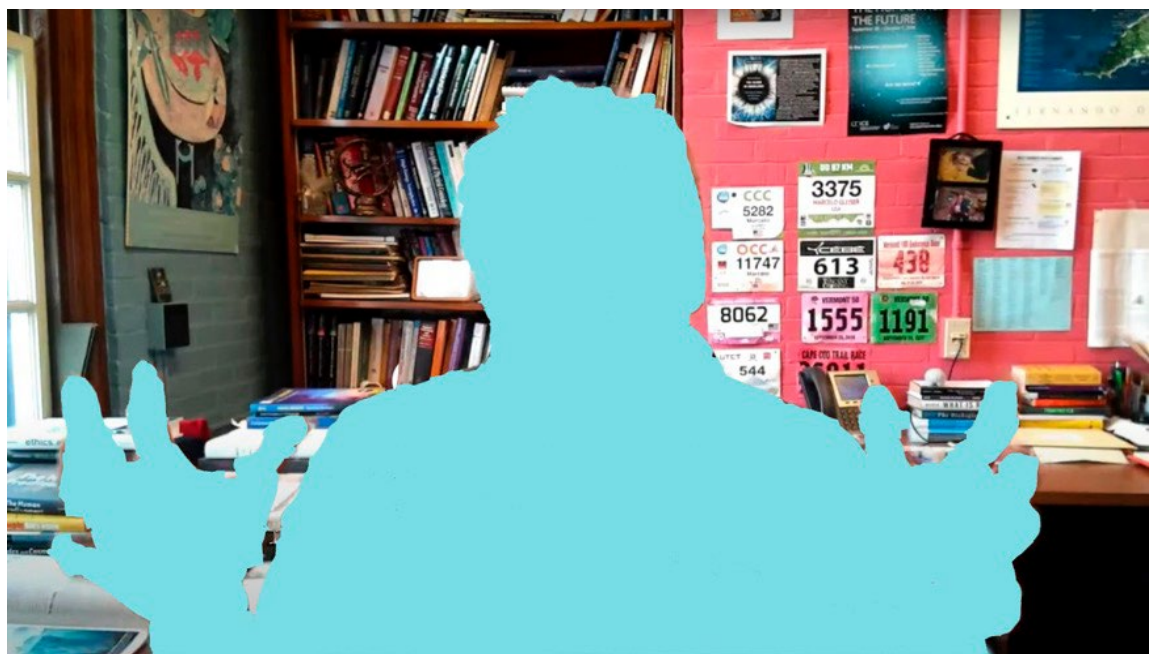


Figura 1  
Claudia Tavares  
*Fale comigo*, 2020  
Collection of the artist

Who sees what in such an experience? Who looks? Who is looked at? Who <<expects>>? Who is expected? We stand, no doubt, before the image - however sovereign it may be - like the falena before its flame. When we set out joyfully on a butterfly hunt, do we truly know who will be the real prey and who will be the real hunter? (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2015. p. 36)

Didi-Huberman, in *Falenas*, discusses the aesthetics and the logic of the apparition that would inevitably (and obviously) come together with the disappearance, through a beautiful poetic metaphor: the falena. Such species, like some butterflies, are always attracted by the light that paradoxically disorients and seduces them; causing the ruin to come to them by virtue of the inattention before their desire together with the fire of the drive between life and death. In other words, the phalenas let themselves die by the desire for enlightenment and appear as an epithet of the metamorphosis of all and any image that appears and disappears in their will to find something that presupposedly shines through; that is, something that reveals it, that translates it and that gives it some comfort.

The being that butterflies does at least two things: to begin with, it throbs and flutters compulsively, its body going back and forth on itself, as in an erotic dance or trance. Then, the being that butterflies, wanders and flutters all over itself, dragging its body from here to there as if in a restless exploration, in a search that decidedly ignores the ultimate object. There is in this dance something of the fundamental instability of being, a flight from ideas, an absolute power of free association, a primacy of leaping, a constant rupture of the solutions of continuity. (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2015. p. 27)

And continues:

And this is valid for humans as for butterflies: desire moves every gesture, but every gesture of desire carries a certain relation to death. The imago reveals itself in its psychic function, as double and pulsating as the butterfly's wings: it forms the privileged means for a symbolic constitution of the subject, but it easily comes <<death factor>> and primary means of the destruction of the other by aggressiveness which is, as among insects, mimetic and spectacular affront" (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2015. p. 27)

The metaphor of the falena seems to bring a possible association to the question of the tie that here, also interests to approach as a variation of the aesthetic experience of identity. Didi-Huberman makes use of the logic of the functioning of the image as being another possibility of approaching the diverse spheres of the visual relationship (in a first instance), in the same way as the endless (i)logics of confrontation of subjective reality. There will always be, then, a mirrored relationship between seeing and being seen, between being and being that; which, besides being fundamental for the symbolic constitution of the subject, will be crossed by desire, by the lust of the desire for the encounter which, in turn, will be surrounded by the absolute presence of death, in a relationship of infinite intermittence.

It is curious to think that the word *falena* comes from the Greek *phalaina* which, according to the 1955 Etymological Dictionary of the Portuguese Language, is the same root as the word whale. In a certain sense, the two animals have an analogous connection of existence, considering their wanderings between appearing and disappearing. If the falena, in the middle of the night, opens and closes its wings so that it can move, in the same way that there was already in its past an opening to life outside the cocoon; the whale, wrapped in its natural environment, also absolutely particular, lives in a playful dialogic drive between appearing and disappearing. Its presence before our eyes is only a flash of vision, an instant, a small illumination, a leap into the concreteness of a world that is not entirely its own, that is, into the uncomfortable atmosphere of necessary things, to empty its lungs in order to later dive and disappear a little more into the maritime infinitude.

*Agoniza mas não morre* is the first movement of a series of works in which Felipe Moraes highlights affective passages of songs and puts them in suspension in the window of his flat near the Santa Efigênia viaduct in downtown São Paulo. Here, in this case, Nelson Sargento's verse gains new timbres, perhaps phantasmatic, in the inevitable oppressive pause of a public health problem, allied to a lack of responsibility towards the collective, permeated by a necrophilic approach. If originally, the song narrates

the structural transitions of samba, its cooptation, pasteurization and its imposition on culture, here the image of neon emerges as an exercise in resistance, in the imbricated faith of the possible, keeping in a delicate way, the respectful silence of a lament that afflicts us nowadays.

The work was made possible by the Aldir Blanc Law of the State of São Paulo. What also seems forceful in this case is the artist's choice of using his flat, as an area in transit, of negotiation and for the possibility of apprehending the work as a movement between the intimate and the public space, as if it were possible an ideal situation between the neon gas and the political infraction that structures the moebius strip between me and you. The phrase *agoniza mas não morre*, besides indicating a desire and an individual urgency, ends up spreading itself in the architectonic and entropic multitude of the city, without ever believing in generalisations and investing its forces in the minimal potency of some revolution that resists obliteration.



Figura 2  
Felippe Moraes, *Agoniza  
mas não morre*, 2021  
Of the series *Samba  
exaltação*  
Photo: Gabriel Cabral

Loneliness also resurfaces potentiated in another imbricated layer between public and private. If, on the one hand, to go out and exist the space of the world is a risk of death, on the other hand, to stay in the world is to sustain being in oneself, dialoguing with the insurmountable risk of the intimacy of screens, applications and connections. The bond between the self and the other, perhaps as a result of a careless process of construction which insists

on disregarding its past, is shattered. What remains is the nostalgic longing for a future time. In eternal future. To be lit and extinguished. As if on an invisible wall of an intimate cave where the pure expression of living still urges.

Chico Fernandes proposed a recent action that strengthens his latest corporal researches in the face of the risk of existing in a devastating actuality. It is a perverse game of visual exposure to the daily dangers faced by a large part of the population, discussing the presence of the body as image, rest and also, something of memory. The plurality of the previous proposals is also linked semantically to the nodal incomprehension of the work by a wider public, in a sharp and tense dialogue with devices of control, police forces and other disciplinary regimes, revisiting even an inevitable heritage of the 1960s, without any melancholy, but crossed by a desire to update and confront issues rarely discussed throughout history in Brazil.

In *Eu sou eu e o cavalo não é meu*, from 2021, the artist performs an action at the Monument to the War of Paraguay, located at Praça XV, in Rio de Janeiro, which consists of placing a ladder, climbing the sculptural ensemble and from the top, taking off his bathing suit and completely naked, making a speech with a megaphone (which belonged to another artist, Aimberê César) on the current conditions of horror, helplessness and political emptiness. In this case, the work was concluded with the already foreseen truculent posture of the surveillance and the referral of the artist and friends who accompanied the process, to a police station for the bureaucratic procedures to be established.

Beyond the image, there is a considerable portion of the proposal that escapes from the conveyed action, since what went viral in the Whatsapp groups of all kinds, as well as of the families still able to march with God for ethics and morals, was the unusual action, the torpid image and the debacle of the subject fractured by his own crisis that perhaps, in a movement faithful to his hysterical desire, chooses not to make silent what one wishes to be silent: that we are more than ever, adrift. If this is what circulates as a question and anecdote among a wider public, and if many other symbolic and even imaginary layers are disregarded, perhaps we can be grateful for the other courage to throw ourselves into a diffuse and extremely nebulous area, where art, as a necrotic identity, decidedly no longer fits.





Figura 3  
Chico Fernandes,  
*Eu sou eu e o  
cavalo não é meu*, 2021  
Photo: Clarisse Tarran

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