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**E CONSUMO**

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## Dossiers

## **For commitment to the collective, in spite of all**

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## **Por uma aposta na coletividade, apesar de tudo**

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Gabriela Machado Ramos de Almeida<sup>1</sup> 

Angelita Bogado<sup>2</sup> 

The second volume of the dossier *Production, Circulation, and Consumption of Images Produced in Collectivity and the Fable of the Common* gathers articles that, from various theoretical and methodological perspectives, discuss the relationships between aesthetic experience, forms of collectivity, and political disputes in the fields of contemporary visual and audiovisual cultures. The five works presented here reflect on how images — in their informational, performative, fabulatory, and expository dimensions — mobilize regimes of sensitivity and sense-making that challenge established categories of spectatorship, representation, and reception.

Varying in their approaches and objects, the articles share a common concern: to investigate the ways in which aesthetic experience and contemporary audiovisual production articulate collective, political, and sensitive dimensions. The proposed analyses draw on perspectives such as phenomenology, semiotics, decolonial studies, critical visual studies, and performance theory to challenge the ways of seeing, narrating, and acting in contexts marked by symbolic and social struggles.

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In the opening text of the dossier, titled *Watching a Film with Others: Toward a Theory of Collective Spectatorship*, Julian Hanich proposes an original approach to spectatorship studies. Based on a dialogue between philosophy, phenomenology, and film theory, the author advances toward a theory of collective spectatorship that reexamines the active role of the spectator in situations of enjoyment previously regarded as passive, highlighting the collective dimension of the cinematic experience. This perspective offers elements to consider, for example, possible counterpoints to the trend of individualization of audiovisual consumption due to the growth of streaming, by viewing the cinematic experience as a collective act and suggesting that watching a film silently in the shared space of a movie theater can be conceived as an intentionally shared practice.

Next, the article Collaborative Artistic Creation “*Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido*” by Colectivo Ayllu, authored by Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa, Patrícia de Oliveira Iuva, and Fabio Sadao Nagawaka, focuses on the work “*Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido*”, presented at the 35th São Paulo Biennial. It investigates the modes of visual, corporal, and symbolic inscription that constitute its aesthetic and political materiality. Through the analysis of the gesturality and performance embedded in the textile panel, the authors draw on contributions from semiotics and decolonial studies, pointing to the re-signification of cultural symbols by racialized and dissident subjects in opposition to colonial logic.

In *The ontological and collective body of the actor in Seven Years in May*, the third article of the dossier, authors Eduardo Bordinhon de Moraes and Pedro Guimarães discuss the atoral play in Brazilian productions of the 2010s, with a focus on the presence of non-professional actors. The work examines how the intertwining of actor and character, combined with epic and allegorical resources, operates as a social critique and a collective fabulation that challenges the boundaries between reality and fiction in contemporary national cinema, revealing how these devices address issues of race, class, and gender.

In the realm of cinema, Luiz Fernando Wlian and Laan Mendes de Barros analyze in the article *Broken Bodies Praise the Indiscernible*:

*Dissident Aesthetic Experiences in Contemporary Audiovisual* works by contemporary Brazilian queer collectives, with an emphasis on their aesthetic propositions in response to the transformations of current capitalism, especially in its technological and sensory dimensions. The text proposes the concept of “praise of the indiscernible” as a key to understanding how these works blur boundaries between form and content, identity and difference, establishing zones of experimentation and resistance.

The dossier concludes with the article *On Cruel Images: The Iconicity of Massacres in the Countryside* by João Damasio da Silva Neto, which discusses the page *Massacres in the Countryside* hosted on the website of the Pastoral Land Commission. Based on critical visual studies and a discussion of the mediatization of land conflicts, the analysis explores the iconicity of the images and their capacity to construct regimes of visibility that destabilize the historical silencing surrounding violence in the Brazilian countryside. In the text, the author employs the concepts of everyday disasters and disorientation, highlighting the tension between invisibility and testimony in records of violence in the Brazilian rural context.

This dossier, published in two volumes in the *journal Comunicação, Mídia e Consumo*, is part of the actions planned within the project *Bodies of the Scene/In the Scene: Aesthetic-Political Images Created Collectively in the Recôncavo of Bahia and Greater São Paulo*. It was funded by the Universal Call of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) (CNPq/MCTI/FNDCT No. 18/2021). The team is composed of professors and students from the Graduate Programs in Communication and Consumer Practices at the School of Advertising and Marketing (PPGCOM ESPM) and in Communication at the Federal University of Recôncavo of Bahia (PPGCOM UFRB).

By gathering these articles, we hope that the dossier will help reinforce an appeal for collective action through the valorization of research that centers on collective and community experiences in the discussion. Although the call did not explicitly focus on examining the ethical, aesthetic, and biopolitical impacts of the platformization of life and the autocratic advances promoted by ultraliberal rationality in the fields of

politics, communication, and information, the dossier presents itself as an attempt at a detour by questioning what aesthetic experience can offer in the face of the challenges posed in this historical moment. We invite readers to engage with this collection of reflections on how images and sounds — in their multiple expressive forms and diverse modes of production, circulation, and consumption — can operate as a space for symbolic contestation and political re-inscription of experience.

## Ver una película con otros: rumbo a una teoría del espectador colectivo<sup>1</sup>

### Assistir a um filme com outros: rumo a uma teoria do espectador coletivo

### Quiet-attentive viewing: toward a typology of collective spectatorship

Julian Hanich<sup>1</sup> 

**RESUMEN:** *Este ensayo sugiere que ver colectivamente una película con atención silenciosa debe considerarse una forma de acción conjunta. Cuando los espectadores ven una película en silencio en el cine, no solo participan en acciones individuales; ver con otros a menudo implica una actividad compartida basada en una intención colectiva, en la cual los espectadores prestan atención conjunta a un único objeto: la película. Recurrimos a debates recientes sobre intencionalidad colectiva y sentimientos compartidos en la filosofía analítica y*

- 1 Este artículo es una versión reducida y adaptada del texto originalmente publicado en la revista Screen por Julian Hanich (2014), bajo el título “Watching a film with others: towards a theory of collective spectatorship”. En 2018, una versión expandida del artículo fue publicada como el capítulo 3, “Quiet-Attentive Viewing: Toward a Typology of Collective Spectatorship, Part I”, en el libro *The Audience Effect: On the Collective Cinema Experience*, de Julian Hanich (2018), publicado por Edinburgh University Press. En esta versión aquí publicada, con autorización del autor, Caroline Fogaça realiza traducción y adaptación, con el fin de adecuarse al alcance y formato editorial de la revista *Comunicação, Mídia e Consumo*. Agradecemos al autor por la cesión del trabajo; a la doctoranda Caroline Fogaça (PPGCOM ESPM) por la adaptación y traducción del artículo al portugués; a Oxford University Press y a la revista Screen por la autorización para su publicación en la revista *Comunicação, Mídia e Consumo*. El texto fue publicado originalmente en Screen, v. 55, n. 3, p. 338-359, 2014.

<sup>1</sup>University of Groningen – Groningen, Países Baixos.

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en la fenomenología, y muestro que este enfoque de la filosofía social puede tener ramificaciones importantes para la teoría y la historia del cine. Proponentes de diversas corrientes teóricas — como los estudios culturales, la teoría cognitiva del cine, la fenomenología fílmica o la estética de la recepción — consideran que el espectador está activamente involucrado con la película. Si esto es cierto y todos los espectadores están activos, sentados en la misma sala de cine viendo la misma película de manera silenciosa y atenta, parece razonable argumentar que, en algún sentido importante, actúan conjuntamente. Mi argumento servirá como un paso hacia una teoría y fenomenología más amplias del espectador colectivo en el cine — un aspecto subvalorado en la historia de la teoría cinematográfica.

**Palabras clave:** espectador colectivo; afecto; intercorporeidad; experiencia compartida; cine.

**RESUMO:** *Este ensaio sugere que assistir coletivamente a um filme com atenção silenciosa deve ser considerado uma forma de ação conjunta. Quando espectadores assistem a um filme em silêncio no cinema, eles não estão apenas envolvidos em ações individuais – assistir com outros frequentemente implica uma atividade compartilhada baseada em uma intenção coletiva, na qual os espectadores prestam atenção conjunta a um único objeto: o filme. Recorrendo a debates recentes sobre intencionalidade coletiva e sentimentos compartilhados na filosofia analítica e na fenomenologia, mostro que essa abordagem da filosofia social pode ter ramificações importantes para a teoria e a história do cinema. Proponentes de diversas abordagens teóricas — como estudos culturais, teoria cognitiva do cinema, fenomenologia fílmica ou estética da recepção — consideram o espectador ativamente envolvido com o filme. Se isso for verdade e os espectadores estiverem todos ativos, sentados na mesma sala de cinema assistindo ao mesmo filme de maneira quieta e atenta, parece razoável argumentar que, em algum sentido importante, eles agem conjuntamente. Meu argumento servirá como um passo em direção a uma teoria e fenomenologia mais abrangentes do espectador coletivo no cinema — um aspecto subvalorizado na história da teoria cinematográfica.*

**Palavras-chave:** espectraloria coletiva; afeto; intercorporeidade; experiência compartilhada; cinema.

**ABSTRACT:** *This essay suggests that collectively watching a film with quiet attention should be considered a kind of joint action. When silently watching a film in a cinema the viewers are not merely engaged in individual actions— watching a film with others often implies a shared activity based on a collective intention in which the viewers jointly attend to a single object: the film. Drawing*

*on recent debates about collective intentionality and shared feelings in analytic philosophy and phenomenology, I show that this import of social philosophy can have important ramifications for film theory and history. Proponents of diverse film theoretical approaches like cultural studies, cognitive film theory, film phenomenology or reception aesthetics consider the viewer actively involved with the film. If this is true and the spectators are all active, sitting in the same movie theatre watching the same film in a quiet, attentive way, it seems reasonable to argue that in some important sense they act jointly. My argument will serve as a step towards a more comprehensive theory and phenomenology of collective spectatorship at the movies, an aspect undervalued in the history of film theory.*

**Keywords:** *collective spectatorship; affect; intercorporeality; shared experience; cinema.*

## Texto traducido y adaptado

En este artículo, propongo que ver una película en silencio y con atención colectiva sea una acción conjunta. En el cine (o en otro espacio), no se trata solo de acciones individuales paralelas; ver una película con otros implica una actividad compartida y una intención colectiva, con la atención puesta en un único objeto: la película. A diferencia de tocar en una orquesta o jugar, es un caso singular, ya que puede hacerse solo y requiere poco esfuerzo para alcanzar su objetivo común. Sin embargo, esta simplicidad no elimina su carácter esencialmente social, configurando una forma específica de acción conjunta en el espacio teatral.

Los estudios culturales, la teoría cognitiva, la fenomenología del cine y la estética de la recepción consideran al espectador como alguien involucrado activamente: decodifica, interpreta, construye hipótesis e imagina lo no mostrado. Sin embargo, ver una película implica cierta pasividad, especialmente en comparación con otras acciones. Reconocer esta dualidad permite superar la dicotomía espectador activo/pasivo: en cierto sentido, es pasivo, pero en otro, es activo.

Ver una película presenta características que califican este acto como una acción. Se trata de una acción mental, que requiere atención e interés continuos. Es un acto voluntario, motivado por el deseo y la intención de seguir la narrativa. Aunque no implica un gran esfuerzo físico, es una acción sostenida. Si restringimos el concepto de acción a movimientos corporales explícitos, estaríamos excluyendo procesos mentales como prestar atención. La meditación, por ejemplo, es ampliamente aceptada como una acción sostenida, y ver una película en silencio se asemeja a ella en ese aspecto.

¿Si todos en la platea ven la misma película en silencio y con atención, podemos considerar eso una acción conjunta? A diferencia de pasajeros silenciosos en un tren, aquí hay una actividad compartida. Además, ver una película solo en el cine es fenomenológicamente distinto de hacerlo como parte de una audiencia atenta. Así, esta experiencia configura una acción conjunta, basada en una intención colectiva (una intención de nosotros) y en una atención compartida dirigida al mismo objeto.

La colectividad silenciosa en el cine rara vez se vuelve explícita: se comparte la experiencia sin una reflexión consciente sobre los demás. La presencia ajena permanece en un segundo plano, pudiendo emerger, pero sin exigir una conciencia plena. Esta acción conjunta pre-reflexiva puede intensificarse en momentos de alta emotividad, cuando la colectividad alcanza un nivel mayor, combinando acción y emoción compartidas. Estos sentimientos no siempre son plenamente reflexionados, pero hacen que la experiencia colectiva sea más evidente.

Históricamente, la platea silenciosa y atenta contrasta con el Teatro Conversacional propuesto por Vachel Lindsay en 1915. Su modelo para el cine mudo sugería una platea intelectualmente comprometida, cuya conversación crítica formaba un murmullo constante, funcionando como una esfera pública de intercambio comunicativo. Lindsey recomendaba este formato a los exhibidores locales, incentivándolos a crear un ambiente en el que los espectadores comentaran y juzgaran estéticamente la película.

Un ejemplo ideal de platea silenciosa y atenta es el Cine Invisible de Peter Kubelka (1974), proyectado para *Anthology Film Archive* en Nueva York. Su función era transmitir “el mensaje filmado del autor al espectador con el mínimo de pérdida”, permitiendo que “la película dictara completamente la sensación de espacio”. (KUBELKA, 1974, p. 32). Ningún atrasado era admitido; todo permanecía en negro, excepto las placas de salida, y los asientos bloqueaban la vista de los vecinos. Aunque parecía excluir la experiencia colectiva, el concepto enfatizaba la comunidad. Poco después del cierre del Cine Invisible, esta fue la descripción de su dimensión colectiva:

¿Sabía que había muchas personas en la sala, podía sentir su presencia y escucharlas suavemente, sin perturbar su contacto con la película? Se creaba una comunidad amigable. En el cine convencional, donde aparecen cabezas en la pantalla, escuchamos palomitas siendo masticadas y conversaciones que interrumpen la inmersión; empiezo a no gustar de los demás. La arquitectura debe ofrecer una estructura donde uno esté en una comunidad sin perturbaciones. (KUBELKA, 1974, p. 34).

Incluso en una atención silenciosa extrema, la colectividad de la platea se hace presente. El Teatro Conversacional y el Cine Invisible representan formas distintas de colectividad, pero ambas son colectivas. Ver una película en silencio y con atención es una acción conjunta. Quien conversa, duerme o usa el celular no presta atención, mucho menos atención conjunta. Se esperan pequeñas distracciones, pero en general, el enfoque en la película contribuye a la acción conjunta. En resumen: quien ve la película, la ve con otros — y, así, la ve conjuntamente.

La platea silenciosa y atenta está moldeada por factores como la arquitectura, la tecnología, la película y el contexto social. El espacio, los reflejos, las luces de salida y el sistema de sonido influyen en la inmersión. La pantalla, la posición y el contexto institucional también impactan. El tipo de película — acción, drama, experimental o documental — determina la intensidad de la experiencia colectiva.

Generar más conocimiento empírico sobre estos factores sería valioso, combinando investigaciones cuantitativas, entrevistas cualitativas y descripciones fenomenológicas. Aquí, propongo solo una abstracción teórica de la espectadoridad colectiva silenciosa, definida como un tipo ideal weberiano. Esta heurística permite comparar casos históricos de audiencias atentas viendo diferentes películas y géneros. El silencio activo de la audiencia atenta merece un análisis más profundo, ya que desafía oposiciones simplistas entre pasividad y expresividad, como ya exploré en otros trabajos<sup>1</sup>.

Este ensayo se inspira en debates recientes de la filosofía analítica y de la fenomenología sobre la intencionalidad colectiva y los sentimientos compartidos. Filósofos como Raimo Tuomela, John Searle, Margaret Gilbert (2007) y Hans Bernhard Schmid (2008) refinan esta discusión sobre ontología social. Reformularé algunos de sus argumentos a la luz del cine y mostraré que esta incorporación de la filosofía social puede tener ramificaciones productivas para la teoría y la historiografía del cine.

Mi argumento contribuye a tres debates. Primero, ayuda a reevaluar a la audiencia silenciosa y atenta, que muchas veces es vista de manera

1 Cf. Hanich (2010a; 2010b).

negativa. Mirian Hansen (1991, p. 61) valora la interactividad de *nickelodeon* frente a la “mera experiencia pasiva” del cine clásico. William Paul (1994) exalta la expresividad de los públicos de terror escatológico y de las comedias animales, ignorando la espectadoridad silenciosa. Lakshmi Srinivas (2002) destaca que, mientras en Occidente la audiencia rara vez habla en voz alta, en la India la recepción es interactiva, formando lazos comunitarios a través de los medios de comunicación masiva.

Podemos concebir la diferencia entre la audiencia silenciosa y atenta — que Casetti (2010) llama de asistencia — y los espectadores más expresivos y distraídos — que el autor asocia con la performance — mediante oposiciones binarias: comportamiento contenido/expresivo, supresión/exhibición de la emoción, disciplina/libertad, pasividad física/actividad corporal, silencio/expresividad vocal y, sobre todo, individualidad/colectividad. Sin embargo, como veremos, el silencio activo (GERRIG; PRENTICE, 1996) de la platea atenta desafía esas divisiones simplistas, demostrando que estas categorías no se sostienen de manera rígida.

Segundo, mi argumento impacta la historiografía al proponer una reinterpretación crítica de la tesis de la individualización de Hansen (1991) y Elsaesser (2002). Para ellos, la transición al cine clásico disolvió la colectividad, pero la recepción silenciosa y atenta favorecía una acción conjunta y sentimientos compartidos. Esto indica un cambio en los tipos de colectividad, no su pérdida. Las relaciones de la audiencia dejan de ser dialógicas, pero no se vuelven meramente imaginarias, como en la televisión. Este ensayo, así, cuestiona las concepciones normativas de colectividad basadas en la interacción cara a cara.

Por último, avanzo en la teorización y fenomenología de la espectadoridad colectiva en el cine, un tema históricamente subvalorado. Con excepción de autores como Barthes (1989) y Morin (2005), la experiencia colectiva fue tratada como secundaria, excepto cuando diferenciaba períodos, géneros o cines nacionales. Incluso Baudry (1986a; 1986b), al discutir el aparato cinematográfico, se desconsideró la presencia de otros espectadores, enfocándose en el sujeto individual. Solo recientemente, estudiosos de la Nueva Historia del Cine, como Richard Maltby, Melvyn

Stokes, Annette Kuhn, Philippe Meers o Robert C. Allen, han resaltado la dimensión social de la recepción fílmica, pero aún sin abordar la fenomenología y la teoría de la platea silenciosa y atenta.

La reticencia a teorizar la experiencia colectiva silenciosa en el cine puede derivar del hecho de que otras artes, como el teatro, la ópera y el ballet, también involucran audiencias silenciosas. Para destacar la especificidad del cine, los teóricos minimizaron estos puntos en común. Aunque esto es válido para la historia de la teoría del cine, este argumento no aclara qué diferencia a esas audiencias. Aquí no abordo esas distinciones, pero el silencio en el cine implica factores únicos, como la ausencia de intérpretes y la oscuridad de la sala. Los estudios comparados de medios son esenciales, pero esto no invalida la relevancia de este análisis para la teoría e historiografía del cine.

Antes de que mi argumento parezca plausible, necesito abordar algunos términos: nosotros-intención, atención conjunta y acción conjunta. ¿Cómo afirmar que espectadores anónimos comparten una nosotros-intención de ver la película conjuntamente? A pesar de la ausencia de vínculos previos, acciones como elegir la película y ocupar asientos revelan un objetivo común, estableciendo una nosotros-intención práctica mínima — una asociación voluntaria temporal.

Esta intencionalidad colectiva práctica difiere de la cognitiva (opinión o convicción compartida) y de la afectiva (emoción o humor común), pero puede incluirlas. Compartimos el interés por la película (intencionalidad cognitiva) y, desde el principio, una expectativa común de una buena experiencia (intencionalidad afectiva), que puede profundizarse a lo largo de la sesión.

La intencionalidad colectiva puede variar en intensidad, de débil a fuerte. En el extremo fuerte, existe una nosotros-intención explícita, como en parejas o amigos que deciden ir al cine. A nivel medio, ocurre cuando los espectadores comparten una identidad colectiva, como fans de *Star Wars* acampando para un estreno. Incluso en una nosotros-intención débil, ver una película en el cine implica adherirse a normas sociales y realizar sacrificios individuales, lo que indica una intención conjunta.

Incluso al simplemente ver una película en el cine del barrio, podemos hablar de una nosotros-intención débil. Aunque no formulamos explícitamente el objetivo de ver la película junto a desconocidos, el contexto — horario, lugar, audiencia — distingue esa experiencia de la rutina cotidiana. Además, al seguir normas sociales, reconocemos implícitamente un objetivo común: ver la película. Elegir el cine puede tener razones prácticas, pero el hecho de sacrificar intereses personales inmediatos, como atender el teléfono o conversar, refuerza esa intención conjunta.

Ver una película en el cine requiere más que una intención individual, ya que implica una pérdida de libertad. Elsaesser (1981) llama eso de “término fijo de encierro”, donde el espectador está confinado y aislado visualmente. Tröhler (2012) compara con un museo, donde hay más libertad de ir y venir. Como el cine exige adherirse a normas, aceptarlas indica una nosotros-intención, aunque débil: ver la película juntos. Para evitar una visión demasiado esquemática, es importante notar que diferentes niveles de nosotros-intención pueden coexistir: un espectador danés en Berlín puede tener una nosotros-intención fuerte en ver la película con su cónyuge, media con otros daneses y débil con la platea general.

La atención conjunta implica un foco intencional común (GILBERT, 2007); aunque periférica, “puede variar en intensidad [...] dependiendo de cuánto nos monitorizamos unos a otros” (COCHRANE, 2009, p. 65). Pero, si la platea no interactúa, ¿cómo inferimos esa atención? En primer lugar, el dispositivo cinematográfico impone un enfoque único: los asientos orientados hacia la pantalla y la oscuridad guían la percepción. En el museo, hay múltiples opciones de atención, asemejándose a un comportamiento de compras en una vitrina (PANTENBURG, 2010), pero en el cine, el espectador se enfoca exclusivamente en la película.

En segundo lugar, la inmovilidad favorece la atención conjunta. A diferencia de los museos, donde el visitante transita y la atención es breve (TRÖHLER, 2012), en el cine, los espectadores permanecen inmóviles, privándose de la libertad motora para concentrarse en la película. En los años 1970, además de la teoría paranoica del aparato, surgieron

visiones utópicas del cine como un espacio de percepción concentrada (PANTENBURG, 2012). Cineastas como Frampton, Kubelka y Smithsonian consideraban la inmovilidad y el silencio como esenciales para la atención. Las discusiones sobre el cine contemplativo refuerzan esta idea, sugiriendo que una platea atenta puede generar experiencias más significativas en la economía de la atención (BIRÓ, 2006).

En tercer lugar, y más importante, el silencio y la ausencia de interacción verbal en el cine indican atención conjunta. El silencio es audible, al igual que las conversaciones, risas o gritos. Aquí, lo que llamo atención silenciosa presupone compromiso, descartando la pasividad o el sueño. Este silencio refleja una atención audiovisual enfocada y en la que asumimos que los demás espectadores también están atentos. Así, el silencio actúa como una señal de colectividad, priorizando la película sobre las reacciones individuales. Cuando ocurren conversaciones, mensajes o movimientos, se vuelve evidente que la atención ha dejado de ser conjunta.

La atención conjunta de la audiencia se vuelve aún más evidente cuando se contrasta con los momentos previos a la película. Antes de la proyección, hay movimiento, conversaciones y distracciones. La transición previa a la película — trailers, apagado de luces — marca una “cambio fenoménico”. (SCHMID, 2005, p. 18) de una atención individual a una intención colectiva de nosotros.

La acción conjunta y la atención conjunta están relacionadas: Kriebich e Gallagher (2012) argumentan que intencionar estar atentos al mismo objeto ya configura una acción conjunta básica. Sin embargo, definiendo que la atención conjunta de la audiencia silenciosa va más allá de esa noción. En la literatura sobre intencionalidad colectiva, se mencionan tres aspectos recurrentes de la acción conjunta: comportamiento sincronizado, intenciones colectivas (nosotros-intenciones) y acuerdos normativos.

Angelika Krebs (2010) define comportamiento sincronizado como ajuste mutuo de las acciones. En una orquesta o danza, si alguien se detiene o sale del ritmo, la acción conjunta se deshace. En el cine, perturbaciones como hablar por teléfono son perceptibles, pero quedarse

dormido puede pasar desapercibido. Sin embargo, la atención silenciosa y colectiva persiste.

Aunque la acción conjunta normalmente implica movimientos físicos, asistir y escuchar son acciones mentales sincronizadas. Además, el público cumple con un criterio esencial para la acción conjunta: comportamiento sincronizado. La sincronización depende de tres factores: inmovilidad, silencio y atención. El público regula su atención mediante el silencio y la inmovilidad, priorizando la película.

La atención conjunta es necesaria pero insuficiente para la acción conjunta del público silencioso, que no se revela únicamente externamente. El silencio y la inmovilidad no la garantizan, ya que una sala homogénea puede ocultar pensamientos individuales. Schmid (2005) resalta que nuestras intenciones, fundamentales para la pertenencia grupal, independen de la conciencia reflexiva. Así, la acción conjunta del público resulta de la interacción entre nosotros-intenciones y el comportamiento sincronizado.

Los tres tipos de nosotros-intención de Schmid (2005) — práctica (objetivo común), cognitiva (opinión compartida) y afectiva (emoción común) — deben estar alineadas. La intención práctica de ver una película y la atención conjunta no garantizan una acción conjunta si existen divergencias cognitivas o afectivas. Por ejemplo, una espectadora en una sala predominantemente masculina puede percibir el silencio al ver una película de acción misógina no como atención, sino como aprobación. Para ella, hay una ruptura en la intencionalidad colectiva: cognitivamente, ve la película como retrógrada, mientras que los demás pueden no importarle; afectivamente, siente incomodidad, mientras los otros se divierten. Así, difícilmente se percibe que se está viendo la película “con” los demás. Sin embargo, mientras estas diferencias no se vuelven explícitas, nuestra intención y la atención conjunta son solo presunciones.

La objeción de que cada espectador podría ver la película solo ignora nuestra intención y los acuerdos normativos. Searle (s/d) afirma que “externamente, los dos casos son indistinguibles, pero son diferentes internamente” (*apud* SCHMID, 2005, p. 53). La objeción ignora

nosotros-intenciones y el acuerdo normativo implícito al ver una película en grupo, que involucra derechos y obligaciones sociales. Seguir estas normas y confiar en que los demás harán lo mismo transforma “yo veo la película” en “nosotros vemos la película”.

Ir al cine no significa solo seguir normas sociales, sino que también implica derechos derivados de nosotros-intenciones. Como destaca Gilbert (1990), al caminar juntas, las personas asumen obligaciones recíprocas para alcanzar un objetivo común y tienen el derecho de reprender a quienes no las cumplen. Estos derechos y obligaciones no son meramente morales ni resultado de intereses propios, sino que emergen directamente de la experiencia compartida.

Aplicando dicha discusión a la experiencia cinematográfica, ver una película solo en un museo no crea una nosotros-intención con otras personas en el espacio. Si alguien cercano comenta sobre otra obra, puede ser una distracción, pero no existe un derecho a reprender. Sin embargo, en el cine, sí existe una nosotros-intención de ver juntos. Por eso, cuando alguien es reprendido por romper el silencio, generalmente reconoce ese derecho y rara vez cuestiona la obligación de respetar la experiencia colectiva.

Cuanto más consideramos la experiencia cinematográfica como una actividad compartida, más fuerte es el acuerdo normativo, mayor la obligación de seguirlo y mayor el derecho a molestarse por su violación. Esto vale tanto para la audiencia silenciosa como para los espectadores expresivos. Por ejemplo, en una película musical, negarse a cantar puede contrastar negativamente. En cambio, que un desconocido duerma a tu lado puede parecer irrelevante, pero si es tu cónyuge, puede generar irritación. La experiencia colectiva requiere un compromiso mutuo hasta la conclusión de la película (KRIEBICH; GALLAGHER, 2012). En el cine, evitar salir antes del final demuestra ese compromiso. La diferencia crucial entre la experiencia colectiva con copresencia real y aquella basada en una audiencia imaginada radica en los derechos y obligaciones involucrados. En el segundo caso, además de la ausencia de una atmósfera afectiva y contagio emocional, no existen compromisos reales entre los espectadores.

Hasta ahora, he argumentado de manera negativa. Ahora, expreso el punto positivo: la ausencia de comunicación verbal y los múltiples focos de atención permiten el silencio, la inmovilidad y un objeto compartido con intención. El silencio puede ser valioso para destacar la experiencia auditiva, por lo que debe ser valorado, no condenado. Pagis (2010), en estudios etnográficos sobre meditación, se observa que el silencio suele ser visto con frecuencia como opresivo, asociado a la negación de la voz. Por otro lado, estudios sobre cine destacan prácticas como conversar y cantar como acciones liberadoras, pero Pagis (2010) argumenta que los silencios compartidos pueden ser constitutivos, ya que permiten experiencias únicas, como en la meditación colectiva.

En el cine, el silencio sincroniza a la audiencia, creando un sentido de intersubjetividad que no requiere reflexión consciente. Las reacciones verbales hacen visibles diferencias que antes eran imperceptibles, fragmentando la acción conjunta: risas de burla contrastan con las de aprobación; los comentarios pueden incluir o excluir. Incluso en la concordancia estética, verbalizar un juicio rompe la experiencia colectiva. Así, el silencio fomenta una intersubjetividad más inclusiva. Como Pagis (2010, p. 324) coloca,

La intersubjetividad silenciosa [...] permite una forma más general e inclusiva, que no está obsesionada con comparaciones exactas de una mente con otra. [...] En realidad, puede prevenir procesos de ‘otroficación’, conectando a las personas a través del compromiso incorporado en el mismo evento.

La atención silenciosa facilita esa sintonía, reforzada por señales no verbales como la inmovilidad y el silencio. Sin embargo, como Pagis (2010, p. 314) destaca, “la intersubjetividad es más una experiencia que una afirmación de una verdad real sobre el mundo”. Aunque los espectadores interpreten la película de diferentes maneras — como lo evidencian estudios de recepción —, la ausencia de señales contradictorias permite suponer una experiencia colectiva tácita, mantenida mientras no sea desafiada. Schmid (2008, p. 78) complementa:

En la vida cotidiana, parece que experimentamos pocos de nuestros estados conscientes como algo estrictamente personal. De hecho, solo los consideramos nuestros cuando hay razón para creer que pueden ser diferentes a los de cualquier otra persona. Cuando eso no sucede, simplemente pensamos lo que se piensa o lo que generalmente se piensa, de manera impersonal o anónima.

Incluso sin seguir integralmente Schmid (2008), podemos argumentar que, en contextos estéticos, con frecuencia proyectamos nuestra experiencia en los demás, convirtiéndola involuntaria y pre-reflexivamente en una norma temporal. En el cine, la experiencia parece compartida hasta que alguien la contradice o percibimos su singularidad. Si esto remite al narcisismo freudiano, se vuelve menos controvertido al considerar que la similitud de la experiencia se da tácitamente como un estándar. En ausencia de diferencias socioculturales explícitas, ese patrón se mantiene, y el público silencioso y atento lo refuerza.

No debemos olvidar que la experiencia colectiva del cine puede generar placer simplemente por la acción conjunta. Sentarse en la audiencia y ver una película juntos puede ser placentero porque lo estamos haciendo en el mismo momento. Como caminar en silencio con alguien, ver una película en grupo puede ser más agradable que hacerlo solo, sin plena conciencia de este hecho. Este placer proviene de la sincronización y coordinación facilitadas por la atención inmóvil. Alternativas como cantar o gritar requieren mayor esfuerzo para sincronizarse. Sin embargo, la atención silenciosa es frágil. A diferencia de alguien que se queda dormido discretamente, una persona que atiende su celular rompe nuestra intención compartida, señalando que no está prestando atención conjuntamente.

Ver una película en silencio y con atención permite una experiencia colectiva valorada sin necesidad de reflexión explícita. Además, esta vivencia favorece el compartir de emociones y afectos. Hitchcock buscaba estandarizar las respuestas del público, creando una emoción de masa: “Si ha diseñado correctamente una película en términos de su impacto emocional, el público japonés gritará al mismo tiempo que el público indio”. (WILLIAMS, 2004, p. 168). Un ejemplo es *Psycho* (*Psicosis*,

en español) (1960), en la que Hitchcock exigía que el público viera la película de principio a fin, sin interrupciones. Sorprendentemente, los espectadores aceptaban esta regla. ¿Por qué?

Este análisis destaca cómo la disciplina y la sincronización colectiva no solo intensifican la experiencia estética en el cine, sino que también refuerzan los lazos entre los espectadores. La atención colectiva absorbente amplifica las reacciones emocionales y corporales, haciendo que el miedo sea más intenso y efectivo. Como Williams (2004, p. 185) argumenta:

Lo que vemos aquí es la concepción del público como un grupo con una solidaridad común: someterse a una experiencia de excitación y miedo mezclados, y reconocer esas reacciones en los demás, e incluso quizás representarlas unos para otros.

La experiencia de ver *Psycho* (1960) bajo las reglas de Hitchcock, no solo se disciplinó al público, sino que también se intensificó el placer colectivo, permitiendo que los espectadores compartieran y representaran sus reacciones. Este fenómeno ocurre en varias experiencias cinematográficas, donde la atención silenciosa y la reacción conjunta moldean la percepción y el impacto de la película.

La espectadoridad silenciosa y atenta es una práctica históricamente construida y culturalmente aprendida. Kennedy (2009) destaca que todas las respuestas del público son socializadas, y Butsch (2000, p. 2) reafirma: “cómo los discursos públicos construyen a las audiencias, cómo las audiencias se conciben y qué hacen son contingentes históricamente”. Esto refuta la idea de un progreso lineal hacia la autodisciplina (Foucault) o supresión del afecto (Norbert Elias), porque las reacciones expresivas también son socialmente aprendidas. Al comparar el cine con la cueva de Platón, espectadores silenciosos y atentos existen desde hace milenios, evidenciando la construcción histórica de esta práctica.

No es una visión unánime que una audiencia silenciosa y atenta implique un tipo de colectividad. Miriam Hansen (1991) y Thomas Elsaesser (2002), por ejemplo, defienden la individualización, y aquí confronta esa tesis. Los autores argumentan que los cambios en el estilo, el

direccionamiento, la exhibición y las normas de comportamiento impactan en la recepción colectiva. Al contrastar el cine primitivo y el clásico, ven una regulación creciente de la platea. Hansen (1991) valora el bullicio y las expresiones espontáneas, mientras Elsaesser (2002) lamenta la disciplina impuesta. El cine primitivo permitía mayor movilidad e interacción: los espectadores fumaban, bebían, leían y comían, creando una “organización alternativa de la experiencia pública” (Hansen, 1990, p. 233).

La transición de los *nickelodeons* para los cines-palacio y del cine de atracciones, el paso al cine clásico de Hollywood resultó en la individualización de los espectadores. Hansen (1990) describe una “institucionalización del voyeurismo privado en un espacio público”, donde un “consumidor invisible y privado” reemplaza a la “platea social” — o “colectiva”, según Elsaesser (2000). Hansen (1991) menciona un “aislamiento endémico al aparato clásico”. El cine, que antes era vibrante y comunicativo, se convirtió en una multitud solitaria de receptores. Châteauevert y Gaudreault (2001, p. 190) lamentan que “¡con el silencio, el régimen de consumo de películas puede haber permitido que el espectador pasara imperceptiblemente de un modo solidario a un modo solitario de consumo!”.

Hansen (1991) y Elsaesser (2002) siguen un enfoque crítico válido en los años 1990 y 2000, pero que pasa por alto aspectos de la fenomenología colectiva de la audiencia. El regreso de la fenomenología y el enfoque en la emoción y el afecto en el cine permiten descripciones más matizadas de las interrelaciones entre los espectadores. Sugieren que nuevos modos de exhibición y normas llevaron a una absorción aislada, sobrestimando el impacto de la película y subestimando la experiencia colectiva. Sin embargo, como cuestiona Tröhler (2012, p. 67), ¿no sería posible que, “dirigidos como individuos, nos sintamos simultáneamente insertos en la multitud”?

Hansen (1991) y Elsaesser (2002) vinculan la esfera pública y la audiencia colectiva a la comunicación verbal y la interacción expresiva, contrastándolas con la recepción silenciosa del cine clásico de Hollywood. La tesis de la individualización resulta convincente desde esta perspectiva, pero reduce la vida social a la interacción cara a cara. Experiencias colectivas como tocar música, meditar o lamentar en silencio evidencian

formas alternativas de conexión. Hansen (1991, p. 95) denuncia la regla del silencio como una supresión de la clase media de las “normas de convivialidad y expresividad de la clase trabajadora”, mientras Elsaesser (2002) ve la recepción silenciosa como un comportamiento aprendido. Ambos romantizan la expresividad popular, ignorando que la atención y la acción conjuntas pueden generar otro tipo de colectividad.

Existe una tensión entre la idea de espectadores clásicos homogéneos y la de un espectador aislado. Además, suponer que las audiencias ruidosas de los *nickelodeons* formaban un colectivo es problemático. Hansen (1991) sostiene que la transición del cine primitivo al clásico subyuga las distinciones sociales y culturales entre los espectadores, transformándolos en un grupo homogéneo. Pero si esas distinciones eran marcadas, ¿cómo podría existir una verdadera audiencia colectiva?

La tesis de la individualización contradice el crecimiento de las audiencias urbanas. A finales de los años 1920, el Roxy (Nueva York) albergaba a más de 6.200 espectadores y el Ufa-Filmpalast (Hamburgo), a más de 2.700. ¿Se veían estos espectadores como una multitud solitaria? En comparación con los pequeños teatros callejeros, la experiencia colectiva cambió. Si solo fuera una pérdida, ¿por qué fue aceptada? Quizás porque también hubo una ganancia, ignorada por Hansen (1991) y Elsaesser (2002).

Mi reevaluación de la audiencia silenciosa y atenta puede parecer retrógrada o restrictiva, especialmente frente a la crítica brechtiana-benjaminiana de la Escuela de Frankfurt hacia la cultura de masas y a la recepción “burguesa” contemplativa y acrítica, que sostiene la tesis de la individualización. Sin embargo, esa no es mi intención. Mi defensa de la audiencia silenciosa también aplica a la recepción de obras experimentales, vanguardistas y modernistas. Aunque un thriller de Hollywood como *El Silencio de los Inocentes* (1991) parezca el ejemplo típico, la atención centrada en una película de autor como *Persona* (1966) en un museo de cine demuestra el mismo principio. No afirmo que esas películas se experimenten de la misma forma, pero que, donde hay silencio y atención, el cine funciona como una acción conjunta.

En segundo lugar, mi argumento sobre la audiencia silenciosa no refuerza una visión “burguesa” de la experiencia estética. Conuerdo con

Benjamin (2002, p. 116) al distinguir la recepción solitaria de la pintura de la recepción colectiva del cine, este último descrito como “un objeto de recepción colectiva simultánea”. Sin embargo, a diferencia de ello, no celebro la distracción como emancipadora. Defiendo que ver una película en silencio y atención crea una situación rara en la que no hay disonancia de intenciones, necesidad de coordinación o exigencia de interacción verbal. Esto no significa descartar Benjamin (2002) ni normatizar a la audiencia silenciosa, sino reconsiderar sus beneficios sin una prescripción normativa.

En tercer lugar, mi argumento no presupone una absorción ingenua y acrítica, sino que permite un distanciamiento crítico y reflexión. La atención silenciosa colectiva puede, además, favorecer la reflexión. En ese sentido, Alexander Horwath (*apud* PANTENBURG, 2012, p. 92) compara el cine al museo:

En el clima socioeconómico y cultural actual, el espacio espacial y temporalmente inflexible del cine es potencialmente más propicio a una experiencia reflexiva o crítica del mundo a través de imágenes que la mayoría de los espacios museísticos.

Sin embargo, la acción conjunta discutida aquí se basa en la filosofía social analítica y en las teorías de la acción, no en la ciencia política. No equivale al activismo, aunque no excluye formas políticas de acción a largo plazo.

Por último, pero no menos importante, en mi libro sobre la fenomenología del miedo en el cine, argumenté que las reacciones expresivas pueden favorecer a la colectividad (HANICH, 2010a). Gritar colectivamente en momentos de shock, por ejemplo, es una forma de comunicación que posibilita una experiencia compartida. Aunque este ensayo no celebra la comunicación del público, eso no implica rechazo a estos modos de espectadoridad. Solo propongo una heurística para diferenciar tipos de experiencia colectiva — incluyendo al público silencioso y atento.

Al destacar que incluso la espectadoridad silenciosa y atenta implica una experiencia colectiva, mi argumento enfatiza lo que está en juego en la creciente individualización de la experiencia cinematográfica. No se trata de nostalgia por la experiencia teatral, sino de demostrar

que ver una película solo en silencio no equivale a verla en silencio con otros. La atención colectiva silenciosa posibilita un tipo distinto de colectividad, alineado con sociedades individualizadas que aún anhelan experiencias compartidas. Ver una película en el cine es un acto social — una acción conjunta con intenciones y sentimientos colectivos.

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## The collaborative artistic creation “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido,” by Colectivo Ayllu

### A criação artística colaborativa “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido”, do Colectivo Ayllu

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**ABSTRACT:** *In this article, we aim to discuss the aesthetic and political inflections performed in the collaborative creation titled “Bordar-Lands: las Cartas son el tejido,” by Colectivo Ayllu and exhibited at the 35th Bienal de São Paulo. In it, one can notice the presence of collaborative writing whose visuality is constructed throughout the performance and gestures of the most varied bodies inscribed in the fabric panel. Following the movement indicated by the gestures in the materiality of the piece, the analysis focuses on the associative relationships suggested from the spiral located in the center of the composition and the mention of “clandestine historiography” present in another fragment, and articulates references related to the field of semiotics, performance, decolonial studies, and religions of African origin. Hence, we seek to understand how certain cultural symbols related to Indigenous and Afro-diasporic peoples are resignified, which in turn constructs a position against colonialism.*

**Keywords:** *Colectivo Ayllu; collaborative creation; visual languages; decolonial creation; orality.*

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**RESUMO:** *Este artigo objetiva discutir as inflexões estéticas e políticas presentes na criação colaborativa intitulada “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido”, realizada pelo Colectivo Ayllu e exposta na 35ª Bienal de São Paulo. Nela, nota-se a presença de uma escrita colaborativa cuja visualidade constrói-se pela performance e pela gestualidade dos mais variados corpos que inscrevem o painel-tecido. Seguindo o movimento indicado pelos gestos na materialidade da peça, a análise tem como foco as relações associativas sugeridas com base na espiral alocada no centro da composição e na menção à “historiografia clandestina” presente em outro fragmento, e articula referenciais relacionados ao campo da semiótica, da performance, dos estudos decoloniais e das religiões de matriz africana. Com isso, busca-se apreender de que maneira ocorre a resignificação de determinados símbolos culturais relacionados aos povos originários e afrodiáspóricos que, por sua vez, constroem um posicionamento contrário ao colonialismo.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Colectivo Ayllu; criação colaborativa; linguagens visuais; criação decolonial; oralituras.*

## Introduction

Based on the concept of decoloniality as praxis, several collectives emerged in the Abya Yala<sup>1</sup> and its diaspora, proposing a theoretical-political practice aimed at thinking and acting differently. Such is the case of Migrantes Transgresorxs [Transgresorxs Migrants] (2024), a collective of racialized, migrant, Black people, several refugees with different sexual and gender identities (neo-colonized, precarious, transfeminists and intercultural — LTIGB), constituted in 2009 in Madrid. As a result of the Migrantes Transgresorx, as of 2017, another formation was established: The Ayllu Collective. Inspired by the *Quechua* concept, the name Ayllu means non-biological community or family and indicates the focus on community thinking and being in community in the artistic work carried out by the Collective. According to Alex Aguirre, member of Ayllu: “We came from different contexts, from the territories of Abya Yala, from anti-racist movements and sexual dissent, researchers, artists, and because of this energy we got together, also having the Migrantes Transgresorxs as a reference and link to the Ayllu Collective” (*apud* CARRERA; COLECTIVO AYLLU, 2020 p. 1, free translation).

The Ayllu Collective stands out for carrying out political-artistic actions and sociocultural practices with the contribution of different collaborators who explain the experiences and oppressions faced mainly by dissident and racialized bodies. Composed by Alex Aguirre Sanchez, Leticia/ Kimy Rojas Miranda, Francisco Godoy Vega, Lucrecia Masson Córdoba, and Iki Yos Piña Narváez Funes, the collective is defined as a “collaborative group of research and artistic-political action formed by racialized migrants, sexual and gender dissidents of former European colonies in Latin America and the Caribbean” (CARRERA; COLECTIVO AYLLU, 2020, p. 1, free translation).

1 “Abya-Yala” is an expression derived from the Kuna language used to designate the territory we know today as the “American continent.” “Yala” is the denomination for land, territory. “Abya” denotes mother, mature young, vital blood. Together, the terms transmigrate to conform to new meanings: land for all, territory in full maturity, living land, blood land. It is an ancestral area that welcomes everyone” (IGREJA; RAMPIN; CAMACHO, 2017).

It should be noted that, at the heart of the political project of the Collective, there is a critique of whiteness as a European heteronormative colonial ideology. Its performance challenges narratives centered on Europe and the Spanish state and proposes past rewritings in the present. This involves interventions in the memory to rethink the construction of history and the past, with the purpose of provoking questions and shocks in colonial structures. Thus, the practice of Ayllu presents itself as a daily research of aesthetic-political action, based on critical studies of white supremacy.

In particular, in this article, we discuss the aesthetic and political inflections present in the fabric panel “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido” [*Bordar-lands: the letters are the fabric*] (Figure 1), exhibited at the 35th Bienal de São Paulo [São Paulo Biennial], which took place in 2023. This creation, sized 290 x 390 cm, which resulted from a workshop with the same title, was attended by several collaborators<sup>2</sup> and, according to the Collective: “In this workshop, we write letters-fabrics to someone from there, someone who is alive or who has left this earthly plan, someone real or fictitious, someone from the past or the future, human or not, for whom there is an ancestral love” (COLECTIVO AYLLU, 2023, free translation). The collaborative production of messages in fabrics resulted in a kind of “open letter,” composed of writings that were embroidered, sewn, painted, and/or silk-screened (Figure 1).

According to our hypothesis, this collaborative creation not only materializes a practice of aesthetic production/creation, but also reverberates pungent semiotic arrangements that call for a fable-like political episteme, capable of creating new images of the past and the future. Therefore, we intend to explain the way in which the panel configures an image that exposes the stitching, the borders, and the between-place of migrants seeking the resignification of an ancestry that aims at the past, the present, and the future as (re)existence.

2 The collaborators are: Alla Soïb d’Nadah, Abigail Campos Leal, Aldones Nino, Anderson Feliciano, Bárbara Esmenia Rãé, Bia Marins, Bruno dos Santos, Camila Fontenele de Miranda, Constanx Alvarez Castillo, Dilma Angela da Silva, Gisela Casimiro, Malu Avelar, Manauara Clandestina, Ricarda Wapichana Vicente de Araújo, Tao Itacaramby, and Uarê Erremays.

Figure 1 – Fabric panel “Bordar-lands: las cartas son el tejido,” exhibited at the 35th Bienal de São Paulo



Source: Ayllu Collective (2023).

As a methodological strategy of analysis, we sought to understand both the visualities and the resignification of certain symbols, considering the way they are materialized in the fabric panel in which, as will be discussed, the dissident body that inscribes and writes is an essential part of the composition. It is about following the movement suggested by gestures and, through them, infer possible meanings or abductions (GELL, 2000) that emerge between the different temporalities that synchronically articulate in the piece. Thus, the delimitation of the theoretical-conceptual references and, especially, the articulation between them, took place due to what was raised by the materiality of the work itself, which allowed us to dialogue with authors of the fields of semiotics (PEIRCE, 1990; LOTMAN, 1996, 1998, 2021), performance and gestures (ZUMTHOR, 1993, 1997; FLUSSER, 1994; TAYLOR, 2013), decolonial studies (ANZALDÚA, 1993; 2000; MIGNOLO, 2019; PAIVA, 2022), and religions of African origin (VERGER, 1994; PRANDI, 2001; PORTUGAL FILHO, 2022). It was this path that allowed us to grasp, in the relationship between image and word, how the

configuration of oralitures (MARTINS, 2021) operates, which emphasize the performance and the inscription of corporalities in messages of affections, tributes, desires, prayers, confessions, statements, and protests.

### **From Migrantes Transgresorxs to the Ayllu Collective: crossroads and borders**

The title of the collective creation “Bordar-lands: las cartas son el tejido” refers, first of all, to the act of embroidering, in which the first part, “Bordar-lands,” relates to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1993) “Borderlands/la frontera: la nueva mestiza,” which refers to the idea of territories and borders. In turn, the word “lands,” situated right after the verb (*Bordar*, to embroider) and separated from it by a hyphen, suggests the act of “embroidering lands.” However, the sound of “Bordar-lands” is similar to “borderlands,” which refers to the border. By playing with the words, we can hypothesize that “Bordar-lands” implies delineating and/or sewing borders between different lands and/or territories.

Due to the complement of the title, it is possible to consider that the “lands” are the letters addressed to those “for whom there is an ancestral love” — which, in turn, have a Panchronic dimension, as they relate to the present, the past or the future; therefore, these are messages that tend to and dismount the logic of linear time. It should be noted that the word “fabric” (*tecido*, in Portuguese) derives from the Latin *textu*, in such a way that every fabric is also a text, something that implies an entanglement, a weaving that results in a specific ordering.

In the face of these relations, we notice that the title does not refer to geographical borders, but rather to the continuous redefinition of sign and symbolic borders arising from the act of embroidering letters/messages to someone belonging to any time/space. Here, we understand the border according to the perspective proposed by the semiotician of culture Iuri Lotman (1996), who situates it as a space for delimitation between different semiotic individualities and, at the same time, for translation between them, in such a way that borders are never stagnant

and predefined; on the contrary: they are constantly redefined by the exchanges established between different cultural spheres that are also modified by these transits.

Likewise, Anzaldúa (1993) operationalizes the concept of border beyond the physical aspects of territory and from a perspective of her own existence as a woman, feminist, Chicana, and lesbian. The panel puts in motion subjectivities (and temporalities) that, through letters, reverberate in a collectivity silenced by the historiography of the European colonizer. This is an important aspect to be considered in “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido,” because the title seems to allude precisely to the condition of those who live the diaspora and oppose the hegemonic structures based on this place of transition, of displacement of the corporalities in connection with their ancestry and in a movement of (re)existence. It is a way of perceiving and representing the existences and performances of bodies at borders, in order to rescue a sensitivity that does not separate bodies from their constitution, conditions, and cultural situations. A way of being and feeling that is in constant movement.

Far from limiting itself only to the fabric panel in question, this way of perceiving and placing oneself concerns the activity of the Collective as a whole. From the creation of *Migrantes Transgresorxs*, in 2009, to the constitution of the *Ayllu Collective*, in 2017, there were several theoretical productions, artistic creations, and pedagogical practices of its members and collaborators, so that it is possible to observe a repertoire of collective procedures of alternative and counter-colonial epistemes of thought, which operate, from our point of view, through crossroads (MARTINS, 2021) and borders (ANZALDÚA, 1993). For Leda Martins (2021, p. 35, free translation):

The crossroads is a radial place of centralization and decentralization, intersections and deviations, text and translations, confluences and alterations, influences and divergences, mergers and ruptures, multiplicity and convergence, unity and plurality, origin and dissemination. Operator of performative and also discursive languages, the crossroads, as a third place,

is a generator of diversified sign production and, therefore, of plural senses. In this conception of crossroads, the kinetic and slippery nature of this enunciative and performative instance of the knowledge there established is also highlighted.

Conversely, the thought of Anzaldúa (1993) specifies a state of consciousness that does not echo in the repetition of the identity canons crystallized by the action arising from history; on the contrary, the three identity references of Anzaldúa (white, Indigenous, Mexican) are claimed in order to be transformed and resignified within a new historical and subjective narrative:

So, don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your luke-warm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures — white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And *if* going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new *culture* — *una cultura mestiza* — with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture. (ANZALDÚA, 1993, p. 22).

Both in Anzaldúa (1993) and Martins (2021), it is possible to envision the notion of permanent movement and transformation, or rather, of transgressive actions that seek ruptures of the civilizing, geographical, and capitalist colonial codifications. And, hence, the artistic-political practices of the Ayllu Collective resonate and are inscribed as a project of decolonial resistance and disobedience, in order to “preserve what each community needs to be able to re-exist” (MIGNOLO, 2019, p. 7, free translation).

This perspective, in turn, allows us to situate the production of the Collective as part of the decolonial turn in the field of Arts that, as Paiva (2022, p. 77, free translation) points out, implies a “collective artistic authorship” that defies the idea of a unique creative subject for the benefit of a doing that emerges based on different alterities and their perception-cognitive dimensions, which involve even a series of

materials that equally perform several agency forms in the creation processes. Therefore, there is the constitution of a gnosiology in which the “process of organization” (PAIVA, 2022, p. 77, free translation) takes on a central role, from which a new territorialization takes place for knowledge and doings that, historically, have been relegated to something inferior by hegemonic thinking in the field of Arts. Thus, we notice how “the decolonial reinforces the idea that the Arts are part of a structural change” (PAIVA, 2022, p. 77, free translation) that necessarily implies a new “possible world.”

### **Bordar-lands: the letters are the fabric**

In the materiality of “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido,” there is one aspect that cannot be disregarded: the act of embroidering and/or sewing. In this regard, Peixoto (2020) states that, in the context of the studies on the “arts of the needles,” “the dimension of risk (and danger) that embroidery made with porcupine’s sharp spines, or with other pointed instruments, sheds light on it, does not usually occupy the foreground of analyses” (PEIXOTO, 2020, p. 77, free translation). With this, the author draws attention to the risk involved in the making of pieces through sewing and embroidery, which implies “thinking the arts of the needles as the arts of risk, of taking risks” (PEIXOTO, 2020, p. 78, free translation), whose making encompasses a body movement and learning, which imply a specific performance.

The act of embroidering and sewing, by which the fabric/text is brought about, in the collaborative creation of the Ayllu Collective, also allows us to infer about the risk involved in writing the letters — and/or their own story — aimed at those “for whom there is an ancestral love” which, in turn, can refer to someone of the present, the past, or the future. The choice for the needle, as a form of inscription on a surface, also refers to the memory of bodies that, historically, have been on the verge of extermination, as the biopower exerted by colonialism is primarily imposed upon them.

According to Taylor (2013), one of the key features of colonialism in the Americas was characterized by the colonizer’s contempt for the bodily performance of the original peoples, then deemed primitive and “delayed,” unable to produce and/or share knowledge. In this context, performance and orality are closely related, considering that, as Zumthor (1993; 1997) and Flusser (1994) state, the latter is not limited to what is uttered, because it refers to body gestures that not only accompanies the voice, but that precedes it or even dispenses with it. It is a communicational/cultural environment marked by the centrality performed by the body and its expressive forms.

As performance is inseparable from the visibility of “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido,” we can understand how, in its materiality, there is the update and, at the same time, the expansion of the memory of the original peoples through the translation operationalized by writing/embroidery. In its irregularity, the cursive writing present throughout the panel enables to recover the body movement that produced the inscription, which would be impossible if typographic letters were used, characterized by standardization and impersonality. It is a kind of translation operationalized by the memory related to the primary orality — that is, still devoid of the alphabetical writing — distinctive of the original peoples, in which the alphabetical writing, instead of potentiating logical forms of reasoning, confers visibility to the gesture and to the performance.

At the same time, as Flusser (1994) points out, the act of writing implies not only dealing with a surface, but pressing it, entering it, and marking it, so as to forge a trace and/or sign that, even erased, becomes part of the material used for the inscription. Hence, a palimpsest of impressions is created, resulting in the spatialization of memory by the overlapping of different temporalities that synchronically persist, something very distinct from the attempt of colonialism to destroy the knowledge of the original peoples and, at the same time, to impose their gnosiology as the only way of being in the world. As Anzaldúa (2000) states in the essay (letter) that she herself wrote to the Third-World women writers:

The act of writing is an act of creating souls, it is alchemy. It is the search for a self, for the center of the self, which us, women of color, are led to think as the “other” — the dark, the feminine. Don’t we start writing to reconcile this other within us? We knew we were different, separate, exiled from what is deemed “normal,” the white-right. And as we internalize this exile, we perceive the foreigner within us and, very often, as a result, we are separated from ourselves and from each other. Since then, we are seeking that self, that “other,” and each other. And in widened spirals, we never return to the same places of childhood where the exile took place, first in our families, with our mothers, with our fathers. Writing is a tool to penetrate that mystery, but it also protects us, it gives us detachment, it helps us to survive. And what about those who don’t survive? The remains of ourselves: so much flesh thrown at the feet of madness or faith or the State (ANZALDÚA, 2000, p. 232, free translation).

By the performance of dissented bodies in interaction, an inscription is outlined in the present, which updates a striking trait of the constitutive episteme of Abya Yala because, as Flusser (1994, p. 37, free translation) points out, “it is not true to say that writing establishes the thought. Writing is another way of thinking.”<sup>3</sup> In the collaborative creation “Bordarlands: las cartas son el tejido,” we precisely identify a thinking with the body or, even, a kind of cognition supported by ancestry, which is managed through it. Thus, it is observed that:

Although the performative practices of Indigenous and African peoples were prohibited, demonized, coerced, and excluded, these same practices, by several processes of restoration and resistance, ensured the survival of a body of knowledge that resisted the attempts of its total erasure, either by its camouflage, by its transformation, or by numerous modes of recreation that have toned down the entire process of constitution of the American hybrid cultures (MARTINS, 2021, p. 22, free translation).

From this perspective, the memory of knowledge is constantly recreated and shared by the orature of memory, that is, by oral and bodily performative repertoires, habits, whose techniques and procedures of transmission

3 In the original: “Es falso decir que la escritura fija el pensamiento. Escribir es más bien una manera de pensar”.

are also means of creation, sharing, reproduction, and preservation of knowledge (MARTINS, 2021, p. 98, free translation).

Producing borders between messages-fabrics by the collective act of embroidering, the fabric panel is placed as a patchwork that allows creating various modes of combination between the parts, all possible and valid. We will discuss one of these reading paths, perceived through the associative relations that start from the spiral-written image, until reaching the mention of clandestine historiography.

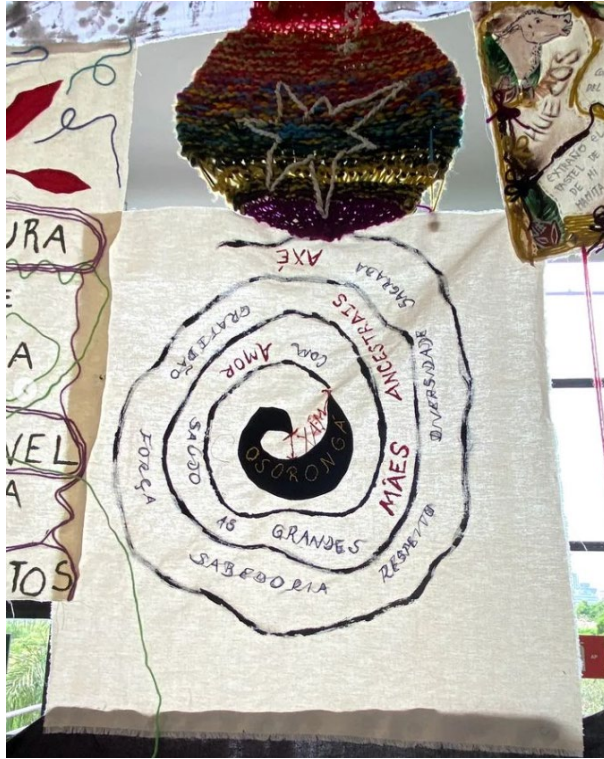
Located at the center on the right side of the panel, on a piece of white fabric, you can see the spiral-shaped sentence embroidered with black and white threads and drawn with red ink, which unfolds in the following words: IYÁMI OSORONGÁ, WITH LOVE I GREET THE GREAT ANCESTRAL MOTHERS GRATITUDE STRENGTH WISDOM RESPECT SACRED DIVERSITY AXÉ. In its center, the spiral figure drawn in black color has the mythical name “Osorongá,” and is bent left until the Yoruba term “Axé” (Figure 2).

Mythical figure of the ritualistic practices of Yoruba religions, the Ìyàmi [my mother] (VERGER, 1994, p. 16) are Ancient Sorceresses and Mothers. One of the best known is Iá Mi Oxorongá (PRANDI, 2001), Ìyàmi Òsòròngà (VERGER, 1994) or Ìyámì Osóronga (PORTUGAL FILHO, 2022)<sup>4</sup>, which are “owners of female bellies” (PORTUGAL FILHO, 2022, p. 18, free translation) and, overall, cause fear in most people due to their unrestricted powers of witchcraft, which act as “an aggressive, powerful force” (VERGER, 1994, p. 16, free translation) that can be both destructive and constructive. According to Reginaldo Prandi (2001, p. 348, free translation):

The Iá Mi Oxorongá are our first mothers, primordial roots of the human lineage, they are sorceresses. They are ancient mothers-sorceresses, our ancestral mothers. The Iá Mi are the beginning of everything, of good

4 The way of spelling the word “IYÁMI” varies according to the way each author cited in this article wrote it in their research.

Figure 2 – Snippet of the fabric panel Ìyámì Osóronga spiral figure



Source: Ayllu Collective (2023).

and evil. They are life and death at the same time, they are sorceresses. They are the feared *ajés*, merciless women. The Oxorongá have lived all that one has to live. The Iá Mi know the formulas for manipulating life, for good and for evil, at the beginning and at the end. No one walks away from the hatred of Iá Mi Oxorongá. The power of her spell is great, it is terrible.

This power turns, above all, against the people who monopolize wealth and resources and also against those who take advantage of power, because the Ìyámì fight every kind of imbalance caused by the man (PORTUGAL FILHO, 2022, p. 22) In addition, it is a power that

is passed on from mother to daughter, so that the latter can develop it in her adulthood (PORTUGAL FILHO, 2022, p. 24).

The gesture of embroidering the mythical name “Iyámi Osorongá” at the center of the spiral allows to call for and summon the Ancestral Mothers with the intention of honoring them affectively, in addition to thanking them. In the spiral scripture, the presence of the Ancestral Mothers radiates through the actions of the senses of words until reaching the “Axé,” in order to compose a circuit of vital forces and energies. It is another temporality, distinct from the historicism proposed by the Western modern order, which narrates history by linear, diachronic, and evolutionary logic. According to Martins (2021, p. 53, free translation), in the “ontology of time in the Yoruba cosmogony,” time “simultaneously bends forward or backward,” that is, a spiraled conception founded on ancestry, considering that

Ancestry is cleaved by a bent, recurring, ringed time; a spiraling time, which returns, restores, and also transforms, and which falls upon everything. An ontologically experienced time as contiguous and simultaneous movements of retroaction, prospection, and reversibility, dilation, expansion and containment, contraction and relaxation, synchrony of instances composed of present, past, and future (MARTINS, 2021, p. 63, free translation).

As a figure of space, the spiral provokes in time other dimensions beyond linearity and allows to diagrammatically visualize the way in which the manifestation and updating, for example, of myths, rites, and symbols take place in different contexts through the functioning of memory. In this sense, it is possible to establish the dialogue between the proposal of the performance of ancestry by the spiraling time of Leda Maria Martins (2021) and the functioning of the cultural memory proposed by Lotman (1996).

For the author, the cultural memory is manifested through data processed in signs, texts, and senses, which are, first of all, updates of the languages under construction and the sign arrangements, that is, events

that approximate the sign existence with making oneself present in culture. However, a configuration that lasts in time is only possible due to its historical or mythical processing through the continuous translation of traditions, in which the performance of memory provokes the distension of the present between the past and the future.

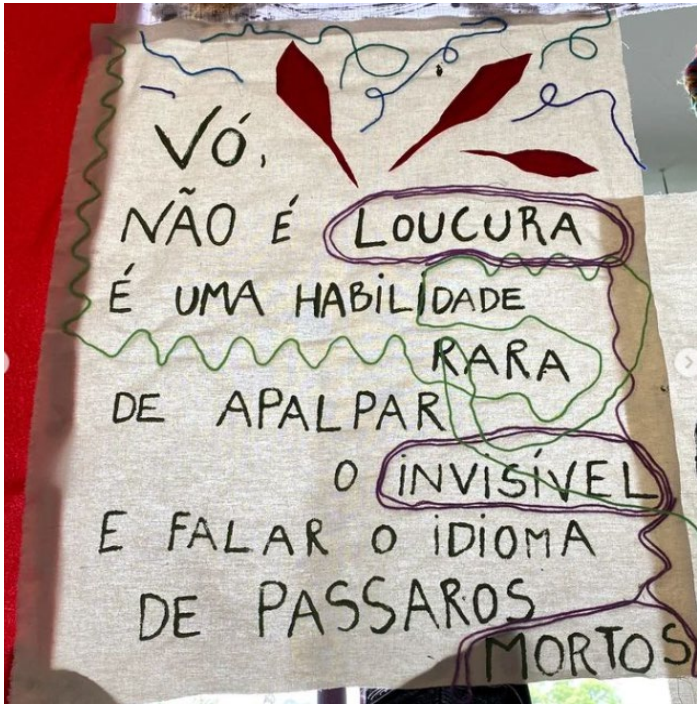
The articulation of signification by the presentification of the past and/or the future is a mnemonic processing, in which the relations between languages, for the production of texts of culture, are constituted by tensions and confrontations between the parts or temporal qualities that synchronically take place in the culture and not only one after the other. In this regard, memory is processed, above all, by spatial logic, which allows several sign temporal configurations to coexist together by a space of coexistence between different temporalities.

The perspective of spiraled time, or the spatialization of time, which promotes the agency of ancestry and the translation of traditions among Black African peoples, also seems to be articulated in other configurations of the collaborative creation “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido,” if we take into account that, at the end of the bend of the spiral text, the word “Axé” is inscribed, which points to the letter-fabric right beside it.

In it, drawn with black ink on a white fabric, the following sentence is written: “Grandma, it’s not madness, it’s a rare ability to touch the invisible and speak the language of dead birds.” Through a purple thread, the words “madness,” “invisible,” and “dead” are circumscribed and connected, and with another green thread, a part of the word “ability” (*habilidade*, in Portuguese) is highlighted, so that the word *idade* (in English, “age”) can be expressed, in a playful game that represents a word within another (*idade* within *habilidade*). In turn, this other highlighted word is connected by the green thread with the word “rare” (*rara*, in Portuguese), composing the sentence *idade rara* (“rare age”, in English), resulting, therefore, from another, the “rare ability” (*habilidade rara*) (Figure 3).

The spiraling time constituted by the message that mentions the “Iyámi Osorongá,” upon reaching the letter-fabric to someone’s

Figure 3 – Snippet of the “Grandma, it’s not madness” fabric panel



Source: Ayllu Collective (2023).

grandmother, promotes the association, by similarity, between the Ancestral Mothers and the “Grandmother,” the idea of ancestry and the “rare age” and also between the power of sorceresses and “rare ability.” Moreover, the mention of the ability to speak the language of birds once again seems to summon the Ancestral Mothers, as the “Iá Mi arrive into the world with their evil birds” (PRANDI, 2001, p. 348, free translation). That is why, according to Verger (1994, p. 17, free translation), “Ìyàmi is often called *eleye*, the bird’s owner,” and “the terms *eye*, bird, or *eleye*, bird’s owner, are employed interchangeably, because the bird is the power of the sorceress,” “at the same time, her spirit” and, also, the one responsible for “doing evil deeds.” This proposition is also defended by

Portugal Filho (2022, p. 22, free translation), when the author states that “Íyámì Eleye is the one that becomes a bird, whose procreative power is represented.”

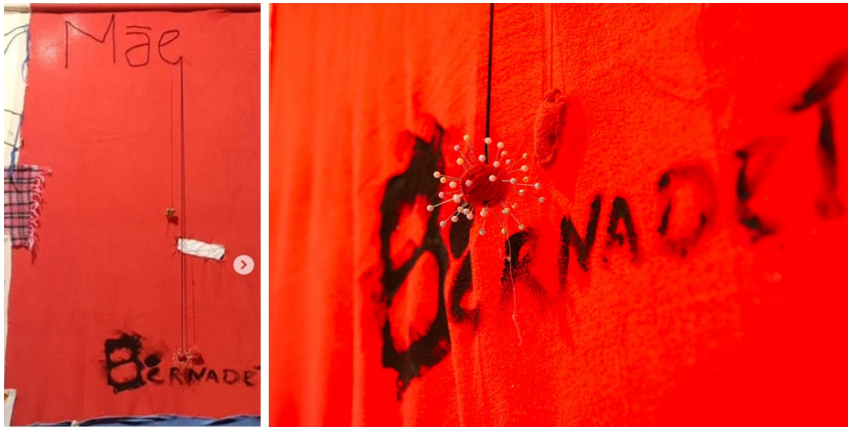
In the fabric panel, the resignification of the mythical figure of the Íyámì is only possible as a form of translation of traditions, if we look at the way the name of the sorceresses is articulated as a mnemonic symbol. The symbol is a type of sign whose meanings are somewhat regulated by coercion and correction of norms, laws, rules, habits, agreements, and/or contracts (PEIRCE, 1990). Such an understanding of the symbol is, to a certain extent, shared by Lotman, who places it as a cultural text that contains and preserves information that is known in different civilizations, as if it preserved primeval senses that are regulated by the very mind of culture, understood as an intelligence generated by the relations between different sign systems.

In this sense, Lotman (1996; 1998; 2021) also understands the symbol from the perspective of memory, as it is constituted as an arrangement capable of containing, in a condensed way, the maximum of information. In ancient civilizations or communities, the mnemonic symbol was used as a device capable of storing information aiming at, above all, expanding and diffusing it, and not only conserving it. It is a semiotic mechanism that strains past and future at the time of its various and distinct updates, when the mnemonic symbol expands in other contexts by being resignified without, however, its ancestral information being dispelled. Its updates are presented in events of both the past and the future, demonstrating the ability of cultural memory to make time management complex by the diachronic and synchronic perspectives of culture.

The spiral time that is made present, translates and resignifies the mnemonic symbol of the Ancestral Mothers, which begins with the spiraled sentence and follows to the letter-fabric addressed to the grandmother, also reaches the largest fragment of the collaborative creation: a red rectangular piece-fabric that is at the center the “Bordar-Lands: las cartas son el tejido,” in which one can see, in the

upper part, the word “Mother” and, in the lower part, “Bernadete,” drawn in black ink. The words are connected by a black thread that starts from the letter “e” of the word *mãe* (In English, “mother”) until it reaches the name “Bernadete.” At the end of it, a ball of red yarn skewered with several sewing needles with white pearls tips makes up a kind of celestial sphere (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Snippet of the “Mãe Bernadete” fabric panel



Source: Ayllu Collective (2023).

The most prominent piece in the fabric panel is a tribute and reverence to the 72-year-old Yalorixá Mãe Bernadete (Mãe Bernadete Pacífico Moreira), leader of the Pitanga dos Palmares Quilombola community, located in Simões Filho, state of Bahia (Brazil), who was brutally murdered with twelve shots on August 17, 2023, six years after the assassination of Binho do Quilombo, her son Fábio Gabriel Pacífico dos Santos. For a long time, the matriarch and Quilombola individuals received threats from “real estate speculation groups,” according to Denildo Rodrigues’s statement, from the National Coordination of Articulation of Black Rural Quilombola Communities (*Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas – Conaq*), according to

the article titled *Quem era Bernadete Pacífico e o que se sabe sobre seu assassinato* [“Who was Bernadete Pacífico and what is known about her murder”], published on the *G1* portal on August 18, 2023 (BBC, 2023). According to the article, written by Camila da Silva (2023) for the *Carta Capital* portal, in one of her last public statements, Mãe Bernadete said that she was a “Black woman of difficult life, because being Quilombola means resistance.”

By honoring her, the creative and collaborative proposal of the Ayllu Collective still makes it possible to relate her to the Yoruba mythical figure of the Ancestral Mothers. Perhaps for this reason, the piece-fabric embroidered on the left side of the piece-tribute is a statement of protest against hatred and violence against the peoples of Abya Yala, which, as aforementioned, refers to one of the names with which the original peoples named their lands, later baptized America by the Europeans (ALMEIDA, 2017). In it, in reference to the mother’s image, we identified embroidered, in black wool threads, the outline of the face of a female figure (Figure 5) surrounded by sentences and expressions in different languages: “return abya yala,” “stop killing us,” “Pindorama,” “kaimen manawyn”, “anna pata anna yan,” “our land, our mother.” Below, on the left, there is a twenty-dollar bill from Guyana’s bank, whose South American country, Guyana, is linked to the Caribbean region.

These scriptures express the basis of a decolonial thought through the inscription of subjectivities and corporalities manifested by collaborative performance in different Indigenous languages: “anna pata anna yan” (our land, our mother, in the Macuxi language — the Indigenous tribe that inhabited the region of Guyana); “Kaimen manawyn” (meaning gratitude, in the Wapichana language — the Indigenous tribe also inhabitant of Guyana); “Pindorama” (America, in Tupi-Guarani language). There is also a kind of signature painted on the panel: the name “Baydykyruab” refers to one of the collaborators, Ricarda Wapichana, an Indigenous woman who participated in the workshop with

Figure 5 – Snippet of the “Return Abya Yala” fabric panel



Source: Ayllu Collective (2023).

the Ayllu Collective and was part of the educational team at the 35th Bienal de São Paulo.

It is noteworthy that the use of Indigenous languages is a mark of struggle against the processes of colonization, in such a way that it was agreed to resume calling America according to the original language, Abya Yala (living land or flourishing land), as well as the Kuna people, from Colombia and Panama. In Brazil, the name “América” was Pindorama, which in Tupi-Guarani means “land of palm trees.” According to researcher Eliene Almeida (2017), the use of the Abya Yala name represents a way of coping with the denomination “Latin America,” given by the invader.

Still according to Almeida (2017), coloniality, as a heritage of colonialism, more than shaping modern structures and institutions, penetrates into mentalities, imageries, subjectivities, and epistemologies, shaping contemporary societies. Thus, coloniality is present in various aspects of social life: work, sexual relations, subjectivity, authority, and the Eurocentric knowledge. It is expressed in several hierarchies, such as ethnic, racial, sexual, gender, knowledge, language, and religious, thus constituting a complex system. In order to fight this system, the formulation of a decolonial thought seeks alternatives, a return to traditional knowledge, respecting ancestral knowledge and practices. According to Almeida (2017, p. 71, free translation), “the modernity/coloniality group understands that beyond the coloniality of power, there are also the dimensions of knowledge, of beings, and of nature.”

We observed, therefore, that the collaborative production of the fabric panel is also permeated by a resistance movement in/of Latin America with a view to valuing the ancestry of the original peoples who inhabited the region before being invaded by the European colonizer and having their ways of life and culture despised and denied. A decolonial historiographical view of the contact between the original peoples who inhabit or inhabited the territory now called Latin America, including Brazil, means understanding how Europe invaded these cultures, made unfeasible, subordinated, and repressed their ways of life, alterity, and ways of producing knowledge.

This process marginalized symbolic knowledge and worlds, creating representations of subordinate subjectivities of these social groups, and denying them the right to exist as culturally distinct peoples and as epistemic individuals. It also involves understanding how this process is updated and acquires new shapes, subjects, and dynamics. When considering the various practices of the Ayllu Collective, especially in a context of migration and erasures, the movement of creating and “bordar-lands” operates a territorialization of ancestry, which implies understanding it as part of a whole, a space of several memories that are collectively fabled.

It is also possible to glimpse this fable-like and decolonial weaving in the texts that arise, to a certain extent, based on individual and collective experiences as a mechanism of (re)interpretation of narratives of the past and the present. It is a “clandestine historiography,” an expression that is embroidered in the panel (Figure 6), which suggests a given indiscipline necessary to confront the colonizing narratives and practices around the world. Something that Mignolo (2019) calls epistemic disobedience, because operating under decolonial logic implies:

Figure 6 – Snippet of the “Clandestine historiography” fabric panel



Source: Ayllu Collective (2023).

Working for re-existence. To re-exist is something different than to resist. If you resist, you get stuck with the rules of the game that others have created, specifically with the narrative and promises of modernity and the necessary implementation of coloniality. There cannot be a single model of re-existence. (MIGNOLO, 2019, p. 6, free translation).

This piece of the panel seems to address a collective ancestral body, in an almost imperative attempt of a cry, a call to the need for a critical (and collaborative) fable as a form of (re)existence.

The panel extensively uses words, which demonstrates the strong bond with a tradition of orality, a mark of the original cultures. However, as we previously mentioned, the word here is also an image (embroidered, painted, drawn) and composes, together with the variety of types and colors of fabrics, what Leda Martins (2021) understands as oraliture. It is a perspective that eliminates the dichotomous view between text and image by understanding certain performative practices as the orthography of knowledge and of different natures, “including a philosophical knowledge, in particular an alternate and alternative conception of time, its reverberations and impressions and orthography in our way of being, of proceeding, acting, fabling, thinking, and desiring” (MARTINS, 2021, p. 26, free translation).

Thus, we can state that the fabric panel is constituted as a collective and collaborative oraliture, a body-canvas as a body-image that postulates connections “whose reception and perception have the power to also affect and prolong, in time, the images and their adherence” (MARTINS, 2021, p. 52, free translation). In the wake of this thought, the visuality of the panel is articulated by means of mnemonic symbols, it gathers a memory of memories, in a kind of survival “which, by combining in itself a set of sign data (traces, colors, movements, voids, reliefs, and so many other sensitive and sensory points),” constitutes “a form that thinks” (MARTINS, 2021, p. 52, free translation) in a very specific way.

## **Final considerations**

When we look at the trajectory of the Ayllu Collective and, more specifically, at the fabric panel “Bordar-lands: las cartas son el tejido,”

we understand that collective and collaborative production does not concern only a mode of artistic creation and/or disruptive process of the hegemonic, but rather a gesture that is based on an aesthetic-political posture toward the world. In other words, collective and collaborative practices confer the very (re)existence of subjectivities and bodies that are inscribed in the Collective.

In her essay *Falando em línguas: uma carta para as mulheres escritoras do terceiro mundo* [“Speaking in languages: a letter to the third-world women writers”], Gloria Anzaldúa (2000) makes explicit, in a striking way, what she feels about her existence and her writing as a Black, lesbian woman: “Who gave us permission to practice the act of writing? [...] There is a recurrent voice within me: Who am I, a poor *Chicanita* from the end of the world, to think I could write?” (ANZALDÚA, 2000, p. 230, free translation). In the collaborative workshop “Bordar-lands: las cartas son el tejido,” we identified more than one practice that seems to align with the tensioning of Anzaldúa (2000) It is, simultaneously, a process and an episteme that summons a counterpoint.

This episteme, in turn, demonstrates a very characteristic compositional trait of the Visual Arts produced in the context of decolonality, that is: the presence of the body and, consequently, of the gesture and performance as an inseparable part of the visibility of production. More specifically, in the case of the creation discussed in the present study, we can also make hypothesis about the risk (by the use of needles) of those who venture to write and/or inscribe their own story and/or memory, in which embroidery, understood as a process of building and redefining borders, results in producing a letter written by multiple voices against colonialism.

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**Research data availability:** All the data supporting the results of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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## The actor's ontological and collective body in Seven years in May

### O corpo ontológico e coletivo do ator em Sete anos em Maio



Eduardo Bordinhon<sup>1</sup> 

Pedro Guimarães<sup>1</sup> 

**ABSTRACT:** *This article investigates screen performance in Brazilian cinema of the 2010s, analyzing the relationship between the actor and the character, fiction, and fabulation. During this period, there was an increase in the use of non-professional actors who represent specific social issues of race, class, and gender. The screen performance here is based on hyper-realistic, performative, and epic principles. The hyper-realistic and performative principles are crucial in forming a “total amalgam” between actor and character, while the epic quality and allegory help to collectivize this experience for a social group, offering a critical gesture on the film’s narrative.*

**Keywords:** *screen performance; acting studies; Brazilian cinema; actor; performativity.*

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**RESUMO:** *Este artigo investiga o jogo atoral no cinema brasileiro dos anos 2010, analisando a relação do ator com a personagem, a ficção e a fabulação. Nesse período, observa-se um aumento no uso de atores não profissionais, que representam questões sociais específicas de raça, classe e gênero. Nesses casos, o jogo atoral baseia-se em princípios hiper-realistas, performativos e épicos. Os princípios hiper-realistas e performativos são cruciais para a formação de um “amalgama total” entre ator e personagem, enquanto a qualidade épica e a alegoria ajudam a coletivizar essa experiência para um grupo social, operando um gesto crítico sobre a narrativa do filme.*

**Palavras-chave:** *jogo atoral; estudos atorais, cinema brasileiro; ator; performatividade.*

## Introduction

This article aims to investigate the screen performance present in Brazilian cinema of the 21st century, focusing on the relationship between the actor and the character, fiction, and fabulation. We observe, particularly in the 2010s, an investment in the collectivization of social issues through the employment of non-professional actors representing a specific race, class, or gender. The analysis seeks to explore this new aesthetic and ethical relationship with non-professional actors, elevating what is often considered an absence of a crafted performance (BARON; CARNICKE, 2008) to a performative quality that defines the actor's performance, which will also become a hallmark of the cinematography of several contemporary directors.

Our hypothesis is that, since the 2010s, a significant portion of films has invested in creating a “total amalgam” between actor and character, according to the definition by Guimarães and Oliveira (2019), constructing the narrative based on the idea of an ontological body but extending beyond it through a poetic organization that favors critical-social reflection over the “psychological consistency” of a “character-person” (LEAL, 2019, p. 66) within the fictional narrative, particularly within the drama genre.

According to the idea of “ontological body,” the actor and the character share some physical or mental aspect in common, which often becomes the very reason for a transparent fictional construction. In the objects analyzed here, it is less about employing procedures of bodily or psychological construction of a fictional character and more about working with the fabulation and performativity of the actor, highlighting the elements that connect them to the character in a lasting manner and with causes prior to the film. This fabulation, beyond telling the story of an individual from a plausible psychological perspective or within a classic dramatic narrative of overcoming, aims to collectivize the experience, bringing in elements from the epic critical-analytical register of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, the concept of *performativity* evokes the political and aesthetic notion defended by Baumgärtel (2018), in the field of arts, of a “body [that] does not signify another fictional body,” but that “brings contextual forces (social and historical) to itself, exposing its marks within itself” (BAUMGÄRTEL, 2018, p. 134). This is a strategy similar to that identified by Heath (1981) in the typology of Soviet cinema of the 1920s, where the individuals appearing in films are “functioning much more in terms of idea than of character, social exposition rather than psychological revelation” (HEATH, 1981, p. 183). In the case analyzed here, it involves staging situations experienced by the actor-character based on moments of violence committed by the State, through police torture, which are then collectivized for a social group: young Black and poor people from Brazilian peripheries.

In their analysis, Guimarães and Oliveira (2019, p. 5) characterize the “total amalgam” as:

a model of acting and gestural communication, an analogical representation, according to Barthes (1964, p. 40), which consolidates the idea of the total physical amalgam because the human element [...] becomes inseparable from the character by possessing a certain physical or mental condition — a condition that, in almost all cases, becomes the factor that drives the plot through overcoming and acceptance. The character and the actor afflicted by the same deficiency where one’s condition becomes a *sine qua non* for the other.

Our goal is to expand the concept of “total amalgam” beyond physical or mental disability, taking the ontological body as any common aspect between actor and character that is, in itself, the foundation of the film and, most importantly, the foundation of the acting process. The result is the production of a fiction or fabulation that, although anchored in dramatic reenactment, will refer to the collective through the use of epic and performative principles. Thus, we seek to understand the ostensive use of non-professional actors in Brazilian cinematography between 2000 and 2020, particularly in the 2010s, and how this type of approach elaborates on social themes from the perspective of collectivity.

## Two moments of the use of non-professional actors in contemporary Brazilian cinema

Regarding the use of non-professional actors in Brazilian cinema, the separation of the 2000s and 2010s is important because there is a relevant distinction between these two periods. In the early 2000s, Brazilian cinematography was predominantly composed of directors already established in cinema, television, and advertising. Many of them produced works that addressed social issues in the country, such as *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002), *City of Men* (Paulo Morelli, 2007), and *Elite Squad* (José Padilha, 2007). These films often employed non-professional actors from the communities being portrayed, but they underwent intense preparation to achieve a degree of verisimilar control within the realist/naturalist aesthetic (XAVIER, 2005). With this, the aim was to achieve a “non-professional effect,” the impression that the actor is not acting (GAGGIOTTI, 2023, p. 144), which would enhance the sense of reality in those works. It was an aesthetic produced by filmmakers from wealthier classes, seeking to align the characters with the dominant class's perspective on the poorer population (CÉSAR, 2006).

These films, generally with high investment in production and promotion, rely on a rehearsal period for the cast to learn how to act according to the specifics of contemporary realist and naturalist methods; that is, broadly speaking, through character characterization, gestural verisimilitude, and scene blocking based on pre-established shot breakdowns. Thus, many of the non-professional actors in *City of God*, although they originated from favelas similar to the one depicted in the film, saw their personal histories serving more as an asset for publicity (GLEGHORN, 2017) than as an element that modifies the quality of the acting performance.

Indeed, the non-professional actors in *City of God* underwent two months of rehearsals, six days a week (CARDOSO, 2014, p. 152). The work was primarily led by Fátima Toledo, known for her acting method that uses the actors' personal aspects to build the characters and

the scenes (CARDOSO, 2014). The final effect in the film is a naturalistic performance, characterized by “its expressive force and significant effectiveness” (DAMOURE, 2014, p. 187), a performance in which the central elements are constructing and presenting, in a claimed manner, the psychology and physiology of the characters (DAMOURE, 2016), which would give the acting expression a certain organicity in its result.

In the 2010s, we see the arrival of a new generation of filmmakers, many of them from lower-income backgrounds, who made their productions viable through the democratization of access to public funding for filmmaker training and audiovisual production. Among these developments, the following stand out: first, the expansion of access to higher education in the country, developed during the administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016), which included measures such as the construction and decentralization of new universities in Brazil and student financing programs; second, the reduction in equipment costs with the consolidation of digital capture and exhibition formats; and third, the emergence of local funding programs, which enabled the production and circulation of works outside the major audiovisual production centers (OLIVEIRA, 2016; RAMOS; SCHVARZMAN, 2018; EDUARDO; HALLAK; HALLAK, 2022). These events allowed new filmmakers to emerge in territories where production was previously seasonal or nonexistent. Part of this new generation produced and still produces films in and about their own territories, often featuring the people who live in these spaces — frequently their friends or family members — moving away from an industrial production model (OLIVEIRA, 2016).

In this context, casting is done within the filmmakers’ personal circles. Some actors appear in only one film or have small roles in several; others become professionals due to their consistency in this cinematography. Actors like Marquim do Tropa, featured in Adirley Queirós’ films, and Aristides de Sousa and Wederson Neginho, frequent in Affonso Uchôa’s films, even in technical roles, exemplify this trend. An exemplary case is that of Maria José Novais Oliveira, a homemaker and mother of André Novais

Oliveira, who, until her passing, systematically acted in her son's films and, posthumously, was portrayed in the documentary *Our Mother Was an Actress* (André Novais Oliveira and Renato Novaes, 2023) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – A troupe composed of friends: the repetition of Aristides de Sousa and Wederson Neguinho in Affonso Uchôa's work



Source: Screenshots from *The Hidden Tiger* (left.) and *Araby* (right).

Thus, in significant parts of these films, acting performances created from non-professional actors and their apparent limitations gain strength. We emphasize the apparent aspect because the acting performance here is generally constructed to produce a performative action, an action that reveals the film's political discourse through the poetic organization of the actor's history and through their body, rather than to represent characters or emotions. What unfolds, in general, is a restrained performance, sparse in expressions and gestures, almost static; the lines are monotonous, and the scenes are filled with contemplative moments in long takes. A "hyper-realist" performance (MARGULIES, 1996) that can be mistaken for the absence of composition or the actor's agency in constructing the scene. This is because the work of composition in the style of realist or naturalist dramatic performance, which has been conditioned as synonymous with acting or good acting, becomes very limited in these films. In these cases, the narrative arc often lacks dramatic peaks, a moment when, in general, elements of a more ostentatious performance are employed — bodily excesses of any kind, underscoring the performance with musical effects etc.

Hyper-realism is understood here, as developed by Margulies (1996, p. 46), as being hyper-realistic the cinematic image that always shifts

representation from its figurative property to its literal property and vice-versa. The stillness of the bodies, often accompanied by the stillness of the frame, prevents the production of a suspension of disbelief pact, as occurs in naturalistic performance, but instead brings some degree of awareness of the reality of the filming to the surface.

One begins to look at the actor who, in the image, does not produce a character; they simply “are there” (GUIMARÃES; TINEN, 2020, p. 61) at the expense of the balanced and verisimilar gestural and vocal composition that creates the character. However, this is an apparent absence of an acting poetics, as we will see later in the analysis of *Seven Years in May* (AFFONSO UCHÔA, 2019), since “being there” constitutes a poetics of performativity. In this poetics, it is not just about narrating or representing an external or textual event, but about poetically elaborating a real situation, a problem to which one is subjected, and, through one’s history and body, seeking a scenic response. These bodily marks would thus be revealed by the filmic device.

The opposition between naturalism and hyper-realism becomes evident when analyzing two representations of childhood in the peripheries: the character Zé Pequeno (Douglas Silva) in *City of God*, and the actor-character Neguin (Wederson Neguinho) in *The Hidden Tiger* (AFFONSO UCHÔA, 2014). The representation in *City of God* seeks to emphasize the composition of the character, with attention to the detailing of costumes and props: the gun used in the scene appears real, Douglas Silva’s body displays a shiny skin that simulates sweat or oiliness, and his face expresses the violence of the character Zé Pequeno. The naturalistic acting performance, by evoking physiological and psychological aspects in the construction of the characters, in both methodology and result, directs their condition toward a determinism of nature (LEITES, 2020). Add to this the correlation of the work with historical episodes in Rio de Janeiro that reinforce the depicted universe as “real,” although tensions of reality seek to be concealed by the film’s fictional proposal.

The issue is that this supposed portrait of reality not only subjects the characters to determinism but also the entire class depicted in the film,

producing stigmatizations (CÉSAR, 2010). It is against this stigmatization that the acting performance of the 2010s discussed here will turn. It does not present a naturalistic intensity, an evocation of a psychosocial extreme — a favela with an intrinsic social evil or disease — but, on the contrary, it is filled with moments of contemplation.

In *The Hidden Tiger*, we see Nequin in his daily life, playing with a toy gun with the same enthusiasm with which, earlier, he had painted his face with white paint. The film shows his discussion with a friend about the fact that the toy gun attracts the attention of the neighborhood people. His face is not highlighted; it is turned toward the depth of field, and his expressions do not matter. What matters is the situation they are in, the simulation of the gun, the game, the play. The real is evoked not by its naturalistic excess but by its banalized everydayness: the children play, without much emotion, with guns. This hyper-realistic and performative perspective is predominant for the construction of characters in Affonso Uchôa's filmography (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Two framings and two performances depicting childhood in the Brazilian peripheries.



Source: Screenshots from *City of God* (left) and *The Hidden Tiger* (right).

### **Fabulation as the collectivization of experience: seven years in may**

In the case of *Seven Years in May*, the ontological relationship is established from the beginning: the film is the fabulation, the poetic ordering of an episode from the life of Rafael dos Santos Rocha, who, after being mistaken for a drug dealer, was kidnapped and tortured by the police attempting to extort him.

To delve into the performative acting performance that Rafael presents on screen, based on his ontological relationship with the character and the fabulation, it is important to understand the characteristics of the actors in Affonso Uchôa's films. The director's works employ two types of actors: a minority of professionals from the theater, generally in secondary roles; and a majority of protagonists who are men and young people from Contagem (MG), many of them friends of the filmmaker, who is also from there. These non-professional actors enter the films chosen for a reenactment of their lives: in films closer to the documentary — *The Hidden Tiger* — or in works with a more evident fictional thrust — *Araby* (AFFONSO UCHÔA AND JOÃO DUMANS, 2017). The latter takes essential aspects of the life of the non-professional actor, Aristides de Sousa, to construct a fiction that distances itself from his biography to speak of a collective, of young people from the poor classes in the peripheries of Brazil's interior and the working class of the 2010s.

Like Uchôa, a certain contemporary production — much of it from Minas Gerais — reinforces the idea of a paradigm shift starting in the 2010s. These are works often classified as documentaries, but where fabulation introduces a fictional thrust into the film and, importantly for this article, produces a distinctive acting performance. “The editing in *Seven Years in May* reflects the film's process, whose main objective was to give Fael a voice” (UCHÔA apud CHIARETTI; ARAÚJO, 2020, p. 208). It is a *mise-en-scène* in which the acting performance is in dialogue with the camera, being produced for it and with it. Let us now analyze how the acting performance unfolds in *Seven Years in May* and how, through three narrative operations, the actors' bodies in this film constitute an ontological body

## Reenact

*Seven Years in May* can be divided into three main sections and is structured around the representation/account/allegory of the torture suffered

by a young man at the hands of the police. Each section is preceded by a prologue, a sequence in which the actor arrives at the space where the action will take place. The first part, the *reenactment* of the torture, is preceded by the image of Rafael's silhouette, walking along the highway toward the camera in near-complete darkness.

After this prologue, the film moves to a field where a group of friends begins the reenactment. They are gathered around a trunk, from which they take clothes and objects that make up the standard uniform of a police officer; however, it is not a complete uniform, and they share the parts. The game proposed by the *mise-en-scène* also provokes them to use their imagination to complete the performance (Figure 3). The pieces of the uniform they start wearing, which they put on with evident admiration, are enough to make them feel authorized to torture. They find themselves handsome in these clothes, striking poses for an imaginary camera while the transparency of the device is maintained, as the camera is never referenced. The reenactment here is a transparent game of "make-believe," in which this group of vigilantes will go out at night in search of criminals (Figure 4).

Figure 3 – The switch from flip-flops to boots: the indicative elements of the police in the composition of the characters



Source: Screenshot from *Seven Years in May*.

Figure 4 – Empowerment through the police uniform design.



Source: Screenshots from *Seven Years in May*.

The group then approaches Rafael. His first gesture is one of surrender: hands behind his head and legs apart, a posture he maintains even when he is knocked down. The “social gesture” (BRECHT, 1978, p. 155) of Rafael is more than a simple gesture of a character or a subject. It aims to show the synthesis of the relationship between the peripheral man and the police forces that approached him. Rafael knows his role, whether in a fictional approach, as we see here, or in a real one. His physical appearance is not very different from that of the men who subdue him, and even the use of uniforms by the latter does not guarantee a fundamental difference between them. The acting quality here is not one of seeking gestural verisimilitude to highlight characteristics of the character that are not necessarily inherent to the actor; but an acting that feeds on the human singularity of the performer, tied to his physical appearance and, concomitantly, to his social position.

Regarding Rafael’s social gesture, it functions as a metonymy of the performance in re-enactment. “In this sense, performance is the gesture in the process of being staged, but within this ‘in the process of,’ it reinvents the scene without ultimately reducing itself to it.” (BRASIL, 2011, p. 7). Rafael’s gesture tensions the imagined and the lived, the acting and the real torture that is revisited, “the performance exposes the continuity between one domain and another” (BRASIL, 2011, p. 7). It functions as a commentary on the body conditioned by constant police approaches and as a critique of this approach; a gesture that creates the scene and evokes beyond it (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Rafael's social gesture



Source: Screenshots from *Seven Years in May*.

The performativity of these subjects also appears in the playful enactment they create to re-enact, in a clumsy way, this common episode in their lives: the police approach. Here, it is the artificial manner in which they portray themselves as police officers that functions as an element of distancing from the action, revealing the device, and serving as a bridge to the real world. “The trinity of actor’s-body / character / actor-interpreting-the-character becomes, in these appearances, a single meaningful entity; one necessarily reminding us of the Other” (GUIMARÃES; OLIVEIRA, 2019, p. 18). Because they are not fully developed characters and their characterization references both suburban youth (the flip-flops) and the police institution (the boot), the establishment of one of the instances — either the actor or the character — never fully completes. This oscillation leads to questioning whether we might be witnessing an episode from Rafael’s past.

## Narrating

The answer to the above question comes in the second segment. Following Rafael’s arrival at an energy substation of the Minas Gerais Energy Company (CEMIG), the second part shows him in front of a campfire with the station in the background. He then begins to narrate the episode in which, years earlier, he was taken by police officers and tortured right there (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – The narratio



Source: Screenshot from *Seven Years in May*.

The long take of the narration lasts 17 minutes. The camera remains fixed, and Rafael stays turned at a three-quarter angle throughout. He narrates the police torture, his subsequent escape to the metropolitan region of São Paulo, and how he became addicted to crack there, eventually returning after years to Belo Horizonte. Although lengthy and detailed, respecting the timing of the action, the narration is concise and delivered without hesitation. The bus passing in the background during the scene, which disrupts the clarity of his words, indicates the absence of someone to correct, cut, or instruct him to repeat or redo. Rafael is alone with the audience, or perhaps with himself, and the control of the scene's rhythm is in his narration.

This narration is what seals the amalgamation between the fiction presented in the previous reenactment and the real events that happened to Rafael. If earlier there were elements of the ontological body that could be gleaned from the image, now Rafael's testimony makes it clear that the body he represents and narrates is the same one that lived and relived, in the earlier part of the film, the experience (MESQUITA, 2019; COSTA JÚNIOR, 2022).

Beyond the act of enunciation in narration, it is through the body that the amalgamation is fulfilled. The impactful experience lived by Rafael makes it so that only his body on film can be capable of re-experiencing what happened. If another actor were to portray him in a naturalistic manner, the horror experienced by Rafael would always be alongside the quality of the character's portrayal. We would be in a different domain of acting where drama and emotional identification would carry more weight. In Rafael's case, the performance is in his rhetorical work, in the narrative construction — an effort of the epic actor-narrator, who “performs a difficult balancing act between metamorphosis and distancing” (ROSENFELD, 1985, p. 161). Rafael revisits his torture and analyzes what he experienced, as he does with his social context. At the same time, a fading of other elements of the *mise-en-scène*, such as editing, directs attention to his body, intensifying its ontological connection with the narrated event.

*Seven Years in May* does not make the total amalgamation an object of the viewer's pity. The next movement is to expand the ontological dimension of Rafael's body to encompass a series of people — something already hinted at in the reenactment through the choice of a group of equals to serve as his tormentors. This collectivization, unlike naturalist determinism, offers a critical perspective on the relationship between the characters. For this reason, Rafael's acting across the three segments operates within the realm of synthesis, not detail. It aims to convey a reflection on the involved social agents (and with some of them), taking a side in the narrative.

After Rafael's lengthy speech, a counter-shot reveals that his interlocutor was neither the outside director nor the off-screen viewer, but rather another man, also Black, who, after a long silence, says: “Your story is sad, like that of everyone I meet.” Then, when Rafael asks him, this interlocutor responds that his own story is also similar to the one being narrated (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – The interlocutor in the narration as an agent of the collectivization of experience



Source: Screenshot from *Seven Years in May*.

The arrival of this man, Wederson Neguinho, shifts the epic tone of the narration to a dramatic dialogue. However, the commitment to drama ends there. The sparing use of gestures and facial expressions, along with a voice with little variation in volume or tone, draws attention to what is being said and the reflection shared by the two, but does not invite emotional identification. What matters here is less the ability of these two men to convey their emotions or depict a character, and more the formal elaboration of their experiences (COSTA JÚNIOR, 2023). It is no longer about acting the dramatic arc of the classical hero, from perdition to redemption, but about performing the emotional-descriptive punctuality of a social individual who is also shaped by the environment they are part of and who is aware of how that environment influences them. Two Black Brazilian men, sharing a series of common experiences and stories of violence.

In this sense, the difference between dramatic, epic, and performative acting is clear. The first aims to represent something. The focus is on the production of a subject — the Character — in search of a verisimilar outcome according to the historical moment in which the representation

takes place. The epic precept, the central line of this segment, requires the actor to engage more with their functional role within the film's narration, that is, in what Leal (2019, p. 43), based on his reading of Greimas, referred to as an actant. The actor aims to present something, and the focus is on the object — the narrative content. However, it is worth noting that in *Seven Years in May*, even the representation and presentation are permeated by a performative aspect that is grounded in the ontological body of its actors.

The performative acting is one in which the actor seeks to live something and, through formal elaboration, convey that lived experience (TAYLOR, 2003). The focus is on creating an experience within the actor's body, where imagination and experience intertwine, but in which the presence of the fictional character is minimal or nonexistent.

From this perspective, we can turn to Richard Schechner's (1988) performance theory, revisited by Leda Maria Martins (2011), as well as James Naremore's (1988) reference to the concept of "frame" proposed by Erving Goffman (1974). Both concepts aim to understand the staged or (re)created aspects of everyday actions. Martins (2011, p. 102) describes performance as "a network of interrelations, exchanges, movements, and motivated and recovered actions". She links performance to an everyday (re)elaborated action, which in the film can be observed in the three ways of recalling and conveying Rafael's experience. This recovery is framed not only by the *mise-en-scène* but also by the acting, the gesture, and the actions.

An example of this recovery is evident in the police approach, when Rafael states his full name: "Rafael dos Santos Rocha." This evocation of the full name, the name listed on his ID document — as well as in the film's credits — embodies the real Rafael, the citizen violently approached by a state institution. The mention of his full name also serves as a form of survival: Rafael is not just a first name, but a full identity of a person and a citizen.

The performative acting also employs an "arrangement" (GOFFMAN, 1974 apud NAREMORE, 1988, p. 22) that "divides people into

two fundamental groups, designating some as performers and others as watcher. Its [the arrangement] propose is to establish an unusually high degree of ostentation, a [...] ‘visibility’” (NAREMORE, 1988, p. 22), which is shared by both groups in the same space and time.

It is worth noting, however, that this shared reality is minimally connected to the spatial relationship present in a performance in the performing arts, since the filming moment is not the same as the exhibition. In the case analyzed here, the shared reality is more about a connection that is *temporally* rooted in the real. It is not a sharing of space, but rather a “temporal landscape [that] also extends to before and after the event, including all those who are part of it” (MARTINS, 2011, p. 105). Rafael’s narration connects him and his interlocutors — both within and outside the diegetic frame — to the dimension of the torture he experienced and that of others who went through the same ordeal. He states: “Coming back here for me is like going back in time, as if that day never stopped existing.” Complementing this reflection, Neguinho’s mention of the pile of bodies that has been growing since before the two were born, covering the sky and still increasing, highlights this shared history that exists beyond the film.

Therefore, *Seven Years in May* is not merely a representation or a narrative. It is a crafting that creates the fictional Rafael based on the story of the real Rafael; however, the first can never be complete, as it constantly needs and evokes the other. “Neither purely fact nor purely act, the body is constituted, created, and invented — effectively — while it performs, while it is exposed, and in this exposure, it establishes a constitutive relationship” (BRASIL, 2011, p. 7, p. 10). In this regard, Rafael’s repeated story (also common among many Brazilian Black youth) becomes one of the elements of the performative dimension of the acting. It is the recovery and ritualization of the experienced torture; it represents the fissure between the real and the imagined by the actors.

Given this, the performative dimension of acting observed in this Brazilian cinema piece draws from these aspects and seeks, as pointed out by Baumgärtel (2018), to address the social and collective dimension.

It is a game that always points to the collective and to a shared reality, an “alienation” (BRASIL, 2011, p. 7, p. 10) in becoming another, or, as Neguinho says, “You can still see the blood stains on the asphalt, and it is not just yours [...]. We have to move on for us and for them too”.

In summary, we can conclude that acting with a dramatic focus is engaged in the representation of a “character-person”; whereas the epic focus produces an acting whose core is the transmission of a narrative. Finally, the performative acting emphasizes the poetic arrangement of elements experienced by the actor, which are revived and collectivized within the film. What these three elements have in common is the actor as a creator in the formal arrangement of the film and as a constitutive part of the *mise-en-scène*, rather than as an accessory to it. Rafael engages in an exercise of language — demonstrating how cinematic language can reconfigure lived experience — rather than producing a character to serve a narrative.

### **Allegorizing**

After establishing that Rafael’s experience is also collective, the final segment presents this multitude in image: it is no longer a solitary man arriving at a square at night, but a collective. Filmed from the waist down, we can only confirm that they are all Black and pardo (mixed-race) and that they are wearing flip-flops. Later, we will see their faces and discover that this chorus is made up of young men and women, among whom is Rafael (Figure 8).

Figure 8 – Playing as an allegory of Rafael’s experience



Source: Screenshot from *Seven Years in May*.

The first segment reenacted the torture suffered by Rafael, the second narrated it, sealing the process of complete amalgamation between the character and the actor, and ending with the collectivization of the experience. A similar movement of collectivization can be observed in the choice of the location where the actions take place. The first occurs in a dark, abandoned vacant lot — a place traditionally associated with criminals and police carrying out illicit acts. In the second segment, the CEMIG station takes on a metaphorical character. As a state building, it becomes the place where police feel secure to commit acts of torture and extortion. During Rafael's narration, the station in the background functions as a representation of an negligent State that permits corrupt officials to carry out crimes within its institutions. The final segment unfolds in a public square, and the low lighting of the previous scenes — the first illuminated by lanterns and the second by a bonfire — is replaced by the yellowish glow of urban lighting. Everyone is visible there — victims and oppressors (LEANDRO; ARAÚJO, 2020).

The third segment allegorizes and summarizes Rafael's story, finalizing the amalgamation between the actor's body and that of the character while simultaneously collectivizing it. The "allegorical intention" (XAVIER, 2015, p. 9) initially appears as:

To speak one thing while intending to mean another, [...] to manifest something while aiming to make another thing present [...] [a quality that remains] very generic [...] [but] with a recognized mediation intervening between speech and experience, [...] [in which] the thickness of language itself is emphasized and its problematic relationship with experience (XAVIER, 2015, p. 9).

In other words, through a childlike game unfolding in the square, the film addresses police violence in the outskirts. In a similar movement, to speak of Rafael is to speak of a social group — poor and Black youth — a collective action that collectivizes the ontological body of the protagonist<sup>1</sup>.

1 Xavier (2015, p. 9) points out that the etymology of "allegory" contains the word "agoreuein," which means "to speak in public, in the plaza." In the case of *Seven Years in May*, this connection is fitting. It is in the public square that the film concludes its process of collectivizing its thematic and aesthetic questions.

The crowd that arrives in the scene in front of a police officer, a figure that stands out from all who appeared so far for being the most constructed and recognizable as a social agent: they are fully dressed in uniform and behave like police. The main aspect here is the characterization of the figure that will represent the police force in a process of metonymy. Its military, vertical, and rigid body contrasts with the background, positioned diagonally: the figure of law seems out of place within that world (Figure 9).

Figure 9 – The composition of the police officer and his relationship with the space.



Source: Screenshot from *Seven Years in May*.

During the sequence, the police officer becomes a *voice-over* that directs a Dead/Alive game: anyone hesitating or moving incorrectly after a directive is out, just as one can be killed for not following the police officer's command during a confrontation. The relationship here is clear: the police are in the periphery to kill indiscriminately. However, at the end of the game, Rafael, alongside his real story, refuses to crouch and continues to face off-field, despite the police officer's persistent orders for him to be dead. Rafael's body—fundamental to the construction of this film and the foundation of its performativity—survives and remains alive (Figure 10).

Figure 10 – Rafael’s body as a metonymy for the body of the young Black person from the periphery.



Source: Screenshot from *Seven Years in May* taken by the authors.

This acting choice is a different aesthetic and political stance compared to naturalist acting. The allegory in *Seven Years in May* is connected to what Xavier (2015, p. 14) describes as the “crisis of the transparency of myth [in Ancient Greece],” with allegory functioning as an “imaginative device that, in a displaced manner, exposes concepts” (XAVIER, 2015, p. 13) that are otherwise hidden in a naturalist-oriented acting. In the film analyzed here, the breaking of this transparency is achieved through epic and performative elements, as well as through the symbolic play created in the final segment:

Autopoiesis, when self-referential, can only become politically meaningful when it mediates the boundary between social experience and artistic experience — that is, when the performativity of the scene opens itself to its dimension of being necessarily also language and discourse within a social context (BAUMGÄRTEL, 2018, p. 147).

Allegory as an encoded message evokes a dual spectator stance. First, deciphering its code — which, although simple (death/live game = police violence) — moves the sequence away from a purely emotional reading. It appeals to the intellect, as the scene structures itself as:

a montage-collage of elements assembled through an operation whose principle lies outside them, elements that form a set whose order is that of a mechanism — the pieces are radically external to each other — and not that of a living organism with its particular solidarity. On the other hand, in its incompleteness and juxtaposition, the allegory does not bring the well-formed organic shape as a transfiguration of a meaningful world (XAVIER, 2015, p. 25).

Thus, Rafael's acting operates in a mechanical manner where the actions of "reenacting," "narrating," and "playing" (the Dead/Alive game) are linked to the content — young people from the outskirts subjected to police violence — through a bias that lacks the organicity of violence often seen in Brazilian naturalist productions. Recalling the naturalistic acting in *City of God*, which served as a cornerstone of the portrayal of the Brazilian periphery in the 2000s, the characters' actions, the violence they are subjected to and commit, are organic. The *mise-en-scène* functions as a lens on a given world that is supposedly independent of an authorial vision.

In *Seven Years in May*, the focus is on the discourse and on how the pile of dead people mentioned by Wederson Neguinho increases each day in Brazilian peripheries. This discourse does not aim to present the viewer with a given reality, a form of denunciation, but to recover reality and bring it back to life on film by making "the world of images cross through the world of life: it begins earlier, is transfigured by the film, and continues, transformed, beyond it" (BRASIL, 2011, p. 7, p. 1). For this purpose, starting from an ontological body, the film employs performative acting, whose execution — like the performance art itself — "is, by excellence, relational, interactive, and inconclusive," whether viewed as practice or as episteme (MARTINS, 2011, p. 108). Just like the allegory in the final segment, Rafael's acting aims to create spaces within the film for a conscious and active intervention regarding the presented situation. He is there, together with his collective, engaged in a game — a principle also ontological of the actor's work: to put oneself into play and into a situation with body and imagination, to generate poetry from oneself.

## Conclusion

Contrasting with the deterministic naturalism often found in works depicting Brazilian peripheries, films like *Seven Years in May* employ non-professional actors to create stories about their lives or fictions that resemble their experiences. However, this approach does not aim for dramatization focused on the character's arc but instead seeks to establish a performative acting choice that is critical of the social structure producing the precarious life conditions depicted. To achieve this, the film relies on an ontological relationship between the non-professional actor and the character, which is collectivized through a hyper-realistic acting rooted in epic and performative principles.

By highlighting the process of repeating his story, making Rafael clearly an agent of this process, the film reveals his acting choices. Rafael is an agent in the poetic organization of events; he is actively involved in the scene and is not merely a subject depicted in his everyday nature. It is a crafted performance, as much as the work of professional actors on stage (BARON; CARNICKE, 2008, pp. 31-32) and in naturalist films, just as the choices of *mise-en-scène* present in the film are also constructed. The acting system in *Seven Years in May* approaches “a performative theater that showcases in its scene the very process of transformation; a semiotic instability whose constellation allows the viewer to perceive the work of time as a passing present, more than a full presence of the *hic nunc et sans kind*” (BAUMGÄRTEL, 2018, p. 128). The fictional character is never fully complete; it always references the actor's body and history, exposing the time of Rafael's narration — hence the importance of the long take in the narration of the second segment. In this case, we are dealing with a performance of content organization and filmic discourse, a form that we will observe in other Brazilian films, such as those of Adirley Queirós and Eliane Caffé.

Thus, *Seven Years in May* exemplifies a model of an aesthetic and ethical cinematic gesture where direction engages with collective issues by employing non-professional actors as active and decisive agents in the *mise-en-scène*. It does so through the use of an acting that does not aim to mask the actor under a fictional character but instead creates a performance

that critically reveals their story. This approach signifies a new perspective on representing socially marginalized populations, considering them as determinants in the final cinematic form.

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## **Broken bodies praise the indiscernible: deviant aesthetic experiences in contemporary audiovisual production**

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## **Corpos quebrados elogiam o indiscernível: experiências estéticas dissidentes no audiovisual contemporâneo**

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Luiz Fernando Wlian<sup>1</sup> 

Laan Mendes de Barros<sup>1</sup> 

**ABSTRACT:** *This article aims to examine a segment of contemporary queer audiovisual production in Brazil. In light of the growing plurality of queer works today, we question how they shape their narrative and aesthetic quality, as well as how their images and sounds engage with phenomena of contemporary capitalism, particularly those of a technological and aesthetic nature. Through the film analysis of two works by the collectives Anarca Filmes and Chorumex, we propose the “praise of the indiscernible” as a possible interpretative key for this audiovisual production.*

**Keywords:** *queer audiovisual; aesthetic experience; body; contemporary capitalism.*

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**RESUMO:** *Este artigo recorta e analisa parte da produção audiovisual queer contemporânea no Brasil. Ao observarmos a crescente pluralidade de obras queer nos dias de hoje, questionamos de que formas elas modulam sua narrativa e concepção estética. Também, como suas imagens e sons podem dialogar com fenômenos do capitalismo contemporâneo, especialmente de ordem tecnológica e estética. Por meio de análise fílmica de duas obras dos coletivos Anarca Filmes e Chorumex, enunciamos o “elogio ao indiscernível” como uma chave de leitura possível a esse audiovisual.*

**Palavras-chave:** *audiovisual queer; experiência estética; corpo; capitalismo contemporâneo.*

## Introduction

What is a “broken body”? Can it, in its poorly arranged pieces, be intelligible? In this text, the “broken body” is a poetic, not a conceptual, figure. It is an expression that, subtly inspired by Guacira Lopes Louro’s “strange body” (LOURO, 2004), encompasses both the bodies of dissident subjects and the audiovisual bodies animated by them. It is a poetic way of evoking a strange, dissident, queer body. More than LGBTQIAPN+ bodies per se, the “broken body” is one whose dissidences of gender, sexuality, performance, and ways of being generate discomfort to the so-called “normal ways,” to the hegemonic heterosexual culture, and to contemporary capitalism. This refers to discomfort that is aestheticized in audiovisual works that do not care about being formally and aesthetically integral — works that are stylistically deconstructed, fragmented, sometimes even precarious, rudimentary, “badly made.” These works and bodies that are of interest to us are discussed here in the articulations between communication and aesthetic experience, between aesthetics and politics.

This “broken body” is embodied in many ways in audiovisual media. Increasingly, LGBTQIAPN+ individuals are mobilizing narratives and aesthetic experiences through audiovisual technologies. Filmmakers, multi-artists and artistic production collectives are currently gathering around thinking about and forging new stylistics for images and sounds, in works that do not fear the rudimentary, but embrace it in their experimentation. It is this layer of dissent that we seek to observe here, to think about possible aesthetic-narrative procedures and keys to reading audiovisual productions, in their social, political and cultural context. In this endeavor, we propose to think about “communication, media and consumption” beyond the anesthetizing logic of the market. By considering such productions from the perspective of aesthetic experience and the “sharing of the sensitive” (RANCIÈRE, 2009), of the tension between affects and affectations, we are challenged to think about “communication without anesthesia” (BARROS, 2017).

Queer audiovisual not only seems quite aware of current phenomena of capitalism, but also seems to appropriate them and, through their interludes, stage images and sounds that pervert and play with these phenomena — and that, in doing so, rehearse new forms of sensitivity possible for the present time. It is an audiovisual that understands well that we live in an “aesthetic era” (SODRÉ, 2006), in which the productive logics of capitalism are remodeled by operations of an essentially aesthetic nature, with the purpose of observing and controlling the sensitivity of bodies to meet the current demands of the market and capital. In this context, sensitivity is the target of economic and political interest, and for this very reason, it is the target of a series of technologies that are integrated into the body, into people’s sensitive apparatus. The semi-infinite array of images and sounds, audiovisual media, luminous screens and their endless consumer offerings laid out to exhaustion before our senses: all of this is present in the body. But how can the body appropriate and comment on these technologies? Provocations like this are what we observe in part of today’s queer audiovisual production.

Many Brazilian queer artists seem aware of capitalism’s interest in the body and sensitivity, and it is this awareness that they use when appropriating audiovisual technologies and lending them the dissidences of their own bodies. Works such as those by the collectives Anarca Filmes and Chorumex, both from Rio de Janeiro and founded in 2014, are good examples, and it is the works of both that we will use here. The two collectives mobilize diverse audiovisual experiments in different formats and screens, not limiting their circulation and exhibition to classic movie theaters, but taking part in the internet, thematic exhibitions and circuits organized by themselves, such as parties in LGBTQIAPN+ spaces, and political and artistic resistance. By observing aspects of the works and their dialogue with phenomena of contemporary capitalism, we raise the question: in what ways does this audiovisual comment on these phenomena through aesthetic means? How are their strangeness, dissidence, and “brokenness” constructed stylistically in the films?

This question is part of broader qualitative research (WLIAN, 2025) that analyzes how Brazilian queer films promote aesthetic experiences and affective regimes that comment on contemporary capitalism and propose “perversions” to it, as well as new sensibilities possible for being in today’s world. In this small excerpt, however, we seek to make a brief analysis of two films — *Usina-Desejo Contra a Indústria do Medo* (2021), by the collective Anarca Filmes, and *Os Anos 3000 Eram Feitos de Lixo* (2016), by the collective Chorumex — to enunciate through it a possible key to reading the contemporary queer audiovisual, here named *praise for the indiscernible*. We also return to the problem addressed in the article *Narrativa cuir, experiência estética e política na luta pela paz: notas sobre o curta-film Negrum3* (BARROS; WLIAN, 2023).

Thus, we use a theoretical review to support the proposed reading key, as well as film analysis, with segmentation of specific scenes from each work. However, we refrain from an analysis displaced from traditions based on narratology and representation (AUMONT; MARIE, 2004) to prioritize an analysis that privileges body and affection (RAMALHO, 2012). Thus, we emphasize the dynamics and expressiveness of bodies: the bodies that perform on stage, the materialities in the frame and the images themselves, their framing, movement, cadence and the way in which one shot touches another, considering how these elements are points of corporeal encounter and produce affections.

The interest of this work is markedly aesthetic in thinking about contemporary phenomena through the lens of audiovisual, above all, in thinking about how they can be aesthetically present in audiovisual works. Aesthetics is understood here as going beyond the formal quality of images and sounds or the modulation of audiovisual language to constitute certain styles and sensory effects. Although this understanding is also present, we think of aesthetics through the lens of aisthesis, aesthesia, and sensitivity. In other words, aesthetics as a possibility of expressing sensibilities; or rather, as the constitution and opening

of sensitive universes, in which bodies can reverberate affections in one another. Therefore, in addition to thinking about how audiovisual works stylistically use their images and sounds — although this is something central — we also seek to think about how they can open bodies to a sensitive experience, in which dissident sensibilities can recognize themselves, engage, express themselves, and give vent to their ways of being and feeling.

### **The indiscernible**

To better scrutinize the “broken body” and understand what its indiscernibility is about, it is worth briefly reviewing a metaphor that is quite appropriate for contemporary queer audiovisual media and is present in both films to be analyzed: the cyborg. The figure of the cyborg, enunciated by Donna Haraway (2009) and skillfully reinterpreted by Preciado (2017), is one of the greatest metaphors for capitalism, body, and technology of our times. The cyborg is a post-industrial body whose materiality goes beyond its limits, becomes contiguous with technologies, changes itself, and, in this way, conceives a new sensitive dimension. Evidently, this crossing of boundaries between body and technology has well-defined political bases and power strategies, especially when we think of a capitalism for which sensitivity is a target of interest. However, Preciado (2017) seeks to point out precisely ways to tarnish and pervert hegemonic power strategies. The queer author helps us to undertake a political investment in technology, instead of its mere “demonization”. After all, the cyborg is not a closed mathematical and mechanical system, but rather “an open, biological and communicating system” (PRECIADO, 2017, p. 167). In this sense, the cyborg can help us to conspire a slight perversion of dominant strategies of power: bodies are regulated and produced by technology, but they are also capable of altering it; they also become embedded in it and transform it; they also make “rational” technology an embarrassment, a living flesh with its “excesses of intensity”, its share of “indiscernibility”.

Let us explore this body a little further, asking in what ways this “indiscernibility” can come to the surface, especially if this body is dissident — and it is at this point that we think of this body as a “broken body”. In addition to being queer, the “broken body” is a body contiguous to technologies governed by capitalism, but whose functioning tests bugs in the “rules of use”, constrains the dictates and parameters for which the body-technology connection was a priori established, like a “broken machine”, a device that does not work well, that has breakdowns, unexpected functioning, but that, precisely in its inadequacy, produces something new. If technology was imposed on the body as a means of observing and manipulating its sensitivity, as a means of governing this body to make it perform better, the body can also lend its affects, its powers, its embarrassments — or “breaking” technology. It is this body that lends its embarrassments to technology and, in doing so, forges some lines of flight, which here we call “broken body”. A body whose powers constrain, to some extent, the hegemonic power imposed on it and disobey it. This body is useless and makes no sense from a hegemonic point of view. It is embarrassing, noisy, and has no well-defined function. For the hegemonic, heterosexual culture, it is as if this body were missing things or as if its parts were not in the “correct” place. That is why it is, in some sense, indiscernible, and it is to its own indiscernibility that it pays tribute. It is from this that it uses to produce presence in the world.

When we use the term *indiscernible*, we infer that which is impossible to understand, to grasp, or that which, when seen, is understood in a confused, strange, fragmentary way, like broken bodies, barely intelligible to the understanding of what it means to be “normal” or “useful” to the current hegemonic economy. Indiscernible is also that which, to some extent, escapes language and discourse, and, precisely for this reason, perhaps can escape to the same extent from hegemonic control and utilitarian interests.

By proposing the *praise of the indiscernible* as a key to reading, we understand that the “indiscernible” can take on different features and

appearances from one audiovisual work to another. In other words, it can be translated, materialized and embodied in different ways, in terms of sensitivity and aesthetic experiences. What underpins and connects the praise of the indiscernible is its experimental character, the form and procedures of its narrative and image-sound constructions, which we will explain below.

Audiovisual is technology, and as such, it is something to be disputed. Being a sensitive technology, the best locus of dispute is in the field of sensitivity itself. If the hegemonic audiovisual project is to walk in a straight line towards a telos — to be widely understood and, thus, consumed —, queer audiovisual tries to disrupt this telos, shakes up the path, makes curves. It encourages us to make some deductions about these curves.

We believe that the praise for the indiscernible occurs through a double procedure of queer appropriation, of a narrative and aesthetic order. In short, it occurs through a speculative and exploratory mobilization between two aspects: *teleological deconstruction* of the narrative and vertiginous stylization of images and sounds. By teleological deconstruction, we infer a fragmentation and decomposition of narrative precepts of “cause and effect”, which shake up the understanding and intelligible comprehension of the audiovisual narrative. By *vertiginous stylization of images and sounds*, we evoke an intense mobilization of visual, auditory, tactile, sensory properties, etc., in an underlined way, which pays more tribute to itself than to the narrative trigger, and which we read through the conceptual key of excess, especially an *excess of attractions* (BALTAR, 2012).

We engage with Teresa de Lauretis’s (2011) understanding of what a *queer text* would be. The author tells us:

For the purposes of this discussion, I can provisionally call queer the fictional text—whether literary or audiovisual—that not only works against narrativity, the generic pressure of all narrative toward closure and completeness of meaning, but also that which clearly disrupts the referentiality of language and the referentiality of images (DE LAURETIS, 2011, p. 244).

In other words, queer works would be those that operate against narrative or that, at least, disturb its completeness, its referentiality. To state this, certainly, is not to say that queer audiovisual works do without narratives, but that their narratives are constructed in other terms, in different ways and that they tend towards a fragmentation, a “shuffling” of “cause and effect”. “It is not that there is no plot, because there is a narrative, but the syntactic and rhetorical density of the text, its unusual lexical choices and the kaleidoscopic narrative embedded in its elliptical narration frustrate both narrative and referential expectations” (DE LAURETIS, 2011, p. 244). According to De Lauretis (2011), a hegemonic text would fulfill some requirements for its readers and/or viewers, such as comprehensibility, referentiality and identification. Therefore, if the requirements expected in a work are, precisely, those governed by a thread that leads to the understanding of “what is happening in the story” or to “identification” with that story, it is these requirements that will be fragmented and shaken in a queer work, which generates “difficulty” in relation to the text.

Barbosa (2017) argues that the issue of “text difficulty” could also be attributed to other cinematographies, which are not exactly dissident. “Modern” or “avant-garde” cinemas would be examples of works that are also “difficult”, with narratives that expand and challenge “cause and effect” and easy readability by their viewers. However, while these cinemas, elevated to a “cinema of life and truth” (BARBOSA, 2017, p. 113), point to a “future” or to an “essential humanist teleology” (BARBOSA, 2017, p. 114), queer works dispense with such teleological concerns, and do not even bother to reveal any “human essence” or “redemptive” futuristic proposal. The “difficulty” in queer works would be, roughly speaking, an exercise in exploring and taking advantage of the “difficulty” itself, of the noises and discomforts in their narratives, without great “heroic” commitments beyond disturbing and criticizing hegemonic demands. For this reason, precisely, queer works would be “affective excesses” (BARBOSA, 2017, p. 117).

Let us move from the narrative scope to the image-sound construction of works. If teleological deconstruction leads to the fragmentation of narrative precepts and to “difficulty” in works, excess does the same, but this time animated by a specific and highly stylized use of images and sounds. Already widely theorized in film and audiovisual studies, excess can be analyzed in many ways. Let’s take the approach of Mariana Baltar (2012). When discussing the concept, Baltar (2012, p. 126) says that excess is “an aesthetic and political procedure of dialogic incorporation of stylistic marks”. According to the author, excess would be a procedure that, through images and sounds, would invest a reiterative and saturating rhetoric in audiovisual narratives. It would not be enough to tell about a “cry”, one would have to “show the tears”. It would not be enough to tell about a “wound”, one would have to “show the blood” in a privileged way. This “showing”, this “privileged exhibition”, not only comes in the wake of a growing desire to see in Western modernity but also incorporates values — moral and social — spearheaded by this modernity. In Baltar (2012), excess would be linked to a moralizing pedagogical project linked to the processes of modernity, a project that aimed to educate large social masses sensorially and sentimentally, through vision and spectacle. According to the author, we can infer that sensitive strategies, or even a special interest of capitalism in the sensitivity of bodies, is something that has been around for a long time and that is intensifying today. The modern project advances and takes on other contours in a contemporary “hypermodern” context.

However, still in the footsteps of Baltar (2012), we can perceive other modules of force, other possible modes of excess. Despite being part of a pedagogical procedure linked to a capitalist project, excess would not be merely reiterative or a pure expression of hegemonic values. The author presents us with at least two different procedures linked to excess: reiteration and saturation. In the first, a coherent excess is identified, in which symbols converge to the same field of meaning; in the second, a saturation of elements is

identified that are not necessarily related to each other and that do not point in the same direction or to the same cohesive meaning. Baltar (2012) argues that reiteration and saturation present distinct aesthetic behaviors, and proposes an *excess of attractions*, using the concept of *attraction* discussed at length by Tom Gunning (2006) and other theorists. Attraction is inspired, in the first instance, by Eisenstein's *montage of attractions*, fundamental to the theory of cinematic montage. "The term already had, in the writings of the Russian thinker, three correlated conceptions: the performance dimension, the association of ideas and the capacity to provoke agitation (excitement) in the spectator" (BALTAR, 2012, p. 136). It is from these conceptions of Gunning (2006) that Baltar (2012) develops his ideas about attraction, reflecting not only on the First Cinema — a historical landmark of a "cinema of attractions" — but also on the performance dimension and the production of "emotional shocks" in several other forms of cinema.

The excess of attractions would appear as "shock and saturation inserts" (BALTAR, 2012, p. 138). These inserts, these image-sound insertions in the middle of film works, would occur:

1. As an allusive incorporation of narrative traditions of the mode of excess (the genres of the body itself), with the aim of exacerbating the sensorial experience.
2. As an "ecstatic", saturated and dizzying insertion/association of images and sounds (BALTAR, 2012, p. 138).

Baltar (2012) calls the most "traditional" procedure of excess linked to a reiterative — and moralizing — character, namely *narrative excess*. The other procedure, which although different would not be totally opposite, and could even coexist with the first, would be the *excess of attractions*. The second, which interests us more now, would operate in two ways: direct allusion to privileged narratives of excess (narratives in which excess has historically been widely used); and saturated and dizzying insertion of images and sounds. In this way, the excess of

attractions has both an allusive aspect — to a “cinema of excess” — and a saturating and dizzying aspect.

Along with the teleological deconstruction explained above, we identify the excess of attractions as a praise of the indiscernible in contemporary queer audiovisual. It is, in fact, through the pair *teleological deconstruction* — based on the ideas of queer text in De Lauretis (2011) — and *excess of attractions* — as expressed by Mariana Baltar (2012) — that we base the praise of the indiscernible, conceived as an aesthetic-narrative procedure and a key to dissident readings of audiovisual production.

The praise of the indiscernible would not be an affect or aesthetic regime, but rather a propitiator of aesthetic regimes, which can vary from film to film. It would therefore be a procedure for modulating films, and this modulation is generally conscious on the part of those who make it. The affects that emerge from these modulations, these, yes, shape aesthetic regimes and can go beyond what was previously modulated. Perhaps it is precisely this “beyond” the “precious stone” that the praise of the indiscernible seeks to speculate. In this sense, such a procedure is expressed and can be identified through the way in which *queer text* and *excess*, especially *excess of attractions*, are articulated with each other. Such articulation can generate affects of discomfort, confusion, abjection — as in the films we analyze here —, among others. However, what connects them and makes such a procedure recognizable is the way in which the films “disrupt” their own teleological development so that such aesthetic regimes are expressed, so that the affects they mobilize emerge and engage us, so that images and sounds are displayed in their qualities, in their stylization, in their excess.

The greatest mark of praise for the indiscernible is non-teleology, the “disrupting” of the chain of cause and effect in favor of the affective intensity of images and sounds. Thus, it is perceived in a narrative that does not progress properly to its end, in events “disturbed” by excessive images and sounds — sometimes random —, which are not there to necessarily make the film “move forward”. Films that praise the

indiscernible do without well-defined beginnings, middles and ends. As much as these are there, they are not exactly what matters most. What really matters is what the images and sounds, in their excess, can perform, as well as the feelings they can bring. It is an excess, as already said, often dizzying, that does not want to be edifying, “deep”, revealing a “truth” beyond the images. On the contrary. It is an excess that tends to make the images shallow, superficial, ornamental, jocular. In short, an excess that plays in a “perverse” way with the images and sounds independently of the film’s narrative. This non-teleology is expressed in a filmic cadence interspersed with moments of “suspension”: the scene seems to stop in itself and in what it performs, with a fragile concern about its narrative role within the filmic fabric. Sometimes, there is no narrative role whatsoever. It is as if the film were suspended so that the frame could show us the performance of what is staged — and it is this performance that can bring about affection and that will tell us about the aesthetic regimes with which the film engages.

Films that praise the indiscernible are, in a certain way, fragmentary — and for this very reason, also broken bodies — in which the narrative always seems, on the one hand, to “lose something” to the affective power of the images and sounds in their excess; but, on the other hand, to “gain something” that escapes the narrative itself and lends it a strange and singular face. The main marks of this *non-teleology* are the effect of suspension — of “spins” in the present of the images —; a sense of narrative “dehierarchization,” in which the film does not necessarily privilege the figure of a protagonist, but rather revels in and “takes time” with other characters, other bodies, other images and what they can show us; a sensory engagement that mobilizes in us affections that go beyond the film’s narrative — perhaps even distancing us from it, in some way — but which are, independently, what will provide the tone of the film and its proposed aesthetic experience.

All these non-teleological marks “strange” the film, make it something “confusing”, perhaps something “difficult to understand”, something whose engagement is markedly different from what we are accustomed

to, due to a hegemonic way of narrating in cinema and audiovisual media. They are marks that seem to pay tribute, precisely, to that which cannot be understood, to that which escapes comprehension and, for this very reason, perhaps escapes the clutches of capitalism, even if temporarily. It is this exploratory and speculative invention, operationalized as an aesthetic-narrative procedure in audiovisual media, that we understand as *praise for the indiscernible*, which is “praise” in the sense of being a tribute: film works are not necessarily, in their entirety, indiscernible or unintelligible, impossible to understand and enjoy; however, they animate, play with, pay tribute to indiscernibility, to that which escapes language, to that which is confusing and difficult to explain, to that which cannot be easily grasped.

### **Anarchic cyborgs and odysseys**

It could be said that both Anarca Filmes and Chorumex are cyborgs that build broken bodies. The works of both collectives, of a multimedia and frankly experimental nature, do not shy away from shattering any supposed integrity of the image-sound technologies they appropriate. By challenging hegemonic production schemes, they produce works with a very low budget, with rudimentary resources and, at the same time, quite creative. Works that modulate the theme of sexual and gender dissidence, among others, in their own formal conception, their use of images and sounds. Also challenging hegemonic distribution schemes and the frequent rejection in festivals, circuits and more “traditional” spaces, these works are shown in various windows: projections on walls, in warehouses and in party spaces, in addition to the many online windows. Founded by Amanda Seraphico, Clari Ribeiro, Lorrán Dias and Mariana Cavalcanti, the Anarca Filmes collective excels in production and distribution in spaces of LGBTQIAPN+ political, cultural and aesthetic resistance. Having produced works since 2014 between Rio de Janeiro and Recife, the collective is launching its first interactive film in 2021, *Usina-Desejo Contra a Indústria do Medo*. This is a short film made especially for the

digital platform, and it is the collective's first film to allow audience interaction, allowing them to choose between three alternative endings.

There is much to be said about *Usina-Desejo*, in terms of *queer text*, *excess* and cyborg bodies, contiguous with technologies, especially in its three alternative endings. The film begins when the characters Bill (Lorre Motta) and Penelope (Amanda Seraphico) seek advice from Oracle (Max Willã Morais), a YouTuber tarot reader, a body that does not fit into "male" or "female" gender categories. Oracle then literally "pulls" the characters into the computer, into the "strange world of the internet," where they are trapped, where their biological flesh becomes part of the proliferating virtual images. Here, the cyborgs Bill and Penelope, bodies connected to audiovisual technology, are literally "pulled" and "swallowed" into it, turning their matter into pixels that mix with the many displayed on the screen that was previously in front of them. Then, behold, the viewers are invited by Oracle to interact, to choose between three possible endings for the narrative. Three screens are displayed for us to click on.

We click on a path and are led to yet another sea of convulsive and overlapping images. We see Bill and Penelope's heads amalgamated with other bodies. Their faces embody memes — they embody contemporary pop divas in fragments of music videos. Here we see a profusion of images reappropriated from the internet. An excess of attractions opens up as these images and sounds take over the fabric of the film without worrying about a clear teleological line, in a rather dizzying, saturated way, which revolves much more around the display of images and sounds themselves than a causal and explanatory relationship of this display. Here, the images and sounds enjoying their own appearance and cadence, in themselves, are more valuable than what will come later, in narrative terms. An electronic sound, similar to that of video games, accompanies the confusing digital adventure, which seems to end when Bill and Penelope cross another threshold, a "curtain of algorithms". When they pass through the portal, they fall into another reality. They believe they have returned to the "real world", but they realize that they have

returned as “miniatures” of themselves. “We look just like Chapolin, man!” The opening chords of the Mexican series’ opening song play, and we see Bill and Penelope next to a “giant” cat. The image refers to the shrunken version of the character Chapolin in the television series. Funk chords begin to play, revealing a remix of the series’ song by MC Drika and MC Maycão: Chapolin Corobaile. The film ends.

We click on another path, and another cyborg experience begins. We enter a new scene, dark, reddish, with localized lights, which reminds us of a film studio. Ring light reflectors and tripods are arranged in the space. A film projection takes place on a wall. Bill and Penelope enter the frame. There is a table with a large piece of meat next to what appears to be a cylinder of salt. On a tripod, a fixed cell phone reveals the image of an eye that seems to be spying on the action of the characters exploring the space. A high-pitched sound startles them, and Bill and Penelope run away. A man, played by Lorran Dias, enters the frame, walking around the table and heading towards the piece of meat and the cylinder of salt. He slowly mixes them together. The “salted meat” is placed on a tripod, between two reflectors. The man then begins to film and photograph that scene, which is projected on the wall in the background. A saturating profusion of images takes over the scene. The “spying eye” on the cell phone, on different scales. The flesh. The eye and the flesh. The eye, the flesh and its virtual images. Moving, dancing. The rings of light, the tripods, the salt thrown on the floor. Everything is in flux, with no specific order, no destination. The characters’ voices verbalize clues about the excess of attractions we see in the scene, as well as comments on the aesthetic and technological capitalism in which those bodies and technologies are inserted: “terror and wonder, excess and delirium [...], prey and predators fighting over worlds [...], we distrust the light of the cave, the traps of visibility”. Images are juxtaposed: the flesh and the image of the flesh; the image of the eye on the cell phone and the image of the cell phone with the image of the eye; the flesh between the light and the camera, the projected image of the face, in close-up. The film ends.

We click on the last path: A room. A cyborg body in the center, delicately sitting on the floor. A shape of digital spines hovers in the air. A computer is open on the floor. Wires and devices. A high sound frequency is tuned in by the body in the center, which looks at us while manipulating the equipment. Bill and Penelope enter the frame and observe the actions. Their bodies are affected by the sound frequencies, and they begin to dance, moving around the space to the rhythm of the noises produced. Penelope, with a fixed and apathetic tone of voice and expression, dances as she speaks, holding a cell phone at ear level. Bill emits a sound tuned to a device. Tense sounds, noises in increasing frequency. Penelope's shaking. Once again, an excess of attractions mediated by a dizzying display of images and sounds that tell us little or explain to us, and more sensitize us and hook us with their own qualities. The large black eyes of the cyborg body stare at us, and the film ends.

The three paths, which lead to different endings for the film, have many things in common, but perhaps the main one is: none of them lead to an ending. There is no narrative ending. Narrative expectation is broken, destroyed in favor of the power of the images and sounds themselves. Cause and effect are left aside in favor of the affections provided by the saturating and dizzying display of images and sounds. In other words, a queer text combined with an excess of attractions. Each alternative ending shows us a different adventure in an odyssey of frenetic images and sounds, with little or no causality, unconcerned with a coherent and teleological narrative line. Images and sounds whose power resides in themselves, in their affective power, in their ability to hook and provoke us. Here, we are not dealing with a narrative that seeks to make itself understood, that seeks to provide solutions to the problems proposed. The moment Bill and Penelope cross the portal and are pulled into virtual reality—which confirms and expands the cyborg status of their bodies—everything there becomes an image. The “zone of indiscernibility” created by the conjunction of the characters’ bodies with the technology that swallowed them generates dizzying images that do not require established narrative stages, images that are not very legible

for hegemonic aesthetic-narrative standards and demands. It is a wave of images that generates a kind of “alternative plot” based on a certain refusal, including, of hegemonic demands. Nothing is there to be properly understood in a linear way and consumed, nor to point to a hopeful, redemptive future. The narratives are offered to the aesthetic perception of the spectator, without anesthesia, who can interpret and understand them in the light of their “cultural mediations” (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1997; 2004). In its dizzying and non-teleological saturation of images and sounds, the film jokingly celebrates such images and sounds, in a superficial and, as André Antônio Barbosa (2017) would say, frivolous way. However, it is this very superficiality that becomes strange and noisy. The confusion mobilized by the images does not attempt to explain itself or have deep meanings. It is an image-sound confusion that is staged here to take advantage of itself, as well as how it uses audiovisual technology to “bug” it, to make it not “work properly”. This is where its praise of the indiscernible lies. *Usina Desejo* is a “broken body” that uses its intense stylization — modulated by queer text and excess of attractions — to play with the contiguity of body and technology, to play with the cyborg status of contemporaneity and to rehearse on it strange sensibilities, somewhat unproductive to the interests of capitalism.

Something similar can be seen in the Chorumex short film. The Rio de Janeiro collective does not shy away from dissimulating its cyborg status, openly assumed in the bodies of the characters in the short film *Os Anos 3000 Eram Feitos de Lixo*, who present themselves as “cyborgs”. The collective appropriates audiovisual technology in all its works to undertake an experimentation, just like the previous collective, “anarchic”, anti-capitalist, post-humanist. It uses a dizzying excess of images and sounds that underpin its noisy and marginal status, which makes no effort to compromise with any hegemonic dictate whatsoever. On the contrary, it composes broken bodies that pride themselves on “functioning poorly”, on consuming and regurgitating “trash”, on “feeding on leftovers” and from there conceiving an “aesthetics of the rest”, of the “disposable” and the “discarded”, of what has been thrown away

by the hegemonic economy. If “leftovers” and “trash” are materials discarded by the dynamics of capitalism, they are also, in some way, indistinguishable from these dynamics — hence their preciousity. It is by collecting this preciousity that Chorumex modulates its images and sounds into saturated, “fried” and “scatological” parodies of contemporary times, a time that brings no teleological hopes and promises of the future except, as the title of their short film suggests, “trash”.

The short film by Ana All, Cleyton Xavier and Clara Chroma presents a futuristic and parodic cyberpunk scenario, set in the 3000s, in a dystopian society governed by an anarcho-believer power. The city — which, in the past, was a beautiful and tropical Rio de Janeiro — is now a jungle of leftovers and trash. On the margins lived cyborgs, who made crime their way of life. The crime: producing and trafficking experimental works of art. For this reason, they are pursued by an undercover agent of the anarcho-believer government.

Once again, we see the modulation of a queer text, narratively fragmentary, and an excess of attractions that are based on the power of images and sounds. We can say that not only are the bodies of the characters in the scene cyborgs, but the film itself is. A human-machine contiguity full of embarrassment, which seems to pulse the “zone of indiscernibility” of this encounter to its ultimate degree.

The images play with technology by forging a futuristic technology that, in fact, makes direct reference to “retro” technologies: the video game of the 1980s, the VHS video, old computers. The film begins with the words, in an intertitle with digitized letters that refer to old video games: “after the swine apocalypse, robots and machines gain freedom from human slavery”. These machines, the cyborgs that “free” themselves from hegemonic power — represented by humanity, which had built them for its own benefit and its whims —, stage an inversion of contemporary hegemonic technologies, which, in turn, also mobilize technology, but in a perverse way, with little logic and utility for hegemonic standards. Images and sounds are a kind of counter technology that animates a module of force contrary to hegemonic technologies.

A counter technology that aims to break the humanist and teleological character of audiovisual technology in favor of the power that the body — the bodies on stage and the filmic body itself — has to show us. Cyborgs are bodies dressed in various accessories and paraphernalia, with a plastic texture and cheap material, with a “trash look”. In a post-apocalyptic society where everything is trash, where people hydrate themselves with sewage, trash becomes something of value, and is reappropriated by cyborg bodies, which immerse themselves in the remains of VHS tapes and feed on them.

The colors are saturated, and nothing in the scene seems to have a concrete materiality. Everything is digital images, which do not shy away from showing themselves as such. More than digital images, they are flawed images, which digitize, fragment, crack, and break. They are broken bodies. The bodies of the cyborgs, the “main characters,” almost always framed in a medium shot, oscillate between the plastic texture of the trash that adorns them and the texture of the pixels that underlie their images. The criminal cyborgs traffic in amateur-experimental art, which, in its context, was something serious, a threat to the given hegemonic power. The short film certainly plays with its own status as an experimental amateur film, which appropriates contemporary hegemonic technologies, but which at the same time are a threat, because they distort them and make them something meaningless, something that goes against the interests of capital.

In the film, the cyborgs take care of all the stages of production of the art they create: production, distribution, and consumption. By openly mocking widely known production schemes in the audiovisual market, the short film twists them from the inside in a sequence of images that overlap in a saturated way, like attractions. In the consumption stage, experimental arts, like “drugs,” are devoured by cyborgs. They put them in their mouths and eat them. In the dystopian future, trash is the greatest currency of exchange, and the cyborgs’ pleasure is precisely to capture this trash, the remains of capital, and manipulate it in their own way, modulating their own images and sounds. This is what the film by the

Chorumex collective itself intends to do: to appropriate “remains” of the images produced by hegemonic media technologies and to fray them to the point of ignorance, unproductivity, and indiscernibility. The cyborgs find remnants of obsolete technologies in the trash on the streets, and with them they create their experimental art — which is, at the same time, their food and their weapon against the given hegemonic power. In a pixelated, cracked, evanescent, depthless and purely image-sound rhythm, the film continues in a profusion of fast, ultra-colorful and dizzying images, until its end.

*The 3000s Were Made of Trash*, as well as *Desire-Factor Against the Fear Industry*, are broken bodies that praise the indiscernible. Cyborgs that have bugs, are fragmentary and have no aesthetic-narrative integrity — and it is precisely their fragmentation that they use to communicate. They are works of visual and sound experimentation, of sensory investigation and speculation about the dissident bodies that are mobilized by them. His praise of the indiscernible, translated and embodied in image-sound constructions based on queer text (DE LAURETIS, 2011) and excess of attractions (BALTAR, 2012), is in fact a praise of the powers of what a body can do beyond what is contained and saved by the dictates of capitalism.

### **Non-ending considerations**

The “broken body,” the poetic figure that walks through this text, without anesthesia, is not afraid of its cracks. Instead, it leans into them to extract power from them, perhaps something new to be felt in today’s times. The praise of the indiscernible is about exploring something that is, to some extent, incomprehensible, or even useless, from a hegemonic point of view. It is about twisting the limits of language, something that we believe we find in the speculative and experimental work of contemporary queer collectives, such as those analyzed here.

By enunciating the praise of the indiscernible as a key to reading queer audiovisual objects, we seek to demonstrate how part of the contemporary

audiovisual made by dissident subjects mobilizes images and sounds that, in addition to not paying tribute to the coherence required by a hegemonic narrative economy, play with sensibilities that can pervert and fray hegemonic interests.

If power in contemporary times is exercised over the body and sensitivity, it is on the body and sensitivity itself that queer audiovisual works will focus. If capitalism uses the contiguity of body and technology — the cyborg — to produce, manage, control and save, queer audiovisual works play at perverting this economy, they want to investigate what the body is capable of, what it can do that is embarrassing. It is embarrassment — and, perhaps, what is indiscernible about it — that can shake up something in today's hegemonic dictates. This is what we believe we find in the works, a kind of speculative essay that, in its fragmentary texture — its “broken body” —, stages frankly strange images and sounds, which do not lend themselves to hegemonic intelligibility. That is why these works praise the indiscernible, and it is in this that they seek new aesthetic possibilities.

Far from assuming a status that is traditionally understood as “political,” queer audiovisuals recognize themselves as a product of capitalism, but a strange and perverse product, whose purpose is to hinder understanding and legibility for utilitarian interests, a product modulated so that it “doesn't work properly.” Queer artistic works are not redemptive, they have no intention of being so, and they will clearly not overcome capitalism. However, they can use their strange and dissident fabric to stage commentary on it, to rehearse other sensibilities for the here and now.

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## On the cruel images: iconicity of the massacres in the countryside

### Sobre as imagens cruéis: iconicidade dos massacres no campo

João Damasio da Silva Neto<sup>1</sup> 

**ABSTRACT:** *In this text, we sought to develop an approach, aligned with critical visual studies, to study the iconicity of the “Massacres in the Countryside” page of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). It starts from the heuristics that, in mediatization, the narrative emergence of subalternized contexts enables the perception of perspectives situated on its images. We also mobilize the concepts of everyday catastrophes and perplexity to understand the reality of agrarian conflicts in Brazil. The analysis is focused on the distinction between the circulation of widely-recognized conflicts and the mediatization of agrarian conflicts, drawing some possible observations about the way in which the images from the CPT archives situate the narratives of massacres in the countryside.*

**Keywords:** *image; circulation; narrative; agrarian conflicts.*

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**RESUMO:** *Este texto busca desenvolver uma abordagem, alinhada aos estudos visuais críticos, para o estudo da iconicidade da página “Massacres no Campo” da Comissão Pastoral da Terra. Parte-se da heurística de que, na mediação, a emergência narrativa de contextos subalternizados viabiliza a percepção de olhares situados sobre suas imagens. Mobilizamos também os conceitos de catástrofes cotidianas e atordoamento para compreender a realidade dos conflitos agrários no Brasil. A análise foca a distinção entre a circulação de conflitos amplamente reconhecidos e a mediação dos conflitos agrários, apontando algumas observações possíveis sobre o modo como as imagens dos arquivos da CPT situam as narrativas de massacres no campo.*

**Palavras-chave:** *imagem; circulação; narrativa; conflitos agrários.*

## Introduction

Among the hermeneutic possibilities of the image, several forms of critical visual studies<sup>1</sup> have been arising lately, characterized by the elaboration of situated perspectives to the point of repositioning the imagetic actions. Against the reproductive imagination of hegemonic icons in history, Benjamin (2009), in his *Passages*, and Warburg (2024), in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, have echoed, for some time, the heuristic power of the image, respectively, for constructions of “history against the grain” and reassemblies of a “science of culture.” Strongly inspired by them, Didi-Huberman (2013; 2015; 2020) displaces visual criticism of cultures in general to localized social problems, such as the dramatic abuse of images in *the invention of hysteria* and the historical power of the four images conceived and torn from the Auschwitz-Birkenau hell.

Situated perspectives emerge from the narrative plots “when the images take position” (Didi-Huberman, 2017, free translation) — which impels us to relate the empirical condition of subjects situated before the images that affect their experiences and, therefore, their own subjective conditions. Among the essays that adopt this perspective, we draw attention to the approach De Carli (2021, p. 7) develops between the philosophy of the image and some speculative notions that concern the subjective situation, such as the *Amerindian perspective* of Viveiros de Castro (2017), who teaches us how “the experience from a point of view creates the subjects, and the subjects no longer manufacture a point of view and detach themselves, unharmed, through them” (free translation).

Situating the perspective makes visual studies critical as, in addition to the search for observing visual culture, they focus on the exercise of “showing the seeing” (Mitchell, 2006). Among other merits, the study

1 The term “critical visual studies” in this article derives from the course with this name taught by researcher Anelise De Cali at the Association of Research and Practices in Humanities (*Associação de Pesquisas e Práticas em Humanidades – APPH*) in May 2024. The course syllabus can be found at: <https://anelisedecarli.com/cursos/>.

by Saidiya Hartman (2020) stands out for an exercise as such: not only the author indicates the absence of archives of subalternized people, but proposes a *critical fabulation* as a powerful gesture in the face of images of Black girls. Certainly, other paths can be followed in this theoretical scene, whenever it is possible to reposition the visual criticism in face of the constitution of perspectives.

One of the paths to be pursued, as is the attempt of the present study, is the contribution of the dissertation of Professor Ana Paula da Rosa (2012) when relating theories of image, imagery, and mediatization to understand the process of symbolic elaboration and visual criticism in a society strongly permeated by media processes. Specifically, it is in the changes in the process of circulation of meanings that other forms of constitution of situated perspectives are materialized.

In this article, we raise a question of this type — more than an interpretation of certain images, we seek to situate visual criticism since the narrative emergence of subalternized contexts in mediatization. In this text, the focus lies on the situation of agrarian conflicts in Brazil, which dates back to colonization and lives through in all regions of the country in a ritualized way as if it were a thing of the past. Records of the Pastoral Land Commission (*Comissão Pastoral da Terra – CPT*) show, in a survey carried out annually, the everyday life of this catastrophe, which includes murders, land grabbing, invasions, threats, slavery and — the phenomenon regurgitated in the present study — massacres (or slaughters) that occurred amid conflicts over land and water in rural areas of the country.

In the context that relates critical visual studies, imagery, and mediatization, the relevance of this empirical object lies in the distinction highlighted between the circulation of widely-recognized conflicts (such as televised catastrophes) and the mediatization of everyday catastrophes (such as agrarian conflicts). In this article, we contribute to this theoretical scene as we investigate, in mediatization, the narrative emergence of subalternized contexts, specifically when the images take position in the agrarian struggle movements.

Images of massacres in the countryside have been produced and archived over nearly 40 years by CPT. With documents from judicial proceedings, journalistic coverage, and base works of pastoral agents, the collection constituted in a documentation center was made available on the Internet for the first time in 2017, on an online and interactive page called “Massacres in the Countryside”, a microsite linked to the CPT website<sup>2</sup>. Taking this page as an object of study, our goal is to understand how the unprecedented montage of images of massacres in the countryside by CPT questions the circulation of meanings about this catastrophe over time. Between the denunciation that calls for some visibility and the stun of circulating invisibilization, *how do the images of the CPT archives situate the narratives of massacres in the countryside?*

### **Massacres in the countryside: from catastrophe to stun and from collection to montage**

Since the events that marked colonization in Brazil, the land dispute remains evident. The history is long, complex, and only begins to be effectively organized as a public debate on agrarian reform in the second half of the 20th century, with the struggles of the *Ligas Camponesas* (“Peasant Leagues”, Brazilian social organizations founded aimed at improving rural workers’ living standards) during the elaboration of the subsequent elaborations of the Federal Constitution (COSME, 2018).

At the heart of the debate are female and male land workers, also recognizable in the forms of traditional and peasant communities and by various other identifications:

Homesteaders, landless persons, squatters, small owners, *parceiros* (owners of plots of land), small tenants, rural workers, prospectors, *caiçaras* (inhabitants of coastal regions of southeastern and southern Brazil), peasants from *fundo e fecho de pasto* (peasant communities located in the state of Bahia), *faxinalenses* (traditional peasant communities from the mid-south

2 Available from: <https://cptnacional.org.br/massacresnocampo>. Accessed on Mar. 12, 2024.

of the state of Paraná), *geraizeiro* (traditional inhabitants of the Cerrado regions of the state of Minas Gerais), *marisqueiras* (traditional artisanal fishing workers), fishermen, Quilombola people, *retireiros* (traditional communities who live at the banks of Araguaia River, state of Mato Grosso), riparian people, rubber-tappers, *vazanteiros* (riparian communities who live at the banks of rivers, especially nearby São Francisco River, in Minas Gerais), extractivist workers (chestnut, palm tree traders, babassu coconut breakers, rubber-tappers), Indigenous peoples, etc. (CPT, 2024a, p. 10)<sup>3</sup>.

The Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), which documents this struggle, emerged in 1975, linked to the National Confederation of Bishops of Brazil (*Confederação Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil – CNBB*), an organization of the Catholic Church that guaranteed the work of defense to the peoples of the countryside during the period of military dictatorship in the country. Later, it became an ecumenical institution, maintaining the mystique that confers identity to pastoral action in the struggle for human rights.

The rights provided for by the State, but little effective, and for which the CPT and other social movements fight, basically refer to the “lack of entitlement of Quilombos, demarcation of Indigenous territories, the allocation of public land, and the expropriation of agrarian properties for agrarian reform, as well as the non-holding of free, prior, and informed consultations” (CPT, 2024a, p. 7, free translation).

Alentejano *et al.* (2024), from the Laboratory of Studies of Social Movements and Territorialities of the Universidade Federal Fluminense (LEMTO/UFF) and the Group of Studies, Research and Extension in Agrarian Geography (GeoAgrarian/UERJ), point out that, in the last decade, the country registers a real “agrarian counter-reform,” as the policies already formulated in this regard are not only stuck, but also move backwards. There is what we can call a stun in the face of the everyday catastrophe of agrarian conflicts in Brazil.

3 Those affected by dams and leaderships are also other categories mentioned in the report, which demonstrates that there are several somewhat recognized ways to refer to the various people living in the countryside, by identity criteria, events, or activities exercised in daily life.

Legally and culturally supporting the communities that experience these conflicts, the CPT takes on the “task of documenting” as a pastoral mission that has, according to its own statement (CPT, 2024a, p. 11), the theological, ethical, political, pedagogical, historical, and scientific dimension. In addition, it categorizes some types of conflicts that help guiding the public debate about: land, occupation, and repossession conflicts, camps, labor conflicts, slave labor, overexploitation, resistance actions, water conflicts, conflicts in times of drought, conflicts in areas of mining, union conflicts, manifestations, and violence in the countryside.

Data on these categories are produced and published annually in the report *Conflitos no Campo — Brasil* [Conflicts in the Countryside — Brazil], a journal that also includes analytical texts interspersed with comparative tables, infographics, and photographs. The publication is based on a database made up of primary sources (reports and official documents), followed by secondary sources (newspapers and the Internet) and organized into a collection currently digitized and, in recent years, originally digital.

Due to the fact that it is established as one of the dimensions of the very activity of popular consultancy to social movements, the CPT carries out data collection ‘in loco’ and, therefore, makes feasible the records from real situations experienced by rural workers, traditional, primitive populations, Quilombola, riparian populations, *caičaras*, peasants, etc. who have reacted and react, organically, to the processes of land grabbing, expulsion, and the impacts of the construction of large projects such as dams and disasters resulting from mining activities, or even in their struggles against forms of exploitation of ‘contemporary slave labor’ (RIBEIRO *et al.*, 2020, p. 412, free translation).

We can understand this work of denunciation of the reality of conflicts in the countryside as a narrative resource that seeks to give legibility and visibility to this struggle. The narrative arises, precisely, when it is necessary to elaborate and act in the face of the complexity of world problems, constituting itself “as a mediation of the experience of historical time” (MANNA, 2020, free translation).

The narrative understood as a communication process finds its greatest heuristic power if it is understood in this broad field in which language is founded in relation to complex social dynamics, historically constituted and materially experienced in culture (MANNA, 2020, p. 45, free translation)

In this case, the experience of time mediated by the narrative of the *Conflitos no Campo* [Conflicts in the Countryside] report of CPT is necessarily of the order of disasters or, still, of the crises of time, configurations in which one perceives “a considerable confusion in the elaborations and actions on the course of history” (MANNA, 2020, p. 41, free translation). This catastrophe of conflicts in the countryside in Brazil becomes an everyday occurrence when perceived in its historicity, in the forms of colonization, centuries of violations, the last decades of struggle for agrarian reform, and the current scenario of counter-reform (COSME, 2018; ALENTEJANO *et al.*, 2024).

Having emerged in 1975, the CPT records the catastrophe of agrarian conflicts with documents that have been retroactive since the 1960s, but as of 1985 — therefore, almost 40 years ago — it started annually publishing the *Conflitos no Campo — Brasil* report. With the publication, the Commission is able to guide the media and denounce to society the seriousness of the events that pastoral agents witness every day.

The reports are highlighted, therefore, because they objectively bring, while going against the official records controlled by the same elites, the version of those affected by impunity and illegality carried out by these supposedly (until proven) landowners, who overindulge themselves in promiscuous access to public state apparatus (RIBEIRO *et al.*, 2020, p. 415, free translation).

However, in addition to the daily nature of the catastrophe, 2017 marks a moment of stun — when, along with the coup suffered by President Dilma Rousseff, the aforementioned process of agrarian counter-reform culminated with the alarming increase in deaths in the countryside. In that year alone, there were five massacres. The report, then, warned:

The numbers of violence grow in a frightening way. 71 murders are the highest number recorded since 2003, when 73 victims were counted. [...] But the macabre side of the murders in 2017 are the massacres. Five massacres with 31 victims. As Professor Cláudio Maia pointed out, in two of these massacres, Colniza, state of Mato Grosso, (9) and Pau D'Arco, state of Pará, (10), the number of people killed was only lower than that of Eldorado dos Carajás, dated April 17, 1996, with 19 deaths. Numbers of massacres, close to those of 2017, were recorded only in 1985, with 10 cases and in 1987, with six cases. However, in none of these 16 cases, the number of deaths per event came close to those recorded in 2017. Since 1988, more than two massacres were not recorded in a single year (CPT Nacional, 2018).

The CPT recognizes as “massacre in the countryside” every case in which three or more people were killed on the same occasion of agrarian conflict. The increase in this type of occurrence accentuates the denunciation of other violence, and it is from this stun that emerges the narrative device that we will analyze here.

Between the everyday catastrophe of agrarian conflicts and the increase in the occurrences of massacres, one can see the stun that sparks off a “temporal crisis” (MANNA, 2020). Suddenly, 2017 is mistaken with the scenario recorded in the 1980s and even with the colonization process. This, at first, is what is seen on the online page that makes the CPT collection a montage of images that intended to “bring greater visibility to all massacres in the countryside”:

Motivated by the boom of these crimes in 2017, with cases of greater repercussion in the states of Mato Grosso and Pará, CPT created a page dedicated to the topic, seeking to bring greater visibility to all the massacres in the countryside that occurred in previous years and to show society that this type of crime ‘is a rite of passage for genocide,’ as pointed out by Alfredo Wagner Berno de Almeida. An element that is evoked, because this type of violence has historically reached primitive and countryside populations, reflecting the process of land colonization and, currently, the land concentration in the country (CPT, 2024b).

The collection, previously available only at the Dom Tomás Balduino Documentation Center (*Centro de Documentação Dom Tomás Balduino*), was reorganized and published on the Internet as a set for the first time in 2017. This unprecedented montage of images of massacres in the countryside by CPT is a resource that expands and invites to public access what was restricted to researchers in the documentation center. This is one of the effects — positive, we must say — of mediatization on narratives coming from subalternized contexts.

Thus, in addition to denouncing it, the page drives the circulation of meanings and this takes place in at least two different ways. First, as a narrative that is inscribed in circulation, being able to move forward or not. Second, as a narrative that discloses the gaps of circulation of massacres in the countryside over the four decades of records made by CPT. Based on these two aspects, our objective in this research was to understand how the images of the CPT archives situate the narratives of massacres in the countryside.

### **Circulation of images in mediatization**

More than an interpretation of the represented meaning — which, in the case of a denunciation of murders, is evident —, when we propose an investigation on the images of massacres in the countryside, which are presented on the CPT page, we specifically seek to empirically situate the visual criticism on this topic, from the narrative emergence of subalternized collectives. Undertaking the way CPT arranges its archive images is the focus of this study to situate visual criticism.

Mediatization, understood not as subjugation to technology, but rather as an “interactional process of reference” (BRAGA, 2006, free translation), intensifies the challenges, but also the paths of struggle, as synthesized by Freire (2023, p. 113), in the author’s study on the communicational organization of human rights in mediatization:

The process of mediatization intensifies in such a way that our experiences are increasingly conditioned to the presence in these spaces of mediation,

negotiation, visibility, interaction. Although we cannot talk about radical changes in the understanding of human rights in our society, we perceive gains in the collective effort to bring more comprehensive discussions on the subject, that are not restricted to the principles of normative texts, but which contextualize the debate on human rights from concretion (FREIRE, 2023, p. 113, free translation).

One of the ways in which mediatization manifests itself is by autonomizing the scope of the circulation of meanings, no longer restricted to productive activities or to forms of reception. For Eliseo Verón (2004), the circulation of meanings has always existed as an invisible sphere, in the gap between production and reception — circulation would be what is lost, articulated, or changed. With digital devices, there are procedures that not only expand access to the means of production and reception, but also evidence a sphere in the production of meanings that cannot be circumscribed either by the broadcasting agency or by the work of reception.

Verón (2004) points out that circulation can be understood by the analysis of marks, grammars, operations, and logics perceptible in any communication process. Within the context of this article, we consider that the page “Massacres in the Countryside” can be seen, from the circulation, in two ways: the circulation of the narrative of the massacres to which the page refers and the circulation of this narrative seen by the visual montage provided by the page itself.

In the first case, we would have the process that Braga (2006) calls “moving forward.” It is the ability to carrying on the construction of the meanings in circulation from new appropriations. In this sense, and already in the field of the imagery of catastrophes arising from conflicts, Rosa (2012) investigated the circulation of images of September 11, noticing how its symbolic force motivated its configuration as an “image-totem.”

Every representation already brings in itself a certain structure that is connected with socially constructed imageries. Thus, even unconscious, there are basic structures inherent in the development of human beings, such as, for example, myths, archetypes. However, there are photographs, videos, technical images that are mediatized and which become preponderant to

other images that are also accessible to the eyes. This is not only because such images are being publicized frequently, but rather because they involve deeper social structures that I consider here as totem (ROSA, 2012, p. 331, free translation).

This is, therefore, a case in which the mediatization does not avoid the symbolic power of the circulating images, which move forward and continue producing new meanings (including the meaning of this analysis) up to the present day throughout the world. In the early 2000s, September 11 occupied the place of icon of the new millennium, so powerful that it was able to kill, as expounded by Mondzain (2009).

In this sense, it is possible to infer that the images of massacres in the countryside are far from this iconicity. Therefore, we will not focus, at least at this moment, on the study of circulation that takes place from the page. The intended visibility is still a struggle faced by the CPT and its repercussions in moving forward may be expounded at another time, with more room for this analysis.

The focus here lies on the analysis of circulation from the perspective of the CPT montage: how do the images of the CPT archives situate the narratives of massacres in the countryside?

The analysis will be carried out based on the observation of the page “Massacres in the Countryside” as an “image plates.” The heuristic attempt is inspired by the articulation that Didi-Huberman (2013) makes between the thoughts of Walter Benjamin and Aby Warburg to point to the existence of a “knowing-montage,” capable of evoking Benjamin’s traditional propositions about a “history against the grain,” that is, a way of reassembling the history falling short of hegemonic writing; and of Warburg’s “science of culture,” which is continuously reassembled from the very images of culture.

Didi-Huberman (2015) noticed this, for example, by studying the photographic iconography of Salpêtrière, a clinic that, from the author’s perspective, was responsible for the “invention of hysteria.” Assembling a series of images of women in spectacular acts was an iconicity justified by medical research, but which had the practical effect of inventing this

form of suffering, specifically linked to the pose that makes itself aesthetic to become an image.

In another study, Didi-Huberman (2020) analyzed the images produced by members of *sonderkommando*,<sup>4</sup> in a clandestine and risky way, known as the only four photographs of the surroundings of the gas chamber in *Shoah* — conferring to this achievement the qualification of “images despite everything,” because they were able to witness and survive despite all tragedy.

What interests us in Didi-Huberman (2013; 2015; 2020) is the possibility of this visual criticism that takes place from the devices that are set as montages of certain images. In our case, the “Massacres in the Countryside” page shows a montage or, as Mondzain (2013) prefers, an iconicity.

According to Mondzain (2013, p. 118, free translation), “the essence of the image is not visibility; it is its economy, and only this, which is visible in its iconicity.” It is a perspective of the relationship between symbolically designated images, more than an analysis of the image as a linguistic sign that designates its referent. For the author, “the image is supported by an idea of meaning, not the sign” (MONDZAIN, 2013, p. 112, free translation).

To think about iconicity, the methodology presented with Warburg, Didi-Huberman, and Mondzain is the perception of the relations between images. To this end, in Warburg, the montage of image plates stood out. We can recognize precisely this operation on the “Massacres in the Countryside” page when arranging its images. Our goal is to understand how the montage of these images by CPT questions the circulation of meanings about this catastrophe over time.

### **“The cruel images of the massacre of squatters”**

When opening the CPT “Massacres in the Countryside” page (Figure 1), there is a homepage with an image representing the map of Brazil covered by lands, icon of the struggle in question, overlaid by the title of the

4 Prisoners who were forced by the Nazis to work in extermination camps during World War II.

page and its description: “Continuous monitoring of massacres in the countryside in Brazil, by the Pastoral Land Commission, from 1985 to the present day.” This map is immersed in newspaper clippings/headlines that reported these catastrophes. One of them is the title of this analysis — “the cruel images of the massacre of squatters.”

Figure 1 – Homepage of the “Massacres in the Countryside” page



Source: CPT (2024b).

Before carrying on, it is necessary to add some methodological and operational observations to the theoretical-methodological notes already outlined about our understanding of conflicts in the countryside, such as everyday catastrophes in Brazil, and the warning about the increasing massacres in present times as a stun, as well as our proposition of heuristics of critical visual studies from a perspective situated in the CPT.

First, a personal note adds a relevant methodological datum of this study. At the time of the stun, in 2017, I, the author of this study, worked as a journalist in the CPT communication advisory and reported not only the largest number of murders due to agrarian conflicts in 14 years, but also the series of five massacres involving 34 victims: Pau D’Arco (state of Pará), Colniza (state of Mato Grosso), Vilhena (state of Rondônia), Lençóis (state of Bahia), and Canutama (state of Amazonas). In addition, I was part of the team that carried out the search and synthesis of

information that would go from the CPT collection to the microsite “Massacres in the Countryside,” our object of analysis herein.

This research, therefore, began in 2017, with the observation of this scenario and the creation of a page capable of evidencing the recurrence and severity of this outcome of agrarian conflicts in Brazil, among others. In this project, I physically moved from the communication sector to the documentation sector. I spent a few weeks at the Dom Tomás Balduino Documentation Center to check massacre by massacre. Starting from the information on the cases that occurred each year, from 1985 to 2017, the adopted procedure was to go through all the records, already digitized, eventually checking the physical collection and the complementary archives, to collect the available images and the main contextual and outcome information, aiming at writing notes summarizing each occurrence. Therefore, it is not appropriate to analyze the work carried out or what these images represent in this study — this is duly expressed. As certain operative movements with the images have already been made a few years ago, what is up to us now is to put ourselves before these images again and perceive how they question the circulation of meanings about the massacres in the countryside over time.

The description we chose as the title of this analysis — “the cruel images of the massacre of squatters” — evidences the meaning intended to all the massacres, presented on the page from an image that leads to the description and the available news/headlines about the occurrence. But let us look at a screenshot of the page as a whole. Its unusual verticality hinders its disposition in this study, but favors our analysis (Figure 2):

The presentation of this quite vertical image contrasts with the multiple possible ways of visuality of the page on digital devices, and this is motivated by two objectives in this analysis: the first is that, in fact, there are cruel images and our focus is not to obstinately fixate them on the retina of the reader of this article. Visualizing the images in thumbnails, side by side, still has a second goal, which is to notice its montage more deeply and what it can disclose to us. This is what we will address, through the practice of reassembling these images, to outline how the

Figure 2 – Image plate of massacres in the countryside by CPT



Source: CPT (2024b).

montage of the CPT questions the circulation of images in the imagery related to the massacres in the countryside.

The first aspect that is disclosed is that although there are images that are even “cruel,” it is the promise of “images” that is not fulfilled. There are 56 massacres, 56 frames for images. Half (30) of the massacres are not accompanied by images, and what is seen is the icon of the lack of a figure. The invisibility is iconically presented in frames bordered by the space-time sign that indicates the city and the year in which a massacre took place (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Reassembly I: iconic invisibility



Source: Prepared by the author, based on CPT (2024b).

The first of these frames gives access to the report on the death of four squatters by police officers and employees of a farm with pending evaluation, by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária – Incra*), on the possession of the land occupied by 1,200 families in the Fazenda Agropastoril e Extrativa do Brasil, in São João do Araguaia (state of Pará), 1995. It is against this lack of files that CPT reiterates its mission.

Researchers that have already focused on the issue of (in)visibility in cases of agrarian conflicts report how extreme is the difference in the visibility required by social movements and the invisibility provided by traditional media. In the case of massacres in the countryside, Machado (2021, p. 168, free translation) points out that “in corporate media journalism, these actors [peasants] had low visibility and negative visibility” and considers that this makes it difficult to recognize this violence as a social issue of everyday life.

The low visibility of violence occurring in places far from urban centers may be related to a deepening of violations, because it reduces the possibilities of being incorporated as social problems, socially recognized (and rejected) (MACHADO, 2021, p. 44, free translation).

The issue of visibility, in this and in other cases, is lamented in the face of the media alienation. Machado (2021, p. 169, free translation) believes that “while visible pain and suffering can evoke empathy, feelings of grief and emotion, the conditions in which these deaths occur and the unfolding of events are marked by erasures, injustices, and invisibility.”

A second aspect to highlight is that this invisibility also discloses the symbolic motivation of the “Massacres in the Countryside” page as a montage of invisibilization. The gaps can give us time to think, but they also inform that, even without visual records, each space keeps the account of the cruelty of the massacres in the countryside.

Conversely, a third aspect of our analysis at this moment is the perception of the topics that motivate and present themselves symbolically in the images. All 30 images presented on the covers of conflicts, without exception, are highly indicial. In dialogue with the montage strategy of webpage, we elaborated, in Figure 4, a reassembly that makes different indicial modes into contact:

In this set, we see remaining cartridges of fifteen shots against three members of the League of Poor Peasants (*Liga dos Camponeses Pobres* – LCP) in Porto Velho (state of Rondônia), in 2021, after months of persecution; the absence of bodies of the Quilombola leaders in an empty boat in the river, in Lençóis (state of Bahia), in 2017; dead bodies of people

Figure 4 – Reassembly II: indiciality of violence



Source: Prepared by the author, based on CPT (2024b).

killed in the Pau D'Arco Massacre, in 2017; bodies in coffins in the Eldorado dos Carajás Massacre (state of Pará), in 1996; unrecognizable bodies of tenant farmers killed in Marabá (state of Pará), in 1985, who were thrown at Itacaiunas River and found a week later; ashes of bodies in a charred car with workers who supported the struggle for agrarian reform in Vilhena (state of Rondônia), in 2017<sup>5</sup>.

The colors are in earthy tones of landscapes devastated by death and the wounded bodies do not appear as icons only when the newspaper images themselves occupy this space. They are there not only for what the newspapers said, but for the indiciality of the event. The need for the indication is disclosed, as we see in this other reassembly, which articulates different temporalities by multiplying the indicial frames: they are photos inserted in journalistic publications, which in turn are replicated on the CPT page. We can see how the work with CPT archive images produces complex articulations,

5 Full reports can be found on the aforementioned website. Available from: <https://cptnacional.org.br/todos-massacres> Accessed on: Feb. 12, 2024.

which still lack more studies, between primary and secondary sources, articulated to their fieldwork in the monitored communities. Far from being an isolated act, it is a work deemed necessary by the movements of struggle for land. That is why, during the evaluation of this article in the editorial processes of this journal, *Revista Comunicação, Mídia e Consumo*, one of the evaluators had the generosity of indicating possible parallels with the atlas of photographs of the Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST*), elaborated by Stella Senra.

A fourth aspect takes place when we access the images (Figure 5). They guide us, in most cases, to small summaries of each massacre. Over time, the images and news multiply. There are certainly more images about the five massacres that occurred in 2017 than about those of the 1980s. Not even the largest massacre ever recorded by the CPT — the Eldorado dos Carajás Massacre in 1996 —, which was widely reported at the time, can overcome the proliferation of current images in digital format. The page, however, does not show this imagetic difference. What it denounces is that no matter how much there are more images, invisibility seems to be the same.

Figure 5 – Reassembly III: indiciality of the event



Source: Prepared by the author, based on CPT (2024b).

As we look at the “gaps” of circulation (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2013; ROSA, 2012), it is evident that among the images there is a temporal distance of 40 years of records articulated by a unity of the shapes and colors that denounce the massacres in the countryside in a very indicial way. This finding of something that is repeated over time reminds us of the statement given by CPT (2024b) itself that “this type of crime is a rite of passage for genocide.”

Despite the circulating invisibilization, what this thematic persistence shows us seems to be the sense of resistance and survival of communities and images, which is sharpened by the few images of living people among the analyzed set. They are photos of memories, they are the eyes of children, they are Indigenous people in communities, as we see in our reassembly in Figure 6:

Figure 6 – Reassembly IV: survival of images, peoples, and conflicts



Source: Prepared by the author, based on CPT (2024b).

These notes — which are not intended for a conclusive analysis, but rather for a study capable of raising the questions that the “Massacres in

the Countryside” page present to the circulation of meanings about its own topic over time — make us conclude that there is another face of the mediatized images. The cruel images are not only those that present us with cruel death. While those of September 11 or even contemporary wars make us see the moving-forward circulation in the production of meanings, the images surveyed here lead us to think about the permanence of a never-elaborated meaning, as it is never socially recognized. The images of massacres in the countryside are not only cruel in their content, but in their circulating invisibilization.

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## Articles

## **Production of visibilities as potencies of fabulation: dimensions of everyday practices of image creation and consumption**

## **Produção de visibilidades como potências de fabulação: dimensões das práticas cotidianas de elaboração e consumo da imagem**

Ângela Cristina Salgueiro Marques<sup>1</sup> 

Luis Mauro Sá Martino<sup>2</sup> 

**ABSTRACT:** *What is it possible to see with so much content to look at? This text outlines some relations between image fabulation and the contemporary regime of uninterrupted production of visibilities, focusing on transformations in the creation and consumption of representations. Based on theoretical reflection and a literature review, it is argued that the indefinite increase in the production of images tends to affect their fabulation potency. The argument develops from the definition of the image's fabulating potency, as representation and also as an edge open to the imagination, this edge being the space for the creation of a power that acts against: the political control of the image as a way of regulating the production of the visible and its dissemination, and the elaboration of a regime of production of visibilities based on the market logic inscribed in the fabulation of the social.*

**Keywords:** *image; fabulation; visibility; visuality; media.*

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**RESUMO:** *O que é possível ver diante de tanto conteúdo para olhar? Este texto delinea algumas relações entre a fabulação da imagem e o regime contemporâneo de produção ininterrupta de visibilidades, focalizando as transformações na criação e consumo de representações. A partir de reflexão teórica e revisão de literatura, argumenta-se como o aumento indefinido da produção de imagens tende a afetar sua potência de fabulação. O argumento se desenvolve a partir da definição da potência fabuladora da imagem, enquanto representação e também enquanto borda aberta à imaginação, sendo essa borda o espaço de criação de uma potência que age contra: o controle político da imagem como forma de regular a produção do visível e sua disseminação e a elaboração de um regime de produção de visibilidades pautado na lógica de mercado inscrita na fabulação do social.*

**Palavras-chave:** *imagem; fabulação; visibilidade; visualidade; mídia.*

## Introduction

“And, looking at everything, I saw nothing.” This phrase, the title of a book by Mexican writer Margo Glantz (2021), originally published in 2018, encapsulates the central argument of this text: what are the potential fabulatory capacities within a regime of uninterrupted visual production? This question emerges, among other considerations, when one reflects on data from 2020 indicating that 347,000 images are uploaded to the Instagram platform every minute, amounting to nearly 500 million images daily — these figures, which have continued to grow in recent years, do not account for the vast volume of content shared across other platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

Driven by the need to sustain a continuous stream of posts in the pursuit of potential financial return — “monetization,” in the terminology of digital platforms —, users are compelled to produce content incessantly. Social networks themselves are replete with tutorials emphasizing the importance of maintaining posting frequency.

Beyond the pursuit of financial return, the production of images for social media has become an integral component of social practices, at least since the early 2010s. This shift has been facilitated by the technical ease of image creation via smartphones, in conjunction with the capitalist model embedded within digital platforms. As summarized by Andrea Giunta (2018, p. 262):

Multiplied, itinerant, mediatized, financed, images seem to have unleashed their power in global times. Far from having been diluted within circuits of power, they reveal that there is something in them that cannot be controlled: their capacity to present, to fix in an image something that must not be represented.

This scenario gives rise to numerous questions concerning the conditions under which these images are produced, circulated, and consumed, as well as the processes through which meaning is constructed. Although relatively recent, this phenomenon has already generated a substantial body of research aimed at exploring these dimensions (MARIN, 1998;

HAROCHE, 2004; CÉSAR, 2009; ROSA, 2016; MILLMANN; SANTOS; ROSA, 2018; PRASS; ROSA, 2018).

In dialogue with this body of work, the present discussion may be framed around a central question: what can be seen amid such an overwhelming volume of visual content? How have the fabulatory capacities of the image been altered by its uninterrupted production? Fabulation is understood here through the lens of Jacques Rancière (2012; 2019) as a fictional operation that constructs a scenario or scene in which the images, bodies, gestures, and sounds that emerge deviate from expectations, subvert established conventions, and disrupt the anticipated connections between different temporalities. Fabulating constitutes an aesthetic and political act that dismantles dominant modes of seeing, reconfigures the spatial and temporal coordinates traditionally assigned to subjects and their bodies, redefines imaginaries, and fosters a sensory opening toward alternative ways of perceiving, feeling, and understanding diverse forms of life, experience, and existence. Such fabulatory operations generate visualities that diverge from what was expected to be seen.

There are, of course, visualities that reproduce violence, as well as those that reconfigure the conditions under which images and signs are produced and circulated, questioning the rules that determine who is permitted to portray and be portrayed, to construct their own images, or to appear in the images of others. In this context, visibility constitutes a political and aesthetic operation that shapes regimes of visibility capable of manifesting both violence and emancipatory insurgency. Visibility, therefore, pertains not only to the image itself (its formal and expressive elements), but also to the gaze (historically constituted and contextually situated). Within the work of images, visibilities emerge from visualities that are the result of processes of production, circulation, and experimentation. This perspective allows for the recognition that “an image can only expose its theme correctly if it implies the relationship with language that its own visibility is capable of arousing by disturbing it, always demanding that it reformulate itself, that it put itself into question” (RANCIÈRE, 2012, p. 46).

Unfulfilled expectations constitute a fabulatory process that “alters the status of the visible, the way we look at things and how we move among them” (RANCIÈRE, 2019, p. 51). In a broader sense, fabulation encompasses new forms of word circulation, the exposition of the visible, and the production of affects, all of which generate new capacities and sustain emancipatory practices. It is associated with “the invention of an instance of collective enunciation that redraws the space of common things” (RANCIÈRE, 2012, p. 60). This process introduces an alternative mode of staging by producing different relationships between words, the kinds of things they designate, and the types of practices that resignify the sensory map in which anonymous subjects “dig gaps, open derivations, modify ways, speeds and trajectories according to which they adhere to a condition, react to situations and recognize their images” (RANCIÈRE, 2000, p. 62).

Building on these initial considerations, this text explores the relationship between the fabulatory potencies of the image and the contemporary regime of uninterrupted visual production. The aim is to examine certain transformations that influence the work of images in terms of their capacity to resignify the world. The discussion is structured as an effort to provide a theoretical framework for previously conducted research, which focused on various empirical studies but still appeared to require broader conceptual development (MARQUES; MARTINO, 2020a; 2020b; 2021; MARTINO; MARQUES, 2022).

It is argued that the development of a regime of uninterrupted visual production tends to diminish the fabulatory potency (*puissance fabulatrice*) of images, primarily due to the reduced time available for sustained visual engagement. This argument unfolds in three stages, in which the fabulatory potency of the image is examined both as a form of representation and as an open boundary for the imagination. This boundary constitutes a space for the emergence of a counter-power that opposes the political control of the image as a mechanism for regulating the production and dissemination of the visible, as well as the establishment of a visibility regime grounded in market logic and inscribed within the social fabulation process.

## **The fabulation of the image as an aesthetic and political operation**

As a starting point, the concept of fabulation, according to Rancière (2013), may be understood as an alternative mode of narratively articulating an event that does not adhere to the logic of causality that determines the success or failure of lived experiences. To fabulate, as previously noted, is to evade “the arrangement of necessary or plausible actions that, through the orderly construction of the plot knot and the outcome, makes the characters pass from happiness to unhappiness or from unhappiness to happiness” (RANCIÈRE, 2013, p. 7). As a narrative category, the notion of the fable is generally associated with a form of storytelling intended to convey a moral lesson. In such narratives, a “moral of the story” is to be derived from its references, allegories, and images, typically aimed at articulating distinctions between good and evil, and between actions to be pursued or avoided.

Hence, its contemporary usage refers not only to fictional stories, but more specifically to those populated by talking animals, mythical or quasi-magical beings, figures that are sufficiently anthropomorphized to ensure the intended message is clearly conveyed. The fable reflects the society in which it is produced, insofar as it is imbued with an implicit moral framework: the tale, the narrative, and especially the fairy tale may challenge a society’s moral conventions, the fable, by contrast, positions itself as a narrative custodian of social practices.

The moral dimension of the fable distinguishes it not only from other narrative forms but also from the realm of imagination. For this reason, the present text employs the notion of “fable” without necessarily invoking its narrative structure: the fable is understood here as a form of moral imagination, an exercise in the collective sharing of a morality that, reinforced by the notion of the “moral of the story,” becomes an exemplar of behavior within the social fabric. Thus, if every fable contains a moral, it also tends to function as a manifestation of morality in motion, not merely by delivering a message at its conclusion, but by revealing, throughout its development, the values at stake and in contention.

The elements associated with the conditions and forms of fabulation within a society inevitably carry a wide array of axiological components — its values, both implicit and explicit judgments, dynamics of conflict, mechanisms of hegemonic construction, and the capacities for agency and resistance among its subjects. This calls for a reconsideration of the origins of fabulation within a given society: what constitute the sources of a period's moral imagination, and how these are articulated in relation to the conditions of subject agency within social practices.

In the contemporary context of mediatization, it would be hasty, or even naïve, to disregard the role of media as one of the sources of fabulation, just as it would be insufficient to attribute this role to media alone. From Rancière's perspective (2013, p. 8), such a logic “contradicts the life it intends to imitate. Life does not know stories. It does not know actions oriented toward ends, but only situations open in all directions. It does not know dramatic progressions, but a long, continuous movement, made up of an infinity of micro-movements.”

Contemporary fabulation is closely connected to the inputs provided by the media, intertwined with the social practices of subjects who, within their conditions of agency, continuously elaborate and rework this material. This offers an initial framework for considering the relationship between fabulation and the image — not just any image, as will be further explored, but specifically those that are simultaneously the product and source of the act of instituting and reinstituting a fabled morality.

Thus, particularly within the digital media environment, fabulation emerges as a collective regime of image production. In this context, image production extends beyond the mere recording of moments or events; it primarily involves the construction of relationships. Even when produced individually, an image participates in a collective fabulation concerning its content, its message, the narrative it conveys, and, most importantly, the moral of the story, that is, the value judgments attributed to the subject who created the image.

Each image shared in a social media post appears to form another knot in the fabric of a fable plot aimed at either reinforcing a given morality or challenging it — albeit at the risk of incurring various sanctions. Within the conceptual framework of this text, this risk corresponds to becoming the “villain” of the fable; in more empirical terms, it equates to “being canceled.”

In this sense, insofar as fabulation is directed toward the constitution and reinforcement of a social morality, it invariably entails a collective dimension that both legitimizes it and draws upon it as a resource for defining shared values. This underpins the “educational” character, if the term may be employed, of fabulation — not in a strictly cognitive sense, but primarily in terms of the gradual internalization of morality, incorporated into the habitual conduct of each subject. This notion approaches the ethical framework of Aristotle, as referenced by Rancière (2012) in his definition of the fable as a form that distinguishes itself from other modes of discourse.

Equally important, from a narrative standpoint, is the recognition that the fable differs from other narrative forms through its deliberate moral intentionality. While fictional or documentary narratives may contain moral elements implicitly, the fable is explicitly constructed upon them.

Thus, fabulation is not merely the construction of stories about a given fact, but rather the use of such stories to convey a clear moral judgment about that fact. Subtlety has little place in fabulation, which may explain its resonance within the contemporary regime of image production. The impulse to document, record, and capture an inexpressible reality, enabled by increasingly sophisticated smartphone cameras, also reflects a desire to participate in a collective fabulation about how society is or ought to be, how behaviors are or might become, and which practices and ways of life should be admired or rejected. It may not be an overstatement to suggest that each image posted on digital media carries the potential for a collective fabulation concerning its value.

Associating fabulation with the moral codes that guide the gaze and agency of subjects is one of the gestures emphasized by Rancière

(2019) in defining how fabulation acts upon the sensible, producing shifts in the organization of the visible. For Rancière, fabulation, in its aesthetic and political dimensions, engages in imaging operations that interrupt and alter continuities, generating new registers of appearance. These operations give rise to image-making practices that create ruptures (verticalities within the horizontalities of given narratives) and form sensitive communities. It is as if fabulation constructs the architecture that enables a specific mode of appearance, producing intervals and revealing a montage that articulates images in unexpected, unforeseen ways. “The image as a visual form is linked to something broader, a way of thinking about the common or thinking about the history of the transformations of the common world” (RANCIÈRE, 2019, p. 34). The work of the image, then, draws strength from the broader framework established by fabulation, generating new arrangements, reframings, and reorganizations of established perceptual forms. It composes a montage that highlights intervals, a space that enables inhabitation of the “in-between” “arising from the indeterminate relationships between given images and the meanings they may evoke in association with other images, words, and temporalities originating elsewhere” (RANCIÈRE, 2019, p. 69). These indeterminate arrangements, coupled with the undecidability of meaning that characterizes the operation of images, produce controversial scenes. It is crucial to note that, for Rancière, montage is an action that both assembles multiple images and emphasizes the singularity of an individual image (an image-scene) when it introduces a line of flight from the horizontal unfolding of a narrative governed by consensual causality.

The interval produced by the image through fabulation liberates “what was indexed under the record of the only possible real, presenting to this ordinary and already consensual real a dehierarchization and another possibility of appearing” (RANCIÈRE, 2019, p. 55). Thus, both image and word remain in motion, situated in tension between a past and a future, between one invention and another. They compel the viewer to engage in experimentation and to shift the coordinates that organize the visible, the thinkable, and that which affects us.

The image, as a dissensual political act of scene creation, underscores the gesture and rhythm of “playing with the ambiguity of similarities and the instability of dissimilarities, operating a local rearrangement, a singular rearrangement of circulating images” (RANCIÈRE, 2012, p. 34). The work of the image is therefore linked to the production of intervals and discontinuities that resist scripting the experience of subjects. Indeterminacy, namely, the impossibility of fixing a destination or definitive meaning, prevents images from being mere expressions of specific situations or events. This requires viewing images within a network, an “intrigue” composed of multiple elements and layers of meaning.

As previously mentioned, such intrigue emerges from image operations that, through fabulation, generate forms of sharing within a “gap fabric” (RANCIÈRE, 2009a, p. 319), an intervallic topography of a game that reconfigures the positions and coordinates where bodies appear, as well as the relationships between bodies and the estimates of their capacities, words, and images. Fabulation is directly linked to political appearance and to the “game that undoes a given order of relationships between the visible and the meanings related to it and constitutes other sensitive plots that can contribute to the action of political subjects” (RANCIÈRE, 2009b, p. 515). This work, unlike the incessant and scripted regime of image production intended for consumption, constitutes a political experimentation in the repositioning of bodies within political space, provoking necessary disturbances and tremors that open cracks and fissures in the naturalized modes of apprehending and describing events.

Thus, it is important to consider the scene as a “space” in which appearance is associated with the act of speaking, with the emergence of corporealities that do not conform to the expected order, and with the construction of a reality through the sedimentation of elements that enable the creation of an alternative imaginary (RANCIÈRE, 2018a; 2018c).

Literature and images gain prominence in the processes of fabulation and scene editing, as they enable the invention of “another image of time: a time of coexistence, equality, and interexpressiveness of moments, as

opposed to the time of hierarchical succession and the destruction of a moment by the one that succeeds it” (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 136). The editing and reassembly work involved in the creation of scenes modifies how different temporalities are interwoven within experience, as well as how they are rendered communicable. In fabulatory montage, time is redescribed, “but it also means that time is thus singularized, highlights and reliefs are created, contrary to other times when time is shattered, crushed. Ultimately, time is decomposed and recomposed” (RANCIÈRE, 2021, p. 35).

For this reason, fiction constitutes one of the forces that produce the scene, functioning through the destabilization of relations of domination and proposing alternative approaches to confronting and transforming reality via a redistribution of time. The dehierarchization initiated by the fabulative process, therefore, derives, according to Rancière (2016; 2019), from a dissensual fictional operation that discloses the existence of multiple modes of constructing both reality and temporality.

In fabulation, not only do temporalities coexist in a dehierarchic manner, but so do subjects and their modes of life. This process requires embracing the risk of fabulating alternative possibilities, as it establishes “another way of inhabiting time, another way of sustaining a body and a spirit in movement” (RANCIÈRE, 2018a, p. 34). The practice of fabulation challenges chains of causality and predictability, producing an experimental and dissensual narrative that unfolds through the controversial scene and its destabilizing temporal configurations.

However, how can conditions for the creation of destabilizing fables be enabled when the political work of images is continually undermined by the mass production of images intended to hinder imagination and emancipation? The central tension lies between what is deemed representable or not, and the nature of the relationship that the work of images establishes between the visible and the sayable, as well as between the sensible and the imaginable.

## The production of visibilities as image control

Historically, the fabrication of images appears to be connected to the construction of narratives aligned with potency — not necessarily political or institutionally organized power, but rather to the opening of a possibility of engaging with reality through image representation in order to dominate it. Fundamentally, this is always a collective fabrication of the image, and this perspective continues to serve as a framework for the possibility of controlling reality through the manipulation of its representation (ZÁTONI, 2011).

The control of images is inseparable, in this sense, from the control of the possible fabrications associated with them, particularly when considering the potential to establish a regime of the imaginary founded upon the direction of its core representations. Representing reality is tantamount to controlling it; it constitutes a form of magical control — since it is image-based and thus imaginary — that enables understanding and, potentially, the steering of reality toward some desired outcome. The prohibitions on image production, as well as the state monopolies over the creation of grand images in ancient civilizations — and even in some cultures today — seem to revive this notion of capturing the visibility of reality, transforming it into the visibility of art, a phenomenon that manifests across multiple dimensions.

The sovereign power embedded in the regime of visibility production is also manifested in the representation of images of divinities: goddesses and gods, painted, sculpted, and made visible, appeared in close proximity to a cult of images directly connected to those they represented — the divinity, once captured in image form, was brought near and could display its powers and capacities at any moment. The possibilities of representing divinity were closely tied to the use of visibility as a medium to establish relationships with these deities; imbued with symbolism, images of divinities in Middle Eastern and European cultures up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century functioned as a means to make their attributes present and tangible (CARTLIDGE; ELLIOTT, 2001; WILLIAMSON, 2004).

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Making one see, preventing one from seeing: these two modes of image fabulation closely follow the narratives linked to potency. Regimes of visibility inherently direct what can be imagined, narrated, or fabulated through the images available to us: “What we see is only valid — only lives — in our eyes through what looks at us. However, the division that separates within us what we see from what looks at us is inescapable” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2018, p. 29). Western heritage, in this respect, appears more aligned with the regimes of Greek iconology and the Roman *imago*, where visibility is central to the exercise of governmental and religious authority, than with its other foundational source in Jewish culture, which prohibits representation.

The History of Art, alongside the history of religious practices, provides evidence of images associated with Christianity dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Visibility has consistently been one of its defining features — manifested not only in paintings on church walls, stained glass windows, and murals but also in the architectural form and symbolic layout of religious buildings. These visual and spatial elements find their distant yet iconic descendants in the monumental commercial structures of large metropolitan centers within a globalized economy (OYARZUN, 2015).

This insight touches on the core notion of the “image” as a product of a regime of visibility: historically, images have rarely been created for mere aesthetic appreciation, but rather to make visible a specific form of power — whether political, as in state sovereignty, or economic, through patronage, commissions, or other mechanisms aimed at capturing power through representation and its public display (GIUNTA, 2018; 2020).

In its origins, according to Peters (1983) and Gobry (2010), this form of power is often examined through the distinction between the concepts of “icon” and “idol,” terms that today may share a common meaning but originally referred to different facets of the relationship with representation.

The icon, derived from the Greek term *eikon*, is a representation that directly refers to the object it depicts: upon seeing the icon, one anticipates a significant resemblance to the reality it represents. It is important

to note that this is not imitation, which the Greeks called *mimesis*, but rather a form of construction emphasizing the similarity between reality and representation.

In contrast, the idol, originating from the ancient Greek *eidolon*, refers to the image formed within the mind, connected to a certain object — not as a mere daydream, which the Greeks called *phantasma* (the root of “phantom” and “fantasy”), denoting the uncontrolled, and sometimes involuntary, formation of images. The idol does not necessarily represent the mental content itself but is linked to the idea behind it — its proximity to the word *eidōs*, from which “idea” derives, supports this interpretation. Consequently, this distinction implies a need for stricter control: while the icon could inspire, the idol is what becomes truly incorporated into the mind.

Thus, the capture of reality as materiality was primarily associated with the regime of the icon, whereas its transformation into a symbolic element emerged more forcefully within the sphere of the idol, conceived as something akin to an “idea.”

It is no coincidence that political regimes of various orientations often seek to construct a comprehensive iconography of power, manifested in clothing styles, the aesthetics of paintings, photographs, and films, or, more recently, in social media posts. The vilification of an adversary’s image typically unfolds on the same visual terrain, but with an inverted intent: it involves prohibiting the adversary from producing their own forms of visibility. This dynamic evokes the orthodox function of the icon and the heretical connotation of the idol, the latter associated with falsehood and the distortion of what is deemed the legitimate divinity in each context.

Thus, the fabulation of the image manifested in the icon being endowed with a sense of correctness and faithful representation, whereas the idol was consigned to a position of disdain, from which narratives could also emerge, albeit in a negative register. The distinction between these two categories has been reiterated and reconfigured in various forms throughout history.

It is important to emphasize that these regimes of visibility, as expressions of power, are not confined to a historical past, as a strictly genealogical perspective might suggest. On the contrary, as numerous studies indicate, the constitution of forms of representing reality, whether through the evolution of techniques or the shaping of new mentalities, perceptions, and modes of seeing, remains a pressing issue in the present. This is particularly evident in light of the near-infinite proliferation of image production sources, most notably materialized through the widespread use of smartphones.

If, on the one hand, there exists a form of visibility anchored in selfies, photographs, and videos produced to document events and moments as a means of affirming certain “acceptable” and legitimate ways of life, there is, alongside it and in constant tension, a fabulatory practice that resists the appropriation of image-making. This practice expands the scope of remembrance, fosters the formation of sensitive communities, and enables the circulation of experimental and dissident narratives (RANCIÈRE, 2019).

Considering the question posed by Derrida (2004), one might ask: what is the accumulation of so many archives truly attempting to preserve? Is it a matter of capturing, on the surface of images, a situation in order to extend its existence beyond the ephemeral moment? If so, why are such events so rarely revisited? It appears that, to some extent, the act of archiving exceeds the significance of the archived content itself; photographs, films, and recordings are not necessarily produced to preserve a moment in the archive, but rather to assert visibility — not as evidence of the object’s existence, but as a testament to the presence of the one who captured it.

The regime of visibility production is marked by an emphasis on the act of production itself: taking a photograph, filming a video, recording a moment, sharing, storing, and engaging with these materials acquire an intrinsic value, often one that surpasses the significance of the event depicted. The moment is not necessarily recorded because of the event’s importance, but because of the importance attributed to the act of

recording. The archive thus becomes the foundation from which the group's collective fabulation is constructed — a testament to the idea of “having been there” (HAND, 2013, p. 25).

The value of exposure, highlighted by Benjamin (2006) in his essay, applies in contemporary times not only to the work, but, perhaps more emphatically, to those who produce visibility, especially because it incorporates, at this moment, the narrative expectations of elaborating fables linked to a group in which one is inserted — the proof that one “was there,” the group photos and videos, the echo of a perspective of truth and authenticity of the image resemble an exposure no longer exclusive to the work or the moment, but to those who record it. As Diana Aisenberg (2017, p. 139) recalls, “*the identity of the object seen fades, as does that of the subject who observes it.*”

### **Changes in the potency of image fabulation**

At this point, it is pertinent to revisit a distinction proposed by Lucrecia Ferrara (2002) regarding the concepts of the visual and the visible, terms that, although closely related, are not strictly synonymous. This distinction proves significant for understanding the aesthetic regime of contemporary image production. As an initial approximation, one might argue that visibility calls forth the gaze, whereas visibility is shaped by the intentionality of the observer. It is therefore worthwhile to return to the specific passage in which Ferrara articulates this conceptual differentiation:

A distinction is proposed within the visual by creating two categories: visibility and visibility. Visibility corresponds to the visual recognition of a reference and, being more passive, is limited to the registration of sensory stimuli. Visibility, on the contrary, is properly semiotic, as it aligns with perceptual cognition as alterity, that characterizes and challenges the density of signs (FERRARA, 2002, p. 101).

What can be seen and observed inherently carries the potential to become visible; anything that can be apprehended by the sense of sight

qualifies as a visual element. However, as a visual element, it is not necessarily constituted to be seen, and it only produces an effect on vision if there is a gaze directed toward it. In this sense, the visual is an open element, its visibility is contingent, not intrinsic, and depends on a logic of observation. Its apprehension does not arise from its own properties, but rather from the presence of a gaze that seeks, investigates, and is actively interested in seeing.

In this sense, visibility would be presented as the characteristic of everything that can be seen, regardless of whether there is a gaze with the intentionality to apprehend it. If visibility is the characteristic of that which can be seen, visibility is linked to the image made to be seen, endowed, itself, with an intentionality that tries to transmit, communicate — or impose — on the eye that looks at it, seeking to produce a certain effect, transform it, deliberately, at the beginning of a relationship of an aesthetic nature — in the sense of generating the production of something in the subject.

An image endowed with this aspect of visibility presents itself as an intentional act, an expression of the artist's desire to provoke a specific effect within an aesthetic framework. The artificial landscape, the designed garden, or the constructed park may indeed incorporate elements of “nature” in its strict sense; however, their configuration is directed by an intentionality aimed at capturing the gaze of the observer (WARNKE, 2004; CAUQUELIN, 2019).

The aesthetic regime of visibility asserts itself through a more or less frenetic logic of production: it is an image created to be seen, appreciated and, in contemporary terms, consumed. In this context, the focus is no longer on the image as a product of fabrication in response to the visual, but rather on the production of visibility itself, which becomes objectified as a form of aesthetic commodity.

This distinction becomes particularly pronounced with the development of image production technologies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, extending over the subsequent two centuries into the contemporary aesthetic regime, in which visibility, through its very excess, obliterates

and renders visibility invisible. If, nearly a century ago, Benjamin (2006) identified a transformation in the status of the image due to its technical reproducibility, it is now possible to observe, as a consequence of this process, a shift in the very conditions of image production. The capacity to produce images, now accessible to anyone with a smartphone, emerges as the possibility for the virtually infinite elaboration of new visibilities.

What is at stake, therefore, is not merely the capacity to reproduce something through technology, as Benjamin (2006) underscores, but rather the infinite and uninterrupted production of visibilities, ranging from images generated within complex commercial and technical systems, such as content platforms, advertising, or the entertainment industry, to what Torezani (2022) identifies as the self-referential production of the selfie, captured on a personal smartphone and published with the expectation of garnering approval (likes) from a community that shares the same fable regarding the meanings attributed to such images. The aesthetic moment of technical reproducibility, as described by Benjamin, appears to be extended, and in some respects transformed, by an aesthetic regime characterized by the infinite production of visibilities (GIUNTA, 2020).

Producing the visible entails conceiving images not primarily to be seen, their most apparent function, but to be consumed as quickly as possible, immediately supplanted by the next. Once consumed, these images are expected to be discarded, if not physically erased from a smartphone or memory card, then at least from the immediate perceptual field of the individual or group that created them. This collective fabrication of an immediate visibility regime minimizes the space of memory to its smallest possible dimension, as image production must remain continuous and, thus, incompatible with extended duration in the sense articulated by Bergson (2012). Visibility has no duration, especially insofar as its importance does not lie in being seen, but in being produced and consumed almost immediately, rewarded by sharing or liking — transformed, from a certain scale, into “monetization,” a measure of contemporary visibility in its rate of conversion into capital.

Against the impoverishment of image fabulation caused by its confiscation within the capitalist regime, an important point of intersection emerges between the thoughts of Rancière (2016; 2019) and Benjamin (2006). In Rancière's perspective (2017; 2019; 2021), the coexistence of temporalities enabled by the reorganization of experience through fabulation results from the breakdown and fragmentation of the "time of the victors," which becomes intermingled with other temporalities, thereby losing its organizing and controlling power. The process of identifying, articulating, and assembling events and temporalities opens an interval (*écart*), a threshold on which subjects oscillate between nothingness and totality. This threshold is where Rancière (2017; 2018b) converges with Benjamin (2006): both prioritize not the linear progress of time but its interruptions, suspensions, and deviations, valuing the decisive moment preceding the leap toward the "creation of a defamiliarized, dedomesticated space" (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 182). According to Rancière, the emancipatory fable dissolves the dilemma of choosing between the "time of the victors" and the "time of the oppressed." The time of the "unvanquished" highlights the agency and dignity of the oppressed, as it constitutes a precarious coexistence of temporalities, a common articulation that presents and brings together facts, objects, subjects, words, situations, and events to transform the perception and intelligibility of the world, conceiving time in "its stops, superpositions, turns, detours and explosions" (RANCIÈRE, 2019, p. 85).

In this regard, fabulation is not merely a momentary glimpse through "a half-open window into a world of ignored lives and emotions," but it also carries "the power of shattering, of multiplication that explodes the dominant time — the time of the victors — at the point of its supposed victory: on the edge of the nothingness to which it relegates those who are outside of words and outside of time" (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 172). Once this time has been ruptured, space must be created for the play that is essential to the renewal of forms of life. Within this space, otherness must evade our relentless impulses to categorize, evaluate, judge, and submit

everything to the already familiar; it must remain strange, unfamiliar, and precisely because of this, unsettling.

### **Final considerations**

The fabulation potency of collectively produced images can emerge as a point of challenge and resistance against a regime of visibility in which the uncontrolled proliferation of visual stimuli approaches the very limits of visibility. As observed, the imaginary established through fabulation, whether manifested in art, cinema, or literary texts, reveals an interval within “a supposedly homogeneous temporal continuum” (RANCIÈRE, 2018b, p. 35), enabling moments to surface from thresholds that challenge the gaze and foster oscillation between the reproduction of the familiar and the potential emergence of the new.

Benjamin (2006) conceptualizes the play space (*Spielraum*) as a vital space of life, a site of resistance and inventive, transformative politics. Fabulation can be understood as configuring such a play space, an “empty space” that opens up possibilities for the redesign and rearrangement of everyday elements and practices. This space fosters movement and creates an interval that disrupts life’s continuity, since playing inherently involves experimentation and transformation. Rancière observes that the fabulation guiding the work of images transforms “the consensual device into an experimental device that reveals the possibility of the impossible” (RANCIÈRE, 2024, p. 103), assembling a multiplicity “of serious or fanciful narratives, of historical documents, of collections of witness objects or myths lost in the mists of time” (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 132).

Thus, the fabulation that transforms the coordinates of experience establishes a liminal space, a space of play that has intervals and voids in which one can breathe and redefine the course of things. It is still possible to experiment, because there is still an unfilled space, a space to play, imagine, create together, fracturing the logic of the spectacle from within.

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## **“Memes are good for thinking”... about consumption and material culture: an evaluative activity using starter packs**

## **“Memes são bons para pensar”... sobre consumo e cultura material: atividade avaliativa com o uso de starter packs**

Guilherme Libardi<sup>1</sup> 

**Abstract:** *The text addresses an evaluative activity applied to a Consumer behavior class in which students were asked to create and describe a meme starter pack, correlating it with issues inherent to the anthropology of consumption and cultural material. After gathering the assignments developed over three semesters, I put together 59 starter packs, which allowed me to observe seven topics that most interested the students: sports; class; technology; music; lifestyle; sexuality; politics; and others. The content of the memes reveals that students chose to illustrate identities to which they belong, but also explored social groups from which they radically distance themselves. This evaluative activity has proven to be effective in promoting an understanding of the importance of practices and objects for the production of identities in the contemporary world.*

**Keywords:** *pedagogical resource; starter pack; consumer behavior; consumption; identity.*

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**Resumo:** *O texto aborda uma atividade de avaliação aplicada a uma turma de Comportamento do consumidor na qual os(as) alunos(as) deveriam criar e descrever um meme starter pack, correlacionando-o com discussões inerentes à antropologia do consumo e cultura material. Após acumular os trabalhos desenvolvidos ao longo de 3 semestres, reuni 59 starter packs, que permitiram observar 7 temas que mais interessaram aos(às) alunos(as): Esporte; Classe; Tecnologia; Música; Estilo de vida; Sexualidade; Política; e Outros. O conteúdo dos memes revela que os(as) estudantes optaram por ilustrar identidades às quais se filiam, mas também exploraram outros grupos sociais dos quais se afastam radicalmente. Esta atividade avaliativa se demonstrou efetiva para promover a compreensão da importância das práticas e dos objetos para a produção de identidades no mundo contemporâneo.*

**Palavras-chave:** *recurso pedagógico; starter pack; comportamento do consumidor; consumo; identidade.*

## Introduction

In Advertising and Propaganda courses, the topic “consumer behavior” is usually included, either as a standalone subject or under other names, such as *Consumption Studies*, *Consumer Psychology*, or simply *Psychology*. In this text, I use the term “consumer behavior” to refer to the subjects covered by it.

For the aspiring advertising professional, approaching an understanding of human complexity is a fundamental task. Subjects such as Philosophy, Anthropology, and Sociology, almost always offered in the early semesters of the course, provide the foundation for a humanistic approach to professional practice. The course on *Consumer Behavior* usually appears in the curriculum after the student has been introduced to the propedeutic subjects mentioned, typically around the third or fifth semester. Generally, it addresses psychosocial issues inherent to the purchasing process and consumption practices, which may take different forms depending on the course syllabus and the profile of the instructor. Later on, I will more thoroughly discuss the specific aspects of the subject based on my teaching experience, which I intend to share here.

In this article, therefore, I intend to discuss the experience of applying an assessment activity in which the meme starter pack was used as an educational resource in the *Consumer Behavior* course. The assessment was proposed to a class of the aforementioned course, which is part of the Advertising and Propaganda program within the Department of Social Communication at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (Decom/UFRN). Beyond explaining the teaching experience, I aim to frame the discussion about the central role of using new languages in pedagogical practices in higher education, especially within the Advertising and Propaganda course, against the backdrop of the possibilities for educators to navigate such many transformations.

Since the beginning of this century, this has already been a concern in the field of Educommunication. As Soares (2000, p. 12) pointed out,

“another issue gains relevance and pertains to the conditions that teachers have to coexist with the new *modus communicandi*, characteristic of new technologies and inherent to the nature of virtual communities.” Peterossi and Meneses (2005, p. 105) also diagnosed the change of times in the technological landscape and its repercussions on the teaching-learning process, claiming that “new technologies are altering the nature of what needs to be learned, who needs to learn, who teaches, and how it can be taught.”

More recently, Citelli, Soares, and Lopes (2019) discussed the challenges imposed on Educommunication. Among them is the issue of dialogue in the teacher-student relationship, a situation in which — increasingly — the teacher often ends up performing a monologue during the course of expository classes. A second point worth highlighting is the issue of devices, whose use could represent an opportunity to promote the circulation of new languages. The authors acknowledge that “[the] classroom experience [...] is not always attentive to such landscapes, as it tends to restrict the circulation of languages to the verbal modality (whose importance is undeniable), overlooking the rich suggestions offered by iconographic, chromatic, sound, etc.” (CITELLI; SOARES; LOPES, 2019, p. 19).

In this text, therefore, the discussion of the activity aims to modestly contribute to the debate within the field of Educommunication, attempting to think about how a different *modus communicandi* mediated by the opportunities opened up through new technologies and languages — such as memes — can help mitigate current problems, such as the limited dialogue observed between educators and students.

Initially, I present to the reader the main objectives of the course in which the activity was developed and the context of its application; then, I discuss the relevance of memes in contemporary society and the specificities of the “meme starter pack”; subsequently, I examine the potentialities of this assessment proposal based on the elaborations made by the students.

### **Consumer behavior: a multi-faceted discipline**

As already pointed out in the introduction, *Consumer Behavior* is a central discipline in undergraduate programs in Advertising and Propaganda in Brazil, since, besides its pedagogical importance in the training of students, it also encompasses some institutional obligations outlined in official documents. In the Opinion of the CNE/CES No. 146/2020 (BRAZIL, 2020), which addresses the National Curriculum Guidelines for the Advertising and Propaganda Course, the importance of developing skills so that future advertisers can understand consumer habits is highlighted. Additionally, among the competences to be developed is the ability of students to critically connect with consumer subjects and their practices of meaning-making in response to advertising, for example, as well as “solidary sensitivity; social connection; fascination with people; investigative attitude; psychological, cultural, and social interpretation of subjects.” (BRAZIL, 2020, p. 32). The course Consumer Behavior — but not only it —, because it essentially deals with the study of macro-social aspects and individual practices and their relation to consumption, is largely responsible for developing the previously mentioned competencies.

At Decom/UFRN, the said course<sup>1</sup> has a workload of 60 hours, is offered in the 5th semester, and has the subject *Social Psychology and Communication*<sup>2</sup>. I taught this course at Decom/UFRN on three consecutive occasions: 2021/2, 2022/1, and 2022/2, aiming, based on the syllabus, to develop a program with a strong interdisciplinary inspiration, aware of the inherent challenges of such an approach, which mainly lie in its ambiguous nature: “[n]avigating ambiguity requires accepting the madness that interdisciplinary activity awakens and the lucidity that it demands” (FAZENDA, 1998, p. 21).

1 According to the current curriculum framework, which came into effect in 2018/2.

2 A 4th-semester course, totaling 60 hours, which, according to the syllabus, addresses contemporary social forms and new processes of subjectivation (SIGAA, 2023).

For this, I developed a series of classes and readings<sup>3</sup> aimed at understanding consumption as a complex sociocultural practice with diverse facets, aligning with my deep epistemological approach connected to Latin American Cultural Studies.

It was divided into four approaches: anthropological<sup>4</sup>; sociological<sup>5</sup>; psychoanalytic<sup>6</sup>; and marketing<sup>7</sup>. Here is not the place to discuss theoretically how each of the approaches contributed to the understanding of what consumption is. However, I simply reiterate that, given the affiliation with a sociocultural approach to understand this phenomenon, I aimed to adopt a more comprehensive and thoughtful perspective — that is, less pessimistic or denunciatory regarding the role of consumption in contemporary societies. From developing a program aligned with this perspective, it was possible to establish interdisciplinary dialogues to understand consumption as a fundamental axis of modern life, the importance of material culture, conscious and unconscious motivations for purchasing, and the mediating power of sociocultural variables. After presenting the general guidelines of the course and how it was structured during the three semesters in which I taught it, I will proceed to introduce the proposed assessment activity.

### **Evaluative Activity: General Instructions**

At UFRN, students are required to complete three assessments. The evaluation discussed in this article refers to the first activity, which involves debates about the emergence of consumption studies in Brazil and the anthropological approach to discussing material culture. The guidelines for the assessment were explained during class and also published in a

3 Both theoretical and “practical”.

4 Through authors such as: Livia Barbosa, Colin Campbell, Mary Douglas and Rosana-Pinheiro Machado.

5 Through authors such as: Livia Barbosa and Néstor García Canclini.

6 Through authors such as: Sigmund Freud, Clotilde Perez, Naiara Pereira de Vaz and Anna Isabel Araújo.

7 Through authors such as: Philip Kotler and Michael Solomon.

.pdf document made available to the class via SIGAA. In this document, the assessment was introduced as follows:

As Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood stated in 1979, paraphrasing Lévy-Strauss, “*Consumption is good for thinking.*” Contemporary, in the landscape of postmodern identities (fragmented, fluid, and unfinished), consumption presents itself as a fundamental axis of aesthetic and behavioral ways of living. Depending on the theoretical framework, the name for these identity groupings will be recognized as “groups,” “cultures,” “tribes,” etc. Regardless of this, it is evident that many individuals strongly connect to a specific identity organization, reproducing its symbolic and moral systems. To name just a few, we can refer to: *Fariálimers; Emos; Funkeiros; Otakus; Hippies; Hipsters*, etc.

After this preamble, I presented the objective in a more focused manner: “The aim of this assessment is to select a certain identity and illustrate which elements of material culture are part of its system of representations. The idea is to create a ‘starter pack,’ that is, the essential items and/or activities that a ‘rocker’ (for example) should possess and/or do.” In order to achieve this, students were required to fulfill three specific objectives, each with its corresponding weight, which would constitute their final grades:

- a) Presentation of the identity (where it originated and what is the central element around which its members organize themselves?) (3 pts.);
- b) Elements of material culture that characterize this group: present and describe between 3 and 5 items or practices (3 pts.);
- c) Based on the presented identity, conduct a brief reflection on the importance of elements of material culture in consumer society regarding their integrative nature, citing at least two authors discussed in class (4 pts.).

Since it is not a course focused on graphic developments, I waived the requirement for students to produce a visual meme for the starter pack. However, I can preview that most students created it using the language

codes of memes that circulate popularly on the internet, which will be discussed in the next section. Following what is discussed by Scolari (2010, p. 55), “encouraging the creation of content in the educational context means moving from the realm of *user-generated content* (a concept originating from the media ecosystem) to *content generated by students*”<sup>8</sup>. The work was to be completed individually or in pairs and did not need to be presented orally; it was only to be submitted in writing via the system, adhering to the limit of 1,500 words.

Before presenting the results of the assessment, it is important to contextualize some discussions around the role of memes in contemporary digital culture, specifically about the meme of the starter pack, highlighting its emergence and main features.

### **THE meme: brief notes**

In 1976, biologist Richard Dawkins, in his search for a universal truth in biology, identified in genes a very peculiar behavior with the potential to become a general principle applicable to all organic beings: their replicator character. Extending beyond the microscopic level of genes, the scientist questions whether other types of replicators could potentially be found in the universe. His imagination leads him to suggest that a new replicator is right before us, on our planet, constantly evolving: culture. Dawkins (1989) refers to the replicating nature of culture as a “meme,” which he defines as the unit of cultural transmission, a unit of imitation.

Examples of memes include melodies, ideas, slogans, fashion trends, ways of making pots, or constructing bows. Just as genes propagate within the gene pool by jumping from body to body through sperm or eggs, memes also spread within the meme pool by jumping from brain to brain through a process that, in a broad sense, can be called imitation (DAWKINS, 1989, p. 254).

8 Our translation. In the original: Fomentar la creación de contenidos en el ámbito educativo significa pasar del *contenido generado por el usuario* (un concepto proveniente del ecosistema mediático) a los *contenidos generados por los estudiantes*.

The original concept of “meme,” as discussed by the biologist, remained virtually dormant until the emergence of Web 2.0<sup>9</sup> and the rise of participatory culture<sup>10</sup>, when ordinary people and researchers began to observe, in discussion forums and social networking sites, the circulation of a type of material that is aesthetically simple, with images and text, and generally humorous in nature. These graphic contents were spontaneously created and shared by users of the World Wide Web. Thus, the concept of “memes” reemerges, now coupled with the suffix “of the internet,” referring to mimetic and remixable content developed and shared in the digital environment. Shifman (2014) summarizes that the mimetic condition relates to the internet meme’s ability to be imitated by others. The author affirms that imitation is something people have always done: they imitate their parents, teachers, friends, and celebrities. What changes with the emergence of Web 2.0 is the expanded visibility of this practice. On YouTube, it becomes possible to find thousands of user-made versions of a single video that has gone viral<sup>11</sup>. Remixability is considered a more recent element, involving a practice that becomes possible only through access to technological tools that allow creating/editing content for subsequent publication on the web. In remixing, the user edits the image or video, altering visual and/or auditory elements, proposing a reinterpretation of the original version of the meme. Thus, it requires a certain level of technical knowledge to perform it.

Therefore, the internet meme becomes a cultural artifact of the contemporary world, capable of representing content related to local

9 According to Jenkins, Green, and Ford (2015), it is a business model on the internet that enables user participation. If, until then, subjects had a “passive” relationship with web content, the rise of Web 2.0 made it possible to produce content such as blogs, forming communities and discussion groups.

10 The taxonomical framework of Web 2.0, which defines a “culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content (JENKINS, 2013, p. 323).”

11 According to Jenkins, Green, and Ford (2015), labeling a particular content as “viral” means indicating that it has spread extremely quickly among audiences via the internet (news portals, blogs, social media sites). Internet virality, therefore, characterizes a networked behavior in which agents actively and rapidly propagate a specific content.

and global sociocultural aspects through the use of imagery, textual, and sound resources. At the extreme, as affirmed by Shifman (2014, p. 182), “internet memes play a key role in contemporary formulations of political participation and cultural globalization.

Similarly, Miller et al. (2019) explore memes as an indirect form of expression and control of moral norms on the internet. They observe that memes not only reinforce what is believed to be normative but also provide people with a way to position themselves critically or express values without direct confrontation through more elaborate textual posts (the long texts or “*textões*”). This is largely facilitated by the visual nature of this language, amplified by social media. In this way, memes are seen as a form of “moral surveillance,” through which users promote and reaffirm cultural norms in a humorous and accessible manner.

Obviously, not every message posted on the web will have the capacity to propagate. Specific socio-cultural conditions, literacies, and interpretative skills are necessary for a particular content to be effectively imitated and/or remixed. As Blackmore (2000, p. 73) aptly notes, “the perspective of the meme is the one that considers its surrounding environment to see what replication opportunities it has. What does a meme need in order to make more copies of itself, and what will prevent it from doing so?<sup>12</sup>”.

Since the emergence of Web 2.0, countless contents uploaded to the World Wide Web have become memes, enabling, beyond the description of their main characteristics as mentioned above (SHIFMAN, 2014), the identification of a certain typology of memes. The author, for example, recognizes nine types of memes that, according to him, are important formats that guided meme production over the last decade (2004-2014). Among them, we highlight *LOLcats* and *rage comics*, respectively represented in Figure 1 below:

12 Our translation. In the original: “*el punto de vista del meme es aquel que contempla su entorno para ver de qué oportunidades de replicación dispone. ¿Qué necesita un meme para hacer más copias de sí mismo, y qué le impedirá hacerlo?*”.

Figure 1 – Memes



Source: available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mafaioz/5567019183> e <https://tinyurl.com/yc-44cmsa>. Access on: Nov. 1st, 2024.

Identifying categories of memes, of course, is an ongoing task, given the speed at which new memes emerge in digital culture. A more recent study, published in 2020, considers 11 types of memes (IBÁÑEZ, 2020). Among them, the author highlights the starter pack meme, which I will focus on from here on.

### **Starter pack: prototyping identities**

The starter pack is a meme, and like all content of this kind, it has a history, that is, an original and first post that was catapulted to the status of a “meme.” According to the portal *Know Your Meme*<sup>13</sup>, its origin dates back to September 27, 2014, when a Twitter user posted three images representing parts of a head/face of a (supposedly) white woman, arranged in a grid. These images showed: one of hair styled in a bun; one of an ear with a large, gold hoop earring; and a photograph of a face focusing on the area between the nose, mouth, and chin, in which the woman had a

13 This site presents itself as a portal that researches and documents internet memes and phenomena of virality. It was founded in 2008 and has since been cited as an official source by media outlets as well as for scientific research. I would like to highlight that in Brazil, we have a similar meme repository called the Museum of Memes, a project led and coordinated by Viktor Chagas and his research group coLAB at the Federal Fluminense University

piercing just above the lower lip, located on the right side. These three images, representing parts of a human body, probably of a female, were captioned “The ‘I date black guys’ starter pack” (KNOW YOUR MEME, 2014), as observed in the following image (Figure 2):

Figure 2 – First “*starter pack*”



Source: Know your Meme (2014).

What the user of the platform was suggesting is that all white women who date black men tend to wear that type of earring, have a piercing near the mouth, and style their hair in a bun. These elements, therefore, would be like the basic signs that constitute the identity of this specific kind of woman whose practice is “dating black men,” a sort of initial kit. According to the consulted website, in less than a month, X (formerly

Twitter) already had hundreds of posts with starter packs of all kinds, being mentioned more than 640,000 times per week. Since then, starter packs continue to be created to represent all sorts of relationships between individuals, groups, and practices.

Obviously, the production and replication of these posts reveal — like all memes — cultural specificities, simplifications, and often prejudices against certain groups. In general, Eschler and Menking (2018, p. 2) consider that starter packs “illustrating a prototype of a cultural artifact, member of a community, or shared experience”. In the study conducted by the authors, the following question seeks to be answered: “How is social identity conveyed or expressed in starter pack memes?”.

Building on the data interpretation, Eschler and Menking (2018) disagree with a reading that might suggest that such a meme is a “categorizer” of groups and individuals or a producer of stereotypes and caricatures. They argue that starter packs represent a more complex “semiotic bricolage,” since they offer a series of isolated figures that need to be interpreted as a whole based on textual guidance (the caption). They prefer, therefore, to refer to starter packs as “prototypes of identities.” Citing Donath (2014), they explain that the term “prototype” refers, from the perspective of identities, to the activity of reducing the peculiarities of social groups to the smallest common denominator, that is, “a set of minimal social cues that a person can use to infer other information about an individual’s social world (ESCHLER; MENKING, 2018, p. 9).

Despite the moderate approach toward starter packs, which are less politically concerned and, I would say, slightly relativist, it is necessary to recognize that such memes can indeed operate as a form of symbolic violence of significant magnitude against certain social groups. Treating the stereotyping process merely as “social tips” neutralizes the symbolic — and therefore political — dimension that resides within the meme. Hall (2016), a key reference in Cultural Studies and a fundamental author in identity studies, considers that stereotyping always involves an articulation between representation, difference, and power.

Thus, according to the author, “the first point is that stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and ‘fixes’ difference” (HALL, 2016, p. 191). Returning to the post that originated the starter pack meme (Figure 2), it is essential to recognize that within it lies an articulation of symbolic violence operated in the dimensions of gender and race, disguised as subtle humor — a device, as mentioned earlier, almost always present in meme language.

Returning to the findings of Eschler and Menking (2018), through a content analysis of 500 starter pack memes posted on *Reddit*, the authors observe that 71.6% of them use signs of consumption to encode the meme, representing, through products and brands, a specific group or practice.

The dominance of using signs of consumption to represent social groups is not surprising. In contemporary societies, abstract values and ideologies that underpin the premises of a social identity are predominantly represented through rituals that find, in the practices of consuming goods and services, the possibility of their materialization. Products and brands, as Douglas and Isherwood (2006) argue, become the visible part of culture, responsible for organizing and reflecting the social structure and power relations within a society, and whose use extends beyond the utilitarian dimension, transforming into a vehicle of symbolic meanings. Barbosa (2004) complements this by recalling that things, beyond serving for the biological reproduction that ensures our survival (food, shelter, clothing), also secure our social reproduction, producing symbolic boundaries between us and others and providing material inputs for the stabilization of identities<sup>14</sup>: we do not eat, live, and dress “generically,” but rather in a way structured by multiple cultural, economic, and social conditions, which can reveal everything from the customs of a nation to its deep social inequalities.

14 Many other authors and researchers delve into this issue. Cf. Clotilde Perez, Elisa Piedras, Grant McCracken, Rosana Pinheiro-Machado, Everardo Rocha etc.

The anthropologist Daniel Miller (1998), acknowledging Mary Douglas's influence on his reflection, addresses the topic of material culture by suggesting that any analysis of the materiality of concrete artifacts should be conducted through a methodological strategy that recognizes how this materiality (re)produces subjectivities. Thus, material culture is not merely a material reflection of tastes and preferences but also a means through which identities are forged. Building upon his research on material culture, the author offers the following definition: "an indirect way to understand people and relationships, but one through which we can reach our destination more quickly and go much further than many other more tempting and direct routes" (MILLER, 2013, p. 225). The author also highlights the active, living, and productive nature of things and objects, which help people become "someone," referencing the example of the sumptuous garments of emperors. Therefore, objects possess symbolic value and serve as a way to reflect on relationships, values, identities, and society itself.

In this sense, the starter pack meme gains relevance because it encourages us to reflect on the function of material culture and ritual practices in the reproduction of social groups and the symbolic structuring of identities. Both understanding and creating such a meme require exercises in abstraction and, most importantly, a keen anthropological perception capable of weaving together the signs of material culture to prototype the identity in question. This "weaving" can be understood through the concept of "intertextuality," which, within the circulation of starter packs, "can help establish symbolic boundaries around a culture through a system of mutual referentiality" (MILTNER, 2020, p. 506).

Thus, understanding the relationship between the starter pack meme and its function in "thinking" about consumption and identities, I proceed to the next section with the report on the results of the application of the assessment activity, which, as a reminder, aimed at producing starter packs to discuss the importance of material culture.

### **Results of the activity: how to be a young bus rider and other identities**

Over the three consecutive semesters<sup>15</sup> during which the activity was implemented within the *Consumer Behavior* course (Decom/UFRN) while I was the instructor, a total of 59 starter packs were created by students, either individually or in pairs. After collecting them in a chart, I aimed to categorize them under seven labels that summarized the “type” of prototyped identity for the creation of the meme. The categories were as follows:

- Sports: identities that refer to sports practice or fan groups;
- Class: refer to economic variables as the main element;
- Technology: organized around the appreciation and consumption of technological and digital devices;
- Music: sound scenes are the main source of aesthetic and behavioral reference;
- Lifestyle: adhere to everyday practices based on affiliation with a certain type of movement, trend, or behavior;
- Politics: refer their identities to political ideologies;
- Others: identities that are structured around highly niche and isolated practices.

In Table 1, it is possible to observe the identity groups produced by the students, organized based on the categorizations I subsequently developed:

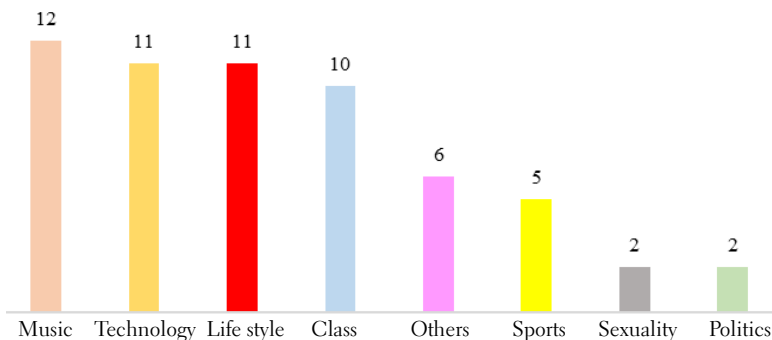
By examining Table 1, we can consider that some identity groups may overlap. For example, “Tango Dancers” might also be categorized under *Music*. The group “Wine Lovers” could be included in the *Class* category if we assume that wine enthusiasts tend to have a more privileged economic status. Although a more complex organization of the categories could be very beneficial, for the purposes of a more objective systematization, I chose to remain “faithful” to what the identities most directly and superficially resembled. The goal was simply to demonstrate

15 In 2022/1, 11; In 2022/2, 21; and in 2022/2, 26.



which elements the young students most connected with to complete the activity, as shown in the Graph 1 below:

Graph 1 – Starter pack categories

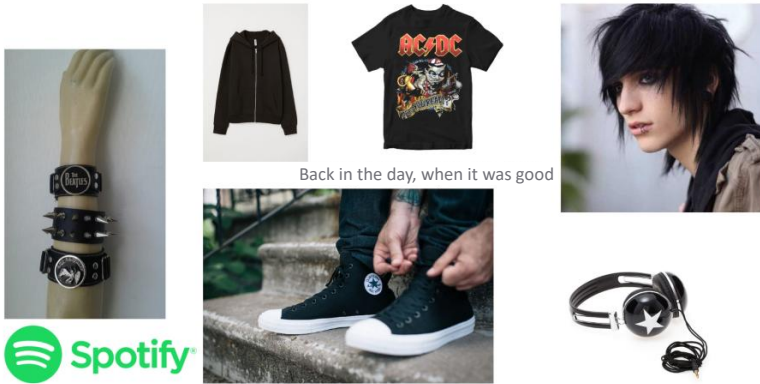


Source: Elaborated by the author, based on the activities developed by the students).

Graph 1 is quite revealing of the sociocultural context of the young students who completed the activity. Although explaining the reasons behind their choices for the starter pack was not part of the assessment, during class discussions about the results, I inquired with the students about what motivated them. Across all three semesters, the majority highlighted that they chose the identified group because they feel included or very close to it. The fact that the most prevalent starter pack categories are *Music*, *Technology*, *Lifestyle*, and *Class* demonstrates the fundamental role these elements play in shaping the identities of the young students. It is well known that music, especially, exerts a significant influence as a vast symbolic arsenal of references for adolescents and young adults to shape their styles. Many of them, for example, identify as “rockers,” whose identity is summarized as follows by a student<sup>16</sup> (Figure 3):

16 The publication of the authorship of the memes was authorized by the students via email.

Figure 3 – “Rocker” *starter pack*



Source: Washington Câmara, student of *Consumer Behavior*.

Another starter pack that deserves to be highlighted is that of the “Young Bus Rider” (Figure 4). Like others, this meme suggests daily practices of young people, primarily students, who commute by bus every day. Although this issue is approached with humor by the student, the meme

Figure 4 – Young bus rider *starter pack*  
**jovem buseiro(a) starterpack**



Source: Luiz Gustavo Bezerra de Souza, student of *Consumer Behavior*.

reveals the difficulties faced by young people who do not own a car or lack the economic means to travel by Uber and similar services. Crowded and inadequate buses, without air conditioning, arriving at bus stops at arbitrary times, often subjecting passengers to long waiting periods in the sun, are experiences shared by many of the students.

This set of elements, based on the meme above, represents the reification of specific identities marked by generational and class crossings. In this sense, the “young bus rider” identity portrayed in the starter pack can be viewed as a material creation of oneself (MILLER, 1998), revealed through objects, practices, and rituals involved in the “simple” act of commuting by bus.

Another significant portion of students said that their choice was based on observing some groups/identities that are highly present in their daily lives, especially in the digital environment. It is interesting to note that among those who chose to describe one “other” identity, they did so with the intention of subtly criticizing it humorously — whether because of its eccentricity, superficiality, or because it belongs radically to another “universe.” One example was the identity “Preppy Girls” (Figure 5), which appeared three times. Below is an example of a starter pack that illustrates this group:

Figure 5 – “Preppy girl” *starter pack*

PATRICINHA NATALENSE STARTER PACK



Source: Victoria Silva, student of *Consumer Behavior*.

Following the “empty” identities chosen by students, I also highlight the “Bolsonarista” identity. It is interesting to note that it emerges only in 2022/2, and one possible explanation is the proximity of the assessment activity to the presidential election period during that semester, a time of significant emotion and mobilization at the university. An example of a “Good Citizen” starter pack can be seen below, in Figure 6:

Figure 6 – “Good Citizen” *starter pack*



Source: Arthur Araújo Oliveira, student of *Consumer Behavior*.

The meme, which seeks to represent the supporter of the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro, operates as a satire of the Bolsonaro supporter, positioning the student themselves on the opposite spectrum of ultraconservative ideologies. This example is rich because it encapsulates both the element of “humor,” a widely used resource in meme language, and the political dimension of memes. According to Viktor Chagas (2018, p. 10), memes are capable of “awakening or demonstrating the subject’s political engagement or even socializing them with public debate through a metaphorical language and guided by the construction of a narrative or framing that often makes use of references from popular culture.”

In addition to this aspect, a characteristic quite common and explored in some memes, such as the “Preppy Girl” (Figure 5) and others, was the marker of the Potiguar or Natalense regional identity. This variable appeared primarily in the starter packs related to the categories of *Class* and *Sexuality*. In these, it was possible to observe the influence of a moral dimension in the construction of the memes (MILLER et al., 2019), representing the Other identity with elements that enable an ironic caricature and carry an implicit dose of value judgment. An example of each can be seen in Figures 7 and 8.

In Figure 7, the student appropriates the expression “*pinta*” to refer to Potiguar individuals who adopt specific attitudes and consumption practices, as revealed by the images that make up the starter pack. The “*pintas*” are young people who embrace a style oriented toward ostentation through clothing brands, as well as listening to certain types of music that narrate their daily lives. The meme in Figure 8, the “*Gay Casanova*,” represents the identity of individuals who frequent *Casanova Ecoobar*, a nightclub catering to the LGBTQIAPN+ community located in the southern zone of Natal. It is important to highlight that this meme articulates both the axis of sexuality and class, as students refer to objects

Figure 7 – “*Pinta*” starter pack

### Started Pack Pinta



Source: Geovanna Nascimento, student of *Consumer Behavior*.

Figure 8 – “Gay Casanova” *starter pack***The “GAY CASANOVA” starter pack**

Source: Moisés Oliveira Lima and João Victor de Souza Coutinho, students of *Consumer Behavior*.

and styles commonly recognized as “more expensive” by the young students I engaged with over the semesters. I particularly note the image of the orange piece of clothing from *AlgoBão*, a local fashion brand whose shirt prices range from R\$ 130 to R\$ 330.

In both cases, it is interesting to consider that the proposed assessment allowed for an exercise of reflexivity on the students’ own practices, as well as an anthropological perspective on the Other. Although not discussed here, it is worth remembering that the starter packs should include a brief historical overview of the emergence of the explored identity, along with an explanation of why the objects and practices selected to compose the meme were chosen. This approach allowed students to present both a contextualization based on documentary research, such as in the case of the *Hippies*, discussing the *hippie* movement of the 1970s in the United States; and also a description derived from their own everyday empirical observations, as in the case of “Gay Casanova.”

### Final Considerations

This article aimed to present and discuss elements of students' productions related to an assessment activity in the *Consumer Behavior* course of the Advertising and Propaganda program at Decom/UFRN. In this activity, students were expected to create and explain a version of the starter pack meme based on a freely chosen social identity. I collected the works developed over the 3 semesters, totaling 59 starter packs. Subsequently, I organized the materials into seven categories: *Sports*; *Class*; *Technology*; *Music*; *Lifestyle*; *Politics*; and *Others*. The most frequent occurrences of starter packs were in the categories of *Music*, *Technology*, *Lifestyle*, and *Class*. Regarding the memes classified as *Music* and *Technology*, most reflected the students' own identities, almost like a starter pack about themselves. The memes developed in the *Class* category also represented issues experienced by the students; however, most of them served as representations with a tone of mockery and sarcasm, which was more evident in the descriptive explanations provided by the students after the presentation of the meme image. This revealed its moral dimension — a point discussed by Miller et al. (2019).

Based on the developments and results, it is possible to affirm that the application of this activity was successful. The students engaged in creating the meme, fulfilling most of the requirements outlined for the activity. When the guidelines were presented in class, the majority of students displayed signs of enthusiasm. However, some students had some difficulty understanding which meme I was referring to. Although examples were provided and the purpose of the meme was contextualized for those unfamiliar with it, creating an image identical to the typical starter pack memes circulating on social media sites was not a requirement. Beyond being a well-received activity — since, according to reports, students found it entertaining to carry out —, the assessment proved to be useful in achieving the main objective, which was to have them relate the construction of the starter pack to the theoretical framework discussed in class on the anthropology of

consumption and material culture. Most of the students' work referenced authors such as Livia Barbosa, Mary Douglas, Baron Isherwood, and Daniel Miller in a coherent manner to interpret their own starter packs. Some students even incorporated other authors not previously discussed in the course, such as Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Baudrillard, likely because they had encountered these authors in other subjects within the program — which is worth celebrating, as it highlights the connections between disciplines and authors.

The activity involving meme starter packs not only illustrates identities through material culture but also reveals the capacity of objects to act as vehicles for the production of identities, as already explored by Miller (1998), Douglas and Isherwood (2006), and other authors in the field of the anthropology of consumption. This process served to illustrate, in a didactic way, that objects and cultural practices, although simple in their everyday appearance, play a profound symbolic role, functioning as the glue that maintains the cohesion of different social groups. Thus, the meme in question is useful for representing a microcosm of the more complex dynamics involved in the formation of subjectivity through material culture, providing important insights into how contemporary consumption is both shaped by and shapes culture itself.

To conclude, another important point to highlight is the significance of revitalizing assessment processes to better connect with the universe of contemporary students. Memes, specifically, can provide an opportunity for students to synthesize theories and abstractions in a more playful and engaging way (GROHMANN, 2021), so that this genre is not only approached as an object of study, but also as a language resource that students themselves can be appropriated of. This aligns with what Scolari (2010) referred to as “student-generated content.”

This does not mean that all assessments and classroom presentations should turn into a spectacle of memes. It means recognizing that, with the rise of digital culture, new languages are emerging, and memes prove to be a powerful communicative resource. I believe it is possible, in circumstances in which it makes sense, to also consider

memes as a pedagogical tool or, as Grohmann (2021) suggests, an educommunications device. It is not productive to rigidly impose teaching and assessment methods based on the conservative discourse of “it has always been like this.” The COVID-19 pandemic made this quite clear. With the return to in-person classes, it is not only the educator’s responsibility to connect with new realities and dynamics, but also the role of management to promote spaces where teachers can learn about different formats and better understand new habits, practices, and worldviews that shape what it means *to be young* today. In this way, by acknowledging the legitimacy of the changes that have occurred, it may increasingly be possible to establish a teaching-learning environment that embraces the *sensorium* of youth in this still early 21st century.

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## **Pernambuco football fan-mothers: investigating women belonging in club spaces**

### **Mães-torcedoras do futebol pernambucano: investigando o pertencimento feminino nos espaços clubísticos**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The article initiates a discussion on the presence of a specific group of women in Pernambuco's football clubs, made up of mothers who are fans of the teams Santa Cruz, Sport Recife, and Náutico. We begin by placing football fan practices in the broader historical context of traditionally male activities. We then describe the evolution of women's participation in the country's football fan clubs and present the results of a quantitative survey held in December 2023. In the discussion, we identify the habits and characteristics of these female fans, who attend stadiums, revealing who they are and how they relate to club spaces. Finally, we conclude that they excel in their role as carers of children and observe changes in their behavior and levels of engagement with their teams after they become mothers.*

**Keywords:** *football; fans cultures; mothering; sports and gender; consumption.*

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**RESUMO:** *O artigo inicia um debate sobre a presença de uma parcela específica do público feminino nos espaços clubísticos do futebol pernambucano, composta por mulheres-mães, torcedoras dos times Santa Cruz, Sport Recife e Náutico. De início, contextualizamos as práticas torcedoras do futebol como atividades historicamente masculinas. Em seguida, descrevemos a evolução da participação feminina nas torcidas do país e apresentamos resultados da pesquisa quantitativa, realizada em dezembro de 2023. Na discussão, identificamos hábitos e características dessas mães-torcedoras, frequentadoras dos estádios, revelando quem elas são e como se relacionam com os espaços clubísticos. Por fim, concluímos que se destacam no papel de cuidadoras das crianças, e observamos mudanças nos seus comportamentos e níveis de engajamento com seus times, após se tornarem mães.*

**Palavras-chave:** futebol; culturas torcedoras; maternagem; esportes e gênero; consumo.

## **Introduction: communication, consumption, and football**

In contemporary studies, consumption has been examined as a social and communicational phenomenon with extensive imaginary, symbolic, and cultural significance. Its relevance in daily life extends beyond material dimensions, given its role in shaping identities and social relationships (ROCHA, 2008; CASTRO, 2014). Gisela Castro (2014) highlights that every act of consumption also constitutes an act of communication, as consumption practices reflect lifestyles, modes of being, behavior, and living. From this standpoint, Ronaldo Helal (2011) identifies football as a communicational phenomenon that mobilizes discourses, practices, and identities. Furthermore, it is viewed as a cultural phenomenon that transcends its sporting nature to serve as a site for the production of meaning.

Historically, the development of football, as well as its spaces of performance and consumption, has been culturally legitimized as masculine domains (GOELLNER, 2005). From an early age, fan practices are encouraged among boys, as sporting values are linked to behavioral traits considered ideal for men, such as strength, virility, and camaraderie. As a result, football has grown and become firmly established as a masculine space, encompassing sporting, fan, and consumer practices.

According to Martine Segalen (2002), fans engage in collective identity phenomena within stadiums through symbolic rituals associated with clubs and football matches. These rituals include wearing team apparel and accessories, as well as chanting club slogans and anthems. Identity bonds are reinforced through language and behaviors marked by dominant warrior symbolism and virile sexuality. Intense bodily and sensory expressions are also observed among fans following team victories, often manifesting in exuberant celebrations such as traffic disruptions, honking, and other public displays (SEGALLEN, 2002).

Within this context, football stadiums, or club spaces, are understood as spaces of consumption. Eric Arnould and Craig Thompson (2005) explain that consumer culture comprises a network or system of images, texts, and commercially produced objects utilized by various

consumer groups. Through these practices, consumption contributes to the construction of identities and meanings that shape life experiences, lending significance to collective habits and social environments. However, such meanings frequently overlap or even conflict with one another, leading consumers to both adopt and negotiate roles and relationships across different consumption contexts, including those found in fan practices and football environments.

Throughout history, football stadiums have come to be seen as sites of contestation, where masculine gender values prevail over feminine ones (BANDEIRA; SEFFNER, 2013). Women's role was to support their husbands, brothers, and sons as fans. In these spaces, they began to take on various roles, many linked to maternal figures and functions, such as companions, organizers of parties and social actions of clubs and supporter groups, or even symbolic fans (*torcedoras-símbolo*<sup>1</sup>) (MORAES, 2017; ARAÚJO, 2019). With the rise of violence in stadiums in the late 1980s, a new type of audience was encouraged by some institutions, which promoted repositioning these spaces to become family-friendly (POPE, 2017; SVEINSON; TOFFOLETTI, 2022).

Based on this context, the present study examined how women fans who are mothers relate to club spaces. Supporting Garry Crawford's (2004) perspective, sports are understood as cultural products that encompass diverse consumption practices, such as attending football matches in stadiums. To this end, consumption practices and the sense of belonging within the stands were explored through interviews with mothers themselves, investigating their behaviors and habits when attending stadiums. The theoretical framework primarily drew on studies addressing football and women fans (GOELLNER, 2005; COSTA, 2006; POPE, 2017; BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019), gender, motherhood, and mothering (GILLIGAN, 2013; COLLIER DE MENDONÇA, 2014; 2021; O'REILLY, 2023), as well as literature specifically

1 This term is widely used in the media and sports community to refer to supporters who represent and show long-term dedication to their club. They fall into the category of fanatics and "tend to blend their own identity with that of the team" (REIN; KOTLER; SHIELDS, 2008, p. 100).

focusing on mothers who are sports fans (SVEINSON; TOFFOLETTI, 2022). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions (LAKATOS; MARCONI, 2003), administered between December 13 and 22, 2023, to individuals identifying as women and mothers who support Recife clubs (Santa Cruz, Sport Recife, and Náutico) and reside in Pernambuco, aiming to profile this population. The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and disseminated online via contact networks and female fan groups associated with these teams. A quantitative approach was employed for data collection and analysis, complemented by qualitative analysis conducted in dialogue with feminist and maternal studies theories.

Mothering practices are understood to involve adults who care for one or more children, regardless of their gender, sexuality, or biological relationship to the child(ren), provided that mother work constitutes a central aspect of their lives (COLLIER DE MENDONÇA, 2014, 2021; O'REILLY, 2023). This study focused specifically on women who are mothers, based on the recognition of the importance of research on women fans, particularly in light of the ongoing gender binarism in the sports domain and the stereotypical representations often assigned to women as sports supporters (COSTA, 2006), which portray them as inauthentic, marginalized, and underserved in terms of stadium infrastructure and safety. Katherine Sveinson and Kim Toffoletti (2022) point out that, although numerous studies address father–child relationships; fan behavior; and either inclusive or exclusionary family policies; as well as women sports fans more broadly, though mothers are frequently overlooked. The objective of profiling fan-mothers and examining their modes of occupying stadium spaces is to initiate a discussion about a more specific subset of the female fan base within supporter communities.

### **Football: men's stronghold and fan representations**

Football emerged among wealthy white families in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and gradually evolved into a commercial enterprise. Initially practiced by

men from affluent backgrounds, it later became associated with factories and clubs (DAMATTA, 1994). The sport developed as a male-dominated space, both in terms of participation and fandom, with men establishing the norms (GOELLNER, 2005), performance standards, and consumption rituals of the sports market. Within this context, women have been present since the early stages, although their roles and forms of participation have shifted over time.

Beginning in the early 1900s, official football matches in Brazil began to reflect class and racial distinctions. Although other sports also contributed to the formation of fan identities (ARAÚJO, 2019), football in its early stages did not yet foster the kind of fan identity observed today. At the time, spectatorship was characterized by a divided audience, with the upper class occupying separate areas. Women were already present, primarily as companions to their husbands, children, or fathers. These events served as important social occasions for women to be introduced into society and to display their social status through luxury clothing and accessories. As such, their presence was encouraged.

In the following decades, the relationship between fans and teams acquired a strong emotional dimension, and a segment of the urban elite, particularly young women, continued to attend matches (ARAÚJO, 2019). However, as football gained popularity among the working class and evolved into a commercialized spectacle, women participation was increasingly discouraged. The sport became more violent and was deemed inappropriate for ladies, in light of prevailing social expectations tied to femininity and procreation (POPE, 2017; ARAÚJO, 2019). This shift culminated in a government bill that prohibited women from playing football for nearly 40 years, on the grounds that this and similar sports were “incompatible with the conditions of their nature” (BRASIL, 1941). These conditions referred to perceived physical risks, particularly harm to the reproductive system, associated with contact sports. Such justifications were “rooted in biologizing and patriarchal notions of gender” (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019, p. 20), reinforcing dominant social roles assigned to women at the time, especially motherhood.

Beginning in the 1950s, organized fan groups began to gain visibility in stadiums, primarily through the leadership of men. Within this predominantly male environment, one woman managed to break through the barriers of a sport long established as a male stronghold. Dulce Rosalina became the first woman to lead an organized fan group in Brazil, the *Torcida Organizada do Vasco da Gama* (TOV), assuming this role in 1956 while still young, and later being recognized as a symbolic fan (ARAÚJO, 2019). According to Daniela Araújo (2019), during this period, sport ceased to be viewed solely as a space for socialization and securing advantageous marriages for women, and increasingly became a significant arena for devotion and identity formation.

With the emergence and growth of various supporter groups in Brazilian football, particularly those composed of younger fans who opposed the festive and passive values promoted by organized groups up to the 1970s, violence in stadiums began to increase. This escalation contributed to the withdrawal of many female spectators from the stands, as well as some male spectators who no longer perceived football as a safe environment (COSTA, 2006).

In Brazil, during the 1980s and 1990s, women continued to be discouraged from participating as football fans. Within organized supporter groups, they were prohibited from playing instruments or waving flags (MORAES, 2017). In response, some all-female organized fan groups began to emerge, gaining greater visibility and strength in the 2000s. According to Leda Costa (2006), the internet provided these women with spaces for communication and self-expression. The formation of online communities of football fans and club supporters on social networking platforms — such as Orkut and, later, Facebook and Twitter (now X) (VIMIEIRO, 2022) — contributed significantly to the development of fan cultures, particularly in the context of mediatization (FRANDSEN, 2014). On this topic, Amaral *et al.* (2024) note that Brazilian studies on fan cultures began in the 2000s, initially focusing on television fiction, pop culture, and communication technologies. This field is marked by processes of appropriation and resignification,

in which fans actively produce content and participate in engaged communities (AMARAL *et al.*, 2024).

In the context of sports, several researchers highlight fandom as a central component of entertainment, playing a significant role in shaping personal identity and forming social relationships (CRAWFORD, 2004; MEWETT; TOFFOLETTI, 2011; TARVER, 2017). According to Wojoon Lee and George Cunningham (2016), sports fan cultures have historically been structured in a gender-disproportionate manner, operating within a heterosexual and masculine framework, particularly in male-dominated sports. However, in recent decades, shifts have occurred, influenced by social and feminist movements, as well as the growing visibility of athletes, women fans, and LGBTQIAPN+ supporters (VIMIEIRO, 2022). These groups have actively challenged sexism and gender- and sexuality-based prejudices, contributing to the increasing prominence of women's sports on the global stage. Nevertheless, such progress is not always linear or sustained. As characterized by Ludmila Mourão and Márcia Morel (2008), these developments often follow an “accordion effect” — a cyclical pattern of advances and setbacks (POPE, 2017).

In this context, beginning in 2010, several independent women's fan groups emerged online in Brazil. In Pernambuco, notable examples include Coralinas, a feminist supporter movement of Santa Cruz founded in 2016, which aimed to unite women in attending matches without fear of violence (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019) and to promote dialogue on issues affecting women's lives in society. Motivated by similar objectives, the women's movements *Elas e o Sport*, affiliated with Sport Recife, and *Timbuzeiras*, associated with *Náutico*, were also established in the same year (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019).

It is worth noting that although the term “fan” became popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to describe sports enthusiasts (CHAGAS; FONSECA, 2020), in Brazil, this term was not widely adopted in the sports context. Instead, the terms “torcedor” (supporter) and “torcida” (crowd or cheering section) became established (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019).

This terminology originated as a result of women's participation in the stands of football stadiums and clubs. During matches, they would often twist their handkerchiefs or gloves in moments of heightened emotion during the games.

In Brazil, different groups of fans coexist through both modern and traditional practices (VIMIEIRO, 2022)<sup>2</sup>. Female fans, therefore, represent a diverse group whose characteristics extend beyond fan practices and football consumption to include the specific conditions and constraints still imposed on women. Within this context, the experiences of fan-mothers warrant closer examination.

### **Women, mothers and fans**

Although women have gained greater participation in the sports environment, their presence in the stands remains largely unacknowledged by both the media and society. Silvana Goellner (2005, p. 86) emphasizes that “the conditions of access and participation of women are still not equal.” In the case of mothers, a dual form of oppression persists, reinforcing the culture of patriarchal motherhood (O'REILLY, 2023). Moreover, intersecting forms of oppression further exacerbate gender inequalities and place a disproportionate burden on mothers, particularly those who are women of color, low-income, with limited educational opportunities, single, or part of the LGBTQIAPN+ community. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2021) underscore that intersectional power relations are intrinsic to social life, as they do not operate in isolation.

Stacey Pope (2017) notes the various obstacles faced by women fans who are mothers, highlighting that countries such as Sweden and Finland, which support employability during motherhood, have higher women participation in sports. Meanwhile, Maria Collier de Mendonça

2 Ana Carolina Vimieiro (2022) identifies 5 types of fan formations that still exist in Brazil: the *charangas* (from the 1940s), the *torcidas organizadas* (organized fans from the 1960s), online communities (from the 1990s), new supporting movements (from the 2000s), and *torcidas livres* (free *torcidas* from the 2010s).

(2021, p. 58), in her research with Brazilian and Canadian mothers, points out that even though “they strive to balance different tasks and roles, both inside and outside the home, they face many difficulties managing the time dedicated to their children, spouses, household chores, themselves, or professional matters.”

Maternal studies and matricentric feminism (O'REILLY, 2023) propose that the meaning of the word “mother” extend to any adult person, regardless of gender or biological ties, who performs mothering work as a central part of their life. This would encourage the deconstruction of the patriarchal motherhood culture, which to this day remains the dominant narrative, as argued by Andrea O'Reilly (2023). In this context, it is important to emphasize that the plurality of maternal experiences, which intersect with various intersectionalities, encompass diverse social identities (class, gender, race, geographic location, etc.). With this in mind, Lélia Gonzalez (2020) highlights that oppression occurs — especially due to issues of race — affecting African-descendant and Indigenous women.

Matricentric feminism underscores the importance of focusing on fan-mothers, emphasizing the need to recognize “a distinct feminism for and about mothers and to explore their specific needs, experiences, and desires, which continue to be marginalized compared to non-mothers” (O'REILLY, 2023, p. 172). Additionally, the ethics of care as women's work within a patriarchal system is an essential framework to consider (GILLIGAN, 2013). The role of caregivers is visible in many football spaces, regardless of whether women are mothers. This is particularly significant given that hegemonic representations of women in football remain tied to stereotypes such as *marias-chuteiras* (groupies), *torcedoras-símbolos* (symbolic fans), maternal figures, or masculinized portrayals (VIMIEIRO; SOUZA, 2022).

From this perspective, as noted at the beginning of this article, the symbolic women fans (Figure 1) align with representations of maternal figures, who gain privileges in the stands. To achieve such status, these women are generally more mature. Some tend to dress exclusively in

their team's colors and have free access to clubs (COSTA, 2006) as a way to symbolize a family space, within patriarchal tradition, and unconditional love for the team. It is worth remembering that both masculinities and femininities are complementary constructions, not opposites (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2016). Therefore, greater legitimization of women's participation in football challenges the traditionally male-dominated space in this sport. However, the representations of older women as caregivers and mothers can also resonate with culturally dominant values forged in patriarchy and the female ethics of care (GILLIGAN, 2013).

Figure 1 – Symbolic Women Fans of Corinthians (Dona Elisa), Vasco da Gama (Tia Dulce), and Sport Recife (Dona Maria)



Source: Google Images.

Works such as those by Katherine Sveinson and Kim Toffoletti (2022) support the discussion presented here by addressing mothers who support different sports in the United States and Australia, thus highlighting the importance of expanding the debate on this topic within the academic community. The authors point out that for these women fans, it is important for clubs to invest in family-friendly spaces in stadiums, with facilities that support mothers in their caregiving roles, provided that these spaces do not hinder their ability to simultaneously perform both maternal duties and fan practices.

## Where are the fan-mothers? Key findings

To understand the profiles of fan-mothers who attend stadiums, an exploratory quantitative study was conducted to gain familiarity with the subject. A structured questionnaire served as the data collection instrument and was administered to individuals who identify as women — both cisgender and transgender — and as mothers supporting clubs from the capital of Pernambuco (Santa Cruz, Sport Recife, and Náutico). The survey link was disseminated through female club movement groups, such as *Elas e o Sport*, *Timbuzeiras*, and *Coralinas*, as well as via the personal social media accounts of one of the researchers. A snowball convenience sampling technique was employed, primarily for exploratory purposes, relying on referral networks to facilitate the exploration and deeper understanding of the topic (SVEINSON; TOFFOLETTI, 2022). The questionnaire was administered between December 13 and 22, 2023, and consisted of multiple-choice questions, some permitting only one response and others allowing multiple responses.

The questionnaire yielded 86 responses, of which 79 were valid, all from individuals identifying as women — cisgender or transgender — and mothers. As noted, the questionnaire was distributed among women's fan movement groups that actively engage with club spaces, given that these groups were formed with the purpose of attending stadiums collectively. Although the presence of women in these spaces has been increasing, it is believed that many distance themselves from clubs after becoming mothers. This selection allowed for obtaining a qualified sample of fan-mothers who remain involved in club environments. Initially, sociodemographic data were collected to characterize the sample. Regarding age distribution, most respondents reported being between 45 and 54 years old (32.9%), followed by those aged 25 to 34 (29.1%), 35 to 44 (21.5%), 19 to 24 (8.9%), 55 to 64 (5.1%), and over 65 years old (2.5%). In terms of race, the sample reflected the current Brazilian demographic profile recorded in the 2022 Census (DURÃES, 2023), with a majority identifying as brown (45.6%), followed by white (35.4%), black (16.5%), and indigenous and yellow (1.3%).

Regarding education level, the majority of mother-respondents reported having completed higher education (51.9%), followed by those with completed secondary education (25.3%), incomplete or ongoing higher education (20.3%), and incomplete secondary education (2.5%). These results indicate that the sample represents a relatively privileged segment of Brazilian society in terms of educational attainment. Additionally, these fans tend to reside geographically close to the clubs, with most living in Recife (64.6%), the city where the stadiums of the respective teams are located, followed by residents of the metropolitan area (32.9%), and smaller percentages in the Zona da Mata and Sertão regions (1.3% each).

Of the total respondents, 57 are fans of Sport Recife, 12 of Náutico, and 10 of Santa Cruz. We then asked if they usually attend the stadiums, and this data (Figure 2) reduced the sample by nearly 30%, as some women answered that they do not usually go to the stadiums. In our interpretation, this reality may reflect reasons such as violence, difficulties in transportation, and harassment experienced by women, as discussed in previously published studies (MELO; LIMA; CASTRO, 2019).

Figure 2 – Screenshot: Survey on fan-mothers

Você costuma ir ao estádio ver os jogos do seu time?

79 respostas



Given the objectives of this research, understanding the motivations that lead these mothers to attend stadiums was essential. The aim was to determine whether their participation is driven by personal motivation related to the construction of a fan identity, the desire to share the sports

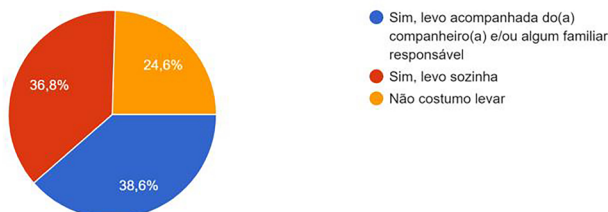
experience with others, or the intent to bring their children to games. Respondents could select multiple answers and had the option to provide other responses. Notably, love for the team was the predominant reason (96.5%). Other reported motivations included attending with friends (19.3%), family (15.8%), and accompanying spouses or partners (8.8%). These findings indicate that women who are mothers also actively construct their fan identities and seek a sense of belonging within football spaces. Soraya Barreto Januário (2019) highlights a historical connection in the *ethos* of Pernambuco's women fans to struggles and resistance for the occupation of previously denied spaces, noting that many young women in the stands were influenced by other women relatives (mothers, aunts, grandmothers) to develop an interest in football.

Focusing on the subset of fan-mothers, we investigated how these women relate to stadiums and football teams after becoming mothers and assuming caregiving responsibilities. Most respondents reported that they take their children to the stadiums, either accompanied by other guardians or on their own (Figure 3). When asked whether this habit was intended to encourage the development of their children's fan identity, a multiple-choice question, the majority (82.2%) indicated that they bring their children so they too can learn to enjoy football and support the team. Other commonly cited reasons included: the children themselves ask to attend (42.2%), it serves as a valuable family activity (44.4%), or they have no one else to leave the children with (6.7%).

Figure 3 – Screenshot: Survey on fan-mothers

Você costuma levar seus filhos(as) para o estádio?

57 respostas



It was equally important to understand the challenges fan-mothers face when bringing their children to stadiums. The majority of respondents highlighted the lack of adequate facilities for young children, such as diaper-changing stations, playgrounds, and child-friendly restrooms, as a key issue (57.9%). Additionally, many pointed to the high costs involved, including expenses for tickets, food, and transportation (45.6%). These findings are consistent with those of Katherine Sveinson and Kim Toffoletti (2022), who observed that one of the main concerns expressed by mother sports fans in the United States and Australia is the insufficient infrastructure in stadiums to accommodate families with young children.

Continuing the list of challenges reported by participants, many noted that the club's communal areas are not appropriate for young children, as these environments often involve alcohol consumption and occurrences of violence (36.8%). Consequently, such spaces are not designed with the needs of parents or guardians in mind, lacking designated family-friendly sections (35.1%). Other difficulties mentioned include the logistical complexity of attending matches with young children who require bottles, toys, or specific foods (22.8%), the late scheduling of games (1.8%), incidents of violence or fights (3.6%), and the lack of priority lines for those with children (1.8%), among other concerns. These findings reflect the normalization of caregiving as a female responsibility (GILLIGAN, 2013). While most men can attend matches alone or with friends without additional concerns, fan-mothers are continually expected to perform care work, whether due to societal norms or structural issues within stadiums — such as diaper-changing stations being located exclusively in women's restrooms.

Corroborating the notion of mothers' awareness of their caregiving roles, we observed that in 2023, certain football matches were held with audiences restricted to women, children, and people with disabilities (PWDs), following sanctions imposed by the sports tribunal in response to previous incidents of violence in the stands. One notable case was Sport Recife, which hosted three Série B matches under these conditions. Although these matches were officially designated for women,

children, and PWDs, both the media and the club emphasized the historic character of the events as festive, peaceful occasions led by women, often portrayed as expressions of “unconditional love” for the team and framed in contrast to traditional, male-dominated fan behavior. However, as previously discussed (BARRETO JANUÁRIO; CASTRO, 2023), much of the infrastructure prepared for this so-called “different” audience was designed primarily with children in mind. This further reinforced the maternal caregiving role (GILLIGAN, 2013), suggesting that women were perceived chiefly as companions responsible for their children’s presence at the matches. Despite this framing, our findings affirm that women possess a deep and autonomous emotional connection to their teams and to football itself, independent of their maternal identity.

Returning to the analysis of the results, we observed notable changes in stadium attendance habits after motherhood. Nearly half of the respondents, 28 fans (49.1%), reported a decrease in their frequency of attending their teams’ games. In contrast, only five (8.8%) indicated an increase in attendance following motherhood, while the remaining (42.1%) maintained the same level of regularity. Regarding their sense of belonging to the clubs, the majority of respondents (57.9%) affirmed that they feel connected to their teams. Nonetheless, almost half (49.1%) of these fan-mothers, whether currently caring for children or pregnant, reported experiencing difficulties or feelings of embarrassment when attending stadiums. These challenges stem from limited accessibility as well as symbolic and physical forms of violence, issues widely documented among women spectators (MORAES, 2017).

When discussing women fans and football, consumer culture plays a significant role in shaping identity and connections with teams and fan groups. Attending the stadium is understood as an act of consumption that includes being present, utilizing the club’s space, services, and products. In this context, we asked fan-mothers whether they typically purchase products from their teams. All 57 respondents answered affirmatively, purchasing official merchandise and/or replicas. However, when

asked if they had ever encountered clothing or accessories specifically designed for mothers, pregnant women, or breastfeeding women, an overwhelming 96.5% responded negatively.

In 2022, Racing Club, an Argentine team, introduced the first nursing-friendly jersey designed to facilitate breastfeeding for nursing individuals by incorporating an opening just below the chest (Figure 4) (FREITAS, 2022). The jersey's launch was accompanied by a viral video campaign on social media, sharing stories from fan-mothers about the stigma that breastfeeding in public places often attracts. Despite the significance of this initiative and the club's acknowledgment of this audience, there has been no evidence of continued production of this style in Racing's official designs. Furthermore, it is unclear whether other teams have adopted this model, although Racing and their sponsor Kappa announced that the design would be available to anyone interested.

Figure 4 – Screenshot: Launch video of the Racing jersey



Source: Racing Club (2022).

Finally, we asked these fan-mothers whether they felt their favorite teams communicated effectively with them (Figure 5). The results revealed that the majority do not feel adequately represented by the clubs, citing a lack of consistent attention to campaigns aimed specifically at

mothers. Official consumer products, such as jerseys, remain limited and insufficient, particularly in addressing the needs of women who are mothers. Even those who perceive some communication from the clubs acknowledge it occurs mainly through occasional, often seasonal campaigns, typically around holidays like Mother's Day. This pattern suggests that clubs prioritize market-driven, calendar-based initiatives rather than fostering genuine, ongoing engagement with their female fanbase.

Figure 5 – Screenshot: Survey on fan-mothers

Você acredita que o seu time se comunica bem com as mães torcedoras? Seja em ações, posts na redes sociais, campanhas, dias de jogo ou estrutura do clube.

57 respostas



Another one-time initiative that gained international attention — and reinforced the idea of mothers as caregivers (GILLIGAN, 2013) and, in this case, as peacemakers (VIMIEIRO; SOUZA, 2022) in the stands — was the “Security Moms” campaign of 2015, organized by Sport Club do Recife. The club recruited approximately 30 mothers of male fans belonging to organized supporter groups, which are often associated with violence, to act as part of the security team during a Pernambuco state championship match against Náutico, a derby with a well-documented history of violence between fan bases. According to the campaign’s video case (SECURITY MOMS - MÃES SEGURANÇAS, 2015), no incidents of violence were recorded in the stands during this game.

After analyzing the data, we can infer that among the respondents, fan-mothers are adult women generally within the typical childbearing age range, according to the medical-biological discourse (20 to 35 years old), and are consumers of team products. Largely, likely due to

the questionnaire's distribution method — online through women's fan networks — these women appear privileged in terms of access to education and, consequently, to discussions surrounding gender issues, motherhood, and parenting. It is important to highlight that groups such as Coralinas, Elas, and Sport uphold discourses aligned with feminist agendas, and their higher educational levels may suggest that the respondents are engaged in politicized and activist debates. These mother fans regularly attend stadiums, with love for the team cited as the most prominent motivation for fandom, regardless of gender (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019). This passion is also reflected in the values they seek to transmit to their children by bringing them to matches. Nonetheless, these mothers face significant challenges related to inadequate club facilities and insufficient support for attending games with children. Nearly half reported a decrease in stadium attendance after becoming mothers, highlighting how parenting responsibilities disproportionately fall on women and reinforcing the concept of the feminine ethic of care (GILLIGAN, 2013). While these women express a sense of belonging to their clubs as fans, becoming mothers adds complex layers to their experiences, where feelings of embarrassment, physical and symbolic limitations, and difficulties in accessing stadiums become more pronounced. Moreover, they perceive that clubs do not communicate effectively with them, which fosters a sense of invisibility and neglect within the fan community.

## **Final considerations**

In this article, we initiate a discussion on practices of belonging in the stands and the diverse ways in which women who are mothers in Pernambuco engage with spaces associated with football clubs. As Daniela Araújo (2019) emphasizes, football, particularly the stadium stands, functions as a social arena for identity formation and reaffirmation, where women are continually striving to (re)assert their legitimacy as fans. Through an analysis of data collected via the questionnaire, we identify fan-mothers as a distinct and active presence within these

environments. Drawing from both theoretical insights and empirical findings, we intentionally adopt the term “fan-mothers” to highlight the inseparable nature of these identities, underscoring that motherhood and fandom are not mutually exclusive but are deeply interconnected aspects of their lived experiences. We contend that this research offers valuable contributions not only to the fields of sports studies and fan culture but also to broader scholarly conversations on motherhood and maternal subjectivities in contemporary society, as advocated by Andrea O’Reilly (2023).

Moreover, fan-mothers report not feeling represented by clubs or sports brands, revealing a significant gap that must be addressed within the football ecosystem, not only as a matter of social inclusion but also from the perspective of consumer engagement. It is crucial to recognize and account for the diverse audiences that inhabit football spaces so that both clubs and brands can develop more effective communication strategies and implement policies that genuinely support and foster the participation of these groups. As Stacey Pope (2017, p. 34) asserts, “the persistence of gendered inequalities today is likely to continue to restrict some women’s access to leisure and thus may prevent them from entering traditionally male domains such as the sports stadium.”

Women are present on the field, in the stands, and behind the scenes of the football industry (GOELLNER, 2005; COSTA, 2006; BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019). Yet, the way these spaces are structured and promoted still tends to exclude or overlook fan-mothers, whose caregiving responsibilities, socially constructed as their primary role, are reinforced within stadiums and club environments. This dynamic contributes to a distancing from their fan practices and limits their full participation. We hope this research, which used the questionnaire as a starting point, can serve as a foundation for future studies that further explore the topic and include the perspectives or actions of key stakeholders, such as football clubs, media companies, sponsor brands, and sports governing bodies, who play a central role in shaping the football landscape.

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