



THE CLAPPING GESTURE IN THE PERFORMANCE AGAINST GISBERTA

O GESTO DAS PALMAS NA PERFORMANCE CONTRA GISBERTA

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 doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v8i15.8146

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Abstract: This article explores the debate surrounding the play *Gisberta*, a solo performance by actor Luis Lobianco that premiered in Rio de Janeiro in 2017. The performance tells the true story of a Brazilian woman murdered in Portugal due to transphobia. The article begins by presenting the author's perspective, then summarizes the opposition performed by trans collectives, which organized demonstrations both inside and outside the theater, and, finally, it details actress Dandara Vital's intervention during a 2018 performance at Teatro Rival.

Keywords: documentary theater; applause; representation; Luis Lobianco; Dandara Vital.

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Resumo: O artigo examina a contestação ao espetáculo *Gisberta*, solo do ator Luis Lobianco que estreou no Rio de Janeiro em 2017 e narra a história real de uma mulher brasileira assassinada em Portugal por motivo de transfobia. O artigo parte da exposição do lugar de fala do autor, depois sintetiza a oposição à obra por parte de coletivos trans, que mobilizaram manifestações dentro e fora do teatro e, por fim, relata a intervenção da atriz Dandara Vital em uma apresentação de 2018 no Teatro Rival.

Palavras-chave: teatro documentário; aplauso; representatividade; Luis Lobianco; Dandara Vital.



1 Introduction: I speak from here

For a few years, I have postponed writing this article, even though I had confidence that my views regarding the object I intend to examine would bring something relevant, unique; confidence that they would mirror positions I have taken regarding other artists and plays when writing my dissertation and which I have reviewed in the years following the conclusion of my doctorate, especially in the undergraduate classes I taught during my post-doctorate research at UNIRIO. I watched the play *Gisberta* in March 2018, a year after its debut, at Teatro Rival in Rio de Janeiro. The presentation I attended included the intervention of artists linked to the National Movement of Trans Artists (Monart) and to Coletivo T, who, continuing the wave of criticism that first took shape in the presentations held at the CCBB of Belo Horizonte, in January 2018, protested inside and outside the theater, challenging the lack of representativeness of such a theatrical production. The play told the story of a real person, Gisberta Salce Júnior, a Brazilian transgender woman who was murdered in Portugal in 2016, through a semi-fictional dramaturgy written by Rafael Souza-Ribeiro, and a solo performance by Luis Lobianco, under the direction of Renato Carrera, all three gay cisgender male artists.

The postponement of my writing stems from a few factors. In the first place, I watched the show the year after my doctorate, and what often follows the completion of such a process—I have been hearing similar reports from several colleagues since then—is a kind of cognitive strain, that dampens the desire to write, combined with the feeling of lack of perspectives. The end of my scholarship, the only source of financial stability that I had at that time, led me to dedicate myself to the search for means of continuing my academic trajectory, applying for postdoctoral scholarships and taking exams for temporary and tenure positions in public universities, and this required a radical broadening of my study focus, in contrast to the detailed examinations I had previously been practicing. The following years, with the specific challenges imposed by the historical conjuncture, a far-right government and a COVID-19 pandemic, made me further doubt my intentions and get tired of both theater and the act of gazing critically at it.

I linger here, at the beginning of this article, I delay the confrontation of the object, thus annoying and scaring away my readers. I expose the trajectory of my own body mediating the gaze, trying with this to map a position in relation to the issue under debate. For, it must be noted, the public backlash against the show *Gisberta* demanded a withdrawal: the collectives were aiming their questioning at the inadequacy of the male artist as a spokesperson for a narrative about ways of life other than his own. Some kind of shared protagonism was demanded, considering the inconsistency between the prominence and privileges of that actor and the difficulties of the people who identify more directly with the life being narrated, and even their difficulty to access the forum that such an artist has, and, through it, to give more authentic accounts of such life experience.



Since I am interested in narrating the clash between the theatrical work and the demands vocalized by the protesters¹, I also feel compelled to offer some kind of justification, to stage some kind of failure. It is as if the gesture of exposing my mediation might offer a glimpse of an ethical statement, a proposition of an agreement, so that I, with some arrogance, can assume a position from which to narrate instances of life that are not my own; with respect, with precision, suggesting that I can master a somewhat scientific language to frame this account, an expertise that would be implied when I state that I have defended a dissertation that addresses documentary and autobiographical theater works (Freitas, 2021). I withdraw from the heat of the critical debate by writing years later, by justifying myself too much, exposing my own difficulty, as if the fragility of this sincere self-report somehow held the key to its viability, and, in the end, I do exactly what I want: I focus on a certain experience, I appropriate details made public about this experience, and produce a discourse that, despite its empathy, serves specific interests, different from those of the subjects it narrates. My discourse aims to contribute, to some extent, to the critical debate, regarding the inclusion of marginalized people in the performing arts, but, for this, contradictorily, it assumes for itself a position of some protagonism, some prominence, and some disinterest, regarding the narratives and struggles that refer to the bodies of these others.

Narrating Gisberta's life is not a disinterested act, at least not for Luis Lobianco. It is a show, he says, with different goals from those of the popular comedies that brought him national visibility (especially the comedic audiovisual series *Porta dos Fundos*, but also, before that, numerous theater projects in Rio de Janeiro that had given Lobianco regional projection). In a debate held at CCBB in Belo Horizonte, Lobianco said he believed that "this place here can transform people's consciousness" (TRANSFAKE [...], 2018), defending the importance of his play as an ally in the fight against transphobia, especially because it would reach an audience outside "our bubble of understanding". According to the pedagogical model of effectiveness of art proposed by Jacques Rancière, what seems to be at stake, in Lobianco's speech, is the "presupposition of a continuum between the production of images, gestures, or words and the perception of a situation that engages the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the spectators" (Rancière, 2012, p. 54, free translation). This view on effectiveness differs from that of artist Renata Carvalho, when she, in the same debate, called on cisgender actors and actresses to stop representing trans people onstage for 30 years, indicating a path of professionalization tied to representativeness. One could, analogously, partially associate Renata's request to the archi-ethical model indicated by Rancière, in the sense that it implies the replacement of the "dubious claim of representation to correct customs and thoughts [...] thoughts are no longer the object of lessons given by represented bodies and images, but are directly embodied in customs, in ways of being of the community" (Rancière, 2012, p. 56, free translation).

¹ By default, I will refer to the protesters with the feminine pronoun, since most of the people I will cite are trans women; it should be noted, however, that the group of protesters was heterogeneous, including trans men, non-binary people, and cisgender people.



My goal in this article is not to take a position regarding this impasse of models, in relation to this specific conflict that is in the past—Lobianco no longer presents the play; Renata declared the end of Monart, because they had perceived “a significant structural change in the Brazilian art market with the increasing presence of trans artists, knowing that we still have a lot to advance and achieve in terms of equity and proportionality” (Carvalho, 2023). I have nothing to add to the terms of the conflict, I prefer to recall it in a citational way; my opinion does not matter. On the other hand, I am interested in the image produced by the shock: it seems to me that something unique takes form when the dispute is taken inside the theater space, without resolving it. Having come across a scenic event resembling a Battle of Hernani—yes, it is the tradition of theater that comes to mind, the arrival of Romanticism on the French stage in the early nineteenth century—, not as a direct object of comparison, but as a suggestion of an unusual event, in which spectators are summoned live to take effectively antagonistic positions, before the scene and the bodies of artists of recognized merit. And what is performed, in this case, is noteworthy and concerns my critical collection, of objects that sparkle before my eyes. I make an artifact of this clash of political desires for the stage, paralyzing the clapping gesture of the spectators engaged in celebrating the famous actor, to observe in it “the exhibition of a mediality, [...] the process of making a means visible as such” (Agamben, 2019, p. 216).

2 The critical debate

Gisberta Salce Júnior was a trans woman born in São Paulo in 1960, who emigrated to Europe at the age of 18, having lived from 20 to 45 years old in Porto, Portugal. She was a performer in gay nightclubs, a sex worker, and lived with HIV. In 2006, living on the streets, she was beaten and murdered by a group of young men between the ages of 14 and 16. The crime gained notoriety in Portugal, having motivated the first LGBT Pride Parade in Porto in 2006, turning the real woman into a symbol of the fight against transphobia and LGBTQIA+ discrimination. In the art world, her story has been appropriated in various forms, ranging from documentaries to works “freely inspired” by her life.

Actor Luis Lobianco narrates having learned about Gisberta’s story in 2016, by hearing the song *Balada de Gisberta*, a composition by Pedro Abrunhosa performed by Maria Bethânia, released on the Brazilian singer’s 2009 album. Lobianco says he was then looking for a story “that would move me, that would make me laugh, that would make me cry” (LUIS [...], 2018a), and that he came across Gisberta’s story in the lyrics of the song, recognized its importance and started a research process towards making a play. The artist, as the author of the project, mobilizes a team, composed especially of friends, “because we work with no resources, so it has to be people who accept working as partners” (LUIS [...], 2018a)—which would include the author of the text, to be written during the creation process, and the director of the play, among others. Having started



without sponsorship, the play is soon funded by Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB) and premieres at its headquarters in Rio de Janeiro in March 2017. As for the creation of the dramaturgy, Lobianco clarifies in an interview that, during rehearsals, “Rafael [Souza-Ribeiro] brought texts that we worked on transforming into staging and, in parallel, I improvised lines and characters that Rafael wrote down and organized as text” (UM ATOR [...], 2018), juxtaposing characters inspired by real people and fictional characters. Lobianco declares that the idea was never to embody the person Gisberta, but to alternate between the interpretation of characters who comment on her life and the staging of his own voice as a “storyteller, the artist of the night, the fine line between the comic and tragic” (UM ATOR [...], 2018).

Since before the premiere, there had been public criticism of Lobianco’s proposal made by artists and activists involved in the fight against transphobia and for trans inclusion. Marcio Serelle and Ercio Sena (2019) note that, before the season at CCBB in Belo Horizonte, the dispute had not taken shape. According to the authors, the NGO TransVest was responsible for mobilizing, through social networks, a demonstration outside the theater at the premiere in Minas Gerais, on January 5, 2018. Journalist Neto Lucon helps publicize the demonstration on his blog, identifying that “the criticism occurs because, on the month of trans visibility, the opportunity is given to a cisgender actor (who is not trans) playing a historical trans character, at the same time that *travesti* and trans artists and plays with *travesti* and trans artists have no space” (Lucon, 2018). Josué Gomes and Helvio Caldeira describe the demonstration on the Jornalistas Livres website, citing, among others, the speech of Duda Salabert, then president of TransVest: “We, *travesti* and trans people, want to be the protagonists of our own history and question some structures that exclude us” (Gomes; Caldeira, 2018). They also cite that, in addition to the posters and speeches outside, demonstrators inside the theater, after the end of the show, made “an act of protest in silence. Naked and raising flags in blue, pink, and white, they remained standing, drawing attention from the audience. ‘Glad to meet you, I am a real Gisberta,’ they presented themselves to the spectators” (Gomes; Caldeira, 2018).

Duda Salabert posts on Facebook, on January 11, accusing Lobianco of an act of transfake, which she defines as the practice of “cisgender men, in a caricature way, embodying roles and narratives about trans people” (Salabert, 2018). On the 12th, Monart—National Movement of Trans Artists—publishes an update of the manifesto Trans Representativeness Now (Monart, 2018). In it, originally published in March 2017, in the form of a public petition authored by Renata Carvalho, transfake is the first item to be explained to the reader—“it is a cisgender actor playing a transgender character, thus the fake” (Carvalho, 2017). The aim of the manifesto would be to sensitize “every author, director, producer, every cisgender actor and actress [...] and make them see the real problems that our population faces on a daily basis. And sensitize the audience so that they as consumers demand that trans artists interpret trans characters” (Carvalho, 2017). The 2018 manifesto is longer than the 2017 one, and appears in Facebook with multiple authorship, listing several collectives.



The critical movement also causes adverse responses in the media and long debates on social networks. Shortly after the premiere, Lobianco tells the press that he is “exhausted” and “questioning if it is worth working so hard using my privileges in favor of a cause, aiming at one day being able to create jobs for LGBTs, if in the construction of this path there is so much defamation” (LUIS [...], 2018b). Journalist Tony Góes is one of those who defend the actor’s practice, stating that “a cis actor can, in fact, play a trans character. By the way, any actor can play anything. [...] Being on stage what one is not in real life is one of the basic premises of the performing arts” (Góes, 2018).

The producers of the play, as a counterpart action of the season at CCBB Belo Horizonte, schedule a public debate, inviting the protesters (TRANSFAKE [...], 2018). In it, Lobianco shares the stage with author Rafael Souza-Ribeiro and with three trans women as guests: Duda Salabert, professor Marina Reidel, and actress Wallie Ruy. Luis Lobianco shares his life story as a theater artist, associating it especially with expressions of LGBTQIA+ culture, and defends the power that his show has to mobilize a wide audience; Marina Reidel talks about the history of her own fight for human rights; Duda Salabert says that art is a space of power and reaffirms that there is transphobia in the play; Wallie Ruy wonders why CCBB did not select plays by trans people; Rafael Souza-Ribeiro understands that art has the power to transform, and reminds everyone they are there discussing because of a theater play. In the audience, there are alternating speeches by artists involved in trans activism: Libermína questions why the producers did not include, in any role in the production, such as visagiste or assistant producer, a trans person; Renata Carvalho talks about her experience with censorship, cites examples of transfake, and says that the play is killing *Gisberta* again; Juhlia Santos narrates the precariousness of the dialogue with the CCBB team and accuses Lobianco’s written defense on social networks of raising his followers against trans people; João Maria Kaisen speaks of the scarcity of opportunities for trans people.

My brief summary is fragile if considering a supposed objective of synthesizing the critical dispute and its main points. I mainly wanted to point to it, presenting sources from which it can be complexified, unfolded according to specific perspectives. But yes, this synthesis is also an exercise in mastery. Ian Guimarães Habib, trans researcher, in an article in which he debates representativeness in art, transfake (or facetrans, as he prefers to name it), and the example, among others, of *Gisberta*, cites what he calls an “academic transfake,” which occurs when “a cisgender researcher focuses on the topic in their scientific works [...], while articles by transgender people continue to be refused by Brazilian journals” (Habib, 2020, p. 74). The author says there is “extensive cisgender bibliography produced in favor of transfake,” while “a single analysis in favor of facetrans was proposed by a trans person” (Habib, 2020, p. 75)—referring to the work of Sofia Ricardo Favero and João Gabriel Maracci, from 2018. His own 2020 paper, says the author, is “the first work written by a trans person that focuses on facetrans” (Habib, 2020, p. 76). Transfake is not my object of analysis; however, here, in this article, it is about me, a gay cisgender male author, interested in exposing details of performativity around what was attributed to transfake in *Gisberta*. My approach tries to be careful when practicing an avoidance, and the avoidance contains in itself the suggestion of



a positivity associated with ethics, but it does not abandon the desire to look or the pretension that this look might produce symbolic capital in my favor, in addition to fulfilling productivity requirements linked to my profession as a teacher-researcher. It does not exempt itself from being in error, from being provocative, from performing a kind of misappropriation.

The creative team of *Gisberta*, likewise, does not claim innocence about the delicate and controversial aspects of its artistic appropriation. However, convinced of the legitimacy and positivity of its own representative strategy, when openly confronted by the militant trans artists, Luis Lobianco refuses to meet both the minimum demand formulated in the debate by Libermanina (employ at least one trans person in the team) and the total demand formulated by Renata Carvalho (stop representing us). At the opposite pole of this refusal is, for example, the response of Georgette Fadel, a white female artist who, having presented for 13 years a musical solo with texts by black poet Stella do Patrocínio (Fibe, 2018), when confronted onstage by two black people in the audience, in 2017, interrupted her performances the next day. In a debate held at Itaú Cultural, in March 2018, Fadel claims that the woman in the audience said: “I love you, but you do not represent me, [...] this speech that you take, synthesize, aestheticize, does not reach those women who are the owners of the speech”; and this would have immediately led her to be aware of what she should do: “I found it completely logical what she said, and that made me no longer have any desire to do the show in the way I was doing” (MESA-REDONDA, 2018). The sudden, total recognition, once and for all, that appears in Fadel’s report seems to exemplify an ideal ethical position, a fully communicative dialogue between artist and public, a listening mode open to the pedagogy of the other, an effective lesson converted into narratable experience. I am suspicious of this kind of effectiveness in the making of art, in the relationship between artist and spectators and the multiplicity of their perceptions, and I prefer, finally, to describe the image of a refusal, a scene of the incomprehension of the other, because I see in it elements that mirror, in a way that I judge more authentic, the difference between knowledges when theater happens.

3 The play that kills

I confess that I was not interested in watching *Gisberta* at the time of its premiere, in 2017. As I reported at the beginning of this article, I was about to finish my dissertation, haunted by other examples of biographical and autobiographical shows, and, from what I had read of the promotional materials released at the time (Reis, 2017), the work seemed similar to other biographical solos that honor important figures, reflecting messages of tolerance by the more or less mimetic embodiment of real people. My initial impression was that the play would quietly replicate a theater model, that appealed to a wide and diverse audience, with numerous productions in recent years. It was only when reports began to appear about the protests in Belo Horizonte, in early 2018, that the play called my attention, and I regretted not having seen it before. Fortunately, it was announced to



return to Rio de Janeiro for two performances at Teatro Rival, and I bought a ticket in advance for March 23rd. I saw on social media that, as in Belo Horizonte, trans artists in Rio organized a protest at the theater entrance for the first performance, on the 23rd. I knew by sight some of those leading the protest, especially the trans actress Dandara Vital, of whom I had watched the autobiographical show *Dandara através do espelho* [Dandara through the looking glass], in 2017, and whose work I knew since her participation in the social and artistic project *Damas em cena* [Ladies onstage], led by Instituto do Ator, directed by Celina Sodré, in the context of which I had watched in 2009 the play *TransTchekov*, Dandara's stage debut.

Arriving at Cinelândia, I noticed the crowd in front of Teatro Rival. The protesters handed out A5-size flyers with illustrations in the form of a comic strip, authored by Alice Pereira, entitled "How to do transfake," with a critical message and a figure drawn with features similar to those of Lobianco (Pereira, 2018). Following the directions of Dandara's posts on Facebook, I had brought a kilo of non-perishable food with me to donate to Casa Nem, an institution that houses LGBTQIA+ people in vulnerable situations. I told this to a woman I knew from Instituto do Ator, she took the food and put it under some black plastic bags. These bags were part of an installation made on the street by the protesters, simulating the visuality of a covered dead body, with candles around it and a white cardboard with the phrase "Trans Representativeness Now". Bringing food with good intentions did not guarantee me the status of an ally. After a few public speeches, of which I remember little, some of the protesters stood by the entrance line—among them Indianarae Siqueira, a prominent public figure of left-wing politics in Rio—, questioning the members of the audience who entered the theater, while phrases were chanted repeatedly like mantras: "this play is killing us, this play is killing us". Entering to watch the show was equivalent to being an accomplice in the killing of the trans population. The interpellation did not seem to me to convince a significant part of the audience to give up watching and for no moment did I consider not entering: I wanted to see *how* the play was killing.

Inside the theater, nothing hinted at the unrest outside: the spectators, seated at tables and chairs, happily chatted and ordered drinks. Shortly before the show began, I saw that some protesters came inside to watch—one of the complaints they had been making on social media was that the production of *Gisberta* had not given them audience-building free tickets, and I imagine those were handed out at the last minute, even though the venue was packed. The play begins with no mention of what had just happened. Luis Lobianco enters the scene, accompanied by a cast of musicians, who position themselves on the outskirts of the stage, a group that includes his husband Lúcio Zandonadi, author of the show's soundtrack. Lobianco wears a light, two-layered beige costume, which does not seem typically associable with the masculine or feminine gender, suggesting, in my view, a deviation from such binarism.

The way Lobianco addresses the audience, from the first moment of the show, refers to long traditions of narrators and masters of ceremonies who, free of constraints related to the dramatic representation of characters, strive to create complicity with the audience by applying



diverse performative strategies. Comparing observations made by the researcher José da Costa on solo theater works by artists in Rio de Janeiro in the first decade of the 2000s, it seems to me that Lobianco shares with actors such as Pedro Cardoso in *O autofalante* [The self-speaking speaker] the desire to create the impression of a “contact perceived to be direct” (Da Costa, 2007, p. 191), in response to which the spectators grant “their applause and smiles,” demonstrating that they “understood and accepted the proposal of a personal and almost intimate relationship” (Da Costa, 2007, p. 191-2). As in Cardoso’s performance (this is also my impression of Lobianco’s), there is a certain “sensibility of a comedian, marked by a sense of fragility and shyness” (Da Costa, 2007, p. 192). Also as Clarice Niskier in *A alma imoral* [Our immoral soul], another example of Da Costa’s article, one could say about Lobianco that “the stripped down presentation and the fact that the artist speaks on their own behalf are elements that configure an image of truth and personal sincerity” (Da Costa, 2007, p. 194). In both plays, I observe, the audience members are summoned to lull themselves “in the discreet tenderness and lightness of the actress [and the actor], with whom they establish a fraternal relationship of trust and empathy” (Da Costa, 2007, p. 194-5).

In the first act of *Gisberta*, Lobianco cites facts from his own life, about the “faggot child” he remembers being, stitching together a close proximity to the story he declares he wishes to portray, the story of Gisberta. My impression is that, in all these speeches, the actor shows full empathy towards the person portrayed: the staging does not question his own intention to pay a respectful tribute to a figure who deserves it; respect on his own terms, of course, terms that, he supposes, he shares with his audience.

When he starts to interpret characters—figures inspired by real people close to Gisberta in Brazil, whom the actor met during the research process, and fictionally created figures, referring to the years she was in Portugal (UM ATOR [...], 2008), Lobianco carries along part of the dispossessed raw qualities he had in the first act to this other form of representation. Here, to play a character does not imply a rigorous technical virtuosity—like the one José da Costa identifies in Edwin Luisi’s performance in *Eu sou minha própria mulher* [I am my own woman], whose intention would be to generate the illusion of the “disappearance [of the performer] in favor of the character” (Da Costa, 2007, p. 201). Instead, Lobianco is purposely careless with his appropriations, marking only subtle differences between one role and the other. Gisberta Salce is not represented as a character: it can be considered that she takes the actor’s body in the final instant of the show, in a fixed pose, with Lobianco’s back to the audience, and, in fact, members of the militancy referred to this image critically. One of the fictional characters is a middle-aged trans woman who recounts her memory of Gisberta in Portugal. There is humor in the representation of this figure, in my opinion, less because of a caricatural form, and more because of a Portuguese accent, mimicking speech patterns from Portugal, executed precisely and mockingly, accompanied by gestures that refer to the body of another only through slight shifts in posture. In addition to the theatrical tradition of an actor-narrator, it is inevitable, for me, to associate his performative choices to *Porta dos Fundos*, a comedic audiovisual series that brought Lobianco’s already consolidated work to the general public,



practicing strategies that, instead of seeking humor in exaggeration, gives light to subtle, everyday facial expressions and gestures, thus standing apart from large part of the sketch comedy shows of Brazilian television of the second half of the twentieth century.

When the show comes to an end, with Gisberta's back to the audience, accompanied by lighting and music that suggest an apotheosis, it feels like we have witnessed a positive tribute, like we have been in contact with an empathic position, created with intelligence and technical aptitude, regarding a serious crime, associated with a recurrent social oppression to which it is important to pay attention, performed by an actor who has shown to have faced this self-imposed mission with courage and dedication, and this, as is often the case, leads the audience to applaud. At that moment, some of the protesters who shouted outside the theater reappear, coming from the back of the audience. I'm sitting next to the stage, on the left side. Dandara Vital seems to have come from the back and it is her voice that shouts: "Don't clap your hands! Don't clap, people!". My memory is inaccurate, but I retrieved WhatsApp messages I had sent to friends at the time, to help me recall the details². Dandara comes through the center of the audience, reaches a distance of about three tables from the stage (the distance from where I was watching) and climbs onto a table, or a chair, repeating phrases that specifically called for the applause to end. For a moment, the clapping stops, I also stop clapping. Lobianco remains serious, impassive. After a few seconds, the applause returns, as if encouraged by some members of the audience, and soon it grows, stronger than before, accompanied by shouts of "bravo" or something like it. That which was a simple conventional reaction to an apothotic end, performed by the audience collectively as an adequate response, suddenly turns into a challenge, an instance of position-taking, a gesture of subversion to the command given by the leader of the protesters. I do not clap again; not because I was led at that moment to take a stand against the play, but because I preferred, once again, to suffice myself in the role of an observer.

Faced with an unusual although predictable situation, the decision is made, as a community faced with an ethical dilemma, to perform the traditional code, the clapping, as if it preserved intact its meaning, of praise to the artist, of recognition of the greatness of his feat. Patrice Pavis suggests the universality of such reaction: "it is a physical release for the spectator after a period of forced immobility. [...] It also says [...]: 'I'm breaking the illusion to tell you that I enjoy the illusion you created for me'. Applause is a bare-handed encounter between the spectator and the artist, above and beyond the fiction" (Pavis, 1998, p. 28). Dandara's imperative intervention seems to believe that this traditional code can be denatured; her oral mention of the clapping draws attention to it, so that the possibility of producing alternative meanings opens up in it; it also causes its suppression to have meaning, even if this is uncertain, like a code that is not mastered. As in CCBB, the improvised intervention of the actress is a concrete response to the demand for effective

² I listened to and transcribed the voice messages that I sent to my friend Patrícia Ubéda, who had recently moved to Portugal, and was following the events on social media and, at first, sided with the indignation of many theater artists in Rio, who took to heart the impact of the critical intervention of the trans activists, positioning themselves in solidarity with Luis Lobianco.



participation in the speech being delivered, interfering to clarify. According to the aforementioned report by Neto Lucon (2018), the intervention in Belo Horizonte would have included the nudity of some protesters after the end of the play, and Renata Carvalho corroborates this information: “when Juhlia [Santos] showed her wonderful breasts [...] she wanted to say to you: ‘I am Gisberta’” (TRANSFAKE [...], 2018). Unlike this synthetic image juxtaposed in CCBB—the presentation of the more authentic body that denounces the inauthenticity of the representation—, Dandara’s final intervention at Teatro Rival does not teach a lesson, but applies a test: the voice of the trans woman, present at last, gives a seemingly simple instruction, “don’t clap”. The moral fable has already come to an end and the teacher-narrator does not give answers at the time of the test (“my message has already been conveyed,” said Lobianco in front of Dandara). So the group collectively chooses to exalt the representation rather than obey Dandara’s order, increasing the intensity of the clapping, increasing the sound, strongly clapping their hands.

From this perspective, the audience fails the ethical test: confronted with the real example of the woman whose body is daily assaulted, it cannot review its traditional procedure, nor understand its clapping as symbolic violence against the woman standing there. However, Dandara’s vexed body at three tables from the stage to the center is also onstage, her intervention (as a test in which the other fails) recalls the tradition of performance art, not only by imbricating art and life in challenging ways, but by subjecting the body itself to heroic and masochistic uses, before which it is expected that the participating audience will be summoned to review the structural conditions of that event that it witnesses and for which it is co-responsible. By highlighting the clapping gesture, the actress exhibits in it the incoherence in thinking that a theatrical representation by non-corresponding bodies is effective, the fragility of its noble objective of generating social transformation. And she does so using the theater, reappropriating its own code in its own space, not by discursive means (“here is the real Gisberta”), but proposing a game that makes the gestures of those who watch perform.

There are, finally, two problems in this conclusion of my observations regarding this event. The most evident is that Dandara Vital was not hired by the production of *Gisberta*, and thus, the operation of displaying the gesture by way of its failure, instead of being typical of a “poetics of failure” (Bailes, 2011), does not impact on the employability of the actress, nor does it seem to correspond to the intention of the militancy of which she was part. On the other hand, considering the transformation in the Brazilian theater scene since 2018 regarding the inclusion of trans people (Carvalho, 2023), it would not be incorrect to assume effective, to some extent, the methods of this militancy and even read my report as a description of a successful achievement, necessary as a stage for a social transformation then underway. But I find this assumption strange, and it brings me to the second problem, which is this article as a whole. By associating the relevance of the actress’ gesture of intervention with systems of thought that illuminate my critical reflection, I potentially hit the issue of academic transfake, pointed out by Habib (2020). Because, to mediate the appearance of the gesture before an audience of readers of this publication, some time later,



is, inevitably, to dominate it, it is to say that it gains meaning specifically through my gaze, by my participation as a privileged observer, because of the deviation that I perform in it towards the field of inefficiency in art, a field of study that I am interested in and to which I give value; and I wonder, since my deviation is so problematic, if it would be better not to publish.



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Funding

UNIRIO

Ethics Committee Approval

Not applicable

Competing interests

No declared conflict of interest

Research Context

No declared research context

Copyright

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Sabrina Leitzke and Leonardo Maciel

Contribution of authorship (CRediT)

Not applicable

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**Evaluation Method**

Double-Blind Peer Review

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Peer Review History

Submission date: 5 October 2024

Approval date: 9 April 2025