

PRESENTATION OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE:

The scene in politics and politics in the scene

APRESENTAÇÃO DO DOSSIÊ:

A cena na política e a política na cena

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The current far-right in Brazil, and several other countries, is a heterogeneous political field, difficult to define, and of changeable composition, in which moral conservatism and the radicalization of neoliberalism converge. From local events, the far-right has been gaining importance in the disputes for votes and in the proposition of public agendas attacking human rights and the scientific community, in the defense of conservative practices in the field of morality and in incitement to xenophobia, for example, as seen in the US project carried out this year.

In Brazil, this field has Bolsonarism as one of its great exponents, but not being limited to it and, even after their defeat in the 2022 presidential elections, it still shows strength on social networks, in state and municipal governments, and in the legislative branch as a whole. The far-right in Brazil is still active and has representatives who act in different spheres, with great media incidence and actions that are often articulated internationally. Other countries experience a similar phenomenon: Argentina, Chile, Portugal, Italy, Spain, the United States, Japan, among others. The spectacular actions of these representatives are the starting point for dealing with reflections that point to multiple aspects related to the political performance of the far-right.

Recently, analyses that observe the relationship between performative strategies, effects, and meanings produced, and the installation of this far-right in Brazil and other countries came into play. Research has been trying to encompass, each from its own angle, many aspects of the radical performances of this political field, which constitute a work in constant elaboration. The time frame usually established in Brazil starts at the *Jornadas de Junho* (June Journeys – 2013), focusing on events such as the campaigns for the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, the intensification of Bolsonarism before, during, and after the 2018 elections and, finally, the so-called January 8th Acts, 2023.

This special issue is part of a broader and earlier investigation into the relationships between performativity and politics, the name given to one of the lines of research of the CRIA group—Arts and Transdisciplinarity, linked to CNPq—and currently headed by Fernando Mencarelli and Mônica Ribeiro, both professors at UFMG. The Performativities and Politics research line was founded in 2018, in the context of dialogues between members Julia Guimarães (UnB), Juliana Coelho (USP), and the leader of CRIA, Fernando Mencarelli. Later, along professors and researchers Raquel Castro (UFOP), Thálita Motta, Christina Fornaciari (UFV), and Júlia Morena Costa (UFBA) joined the group¹. The line of research arises from the observation that there was a strong performative and

1 Currently, the Performativities and Politics research line has nine members (<http://dgp.cnpq.br/dgp/>)



theatrical component in Brazilian political demonstrations since the *Jornadas de Junho* (2013), an aspect that was later intensified by the different actions of the Brazilian far-right since then.

Connected to the broader transdisciplinary purposes of the CRIA group and aimed at the development of a transdisciplinary research that uses the principles and methodologies of knowledge in the Arts as a basis, the Performativities and Politics research line has acted, since its emergence, in the investigation of the theme of this special issue: “The scene in politics and politics in the scene: views on the theatricality of the contemporary far-right”. Whether as published articles and book chapters, participation in conferences and holding web seminars; or, even, under a more artistic framework, via theoretical-practical courses/workshops and scenic shows², the work of the group focuses on the broader question about the ways of knowing favored by the performing arts and, more specifically, about how to understand contemporary Brazilian politics through the lens of performativity.

This question served as a cornerstone for this special issue, which aims to propose a space for investigation and analysis of episodes and performances of recent politics in Brazil and other countries that experience the expansion of the far-right. It proposes reflections on the recent radical political acts, based on theories and practices from theater and performance studies, as well as understanding trajectories that draw lines of resistance and new force fields. These are contributions of various natures—from theoretical or empirical research, aiming to expand the dialogue in this area—as well as essays and interviews. Moreover, this special issue covers studies on theatrical shows and artistic performances that approach the far-right or that have become its targets. Thus, a question works as the core of this investigation/proposal: how can theater, as a social type of knowledge, help us understand contemporary politics? The texts gathered here seek to address this issue from different perspectives.

In **Women in politics: from domestication to adjacency, between first ladies and tradwives**, Júlia Morena Costa addresses the devaluation and persecution of practices, studies, and discourses to mitigate gender inequalities and sexual rights; media campaigns for the return of women to the domestic space; and the instrumentalization of women as adjacent to male candidacies and policies, understanding these resources as three of the strategies of the contemporary far-right to

[espelhogrupo/41302](https://doi.org/10.1111/espelhogrupo/41302)), although the nucleus that has been dedicated to investigating the specific approach proposed here is formed by the researchers who make up the editorial board of this special issue.

2 As an example of the line's aspects of action, we may mention the following developments: 1. Participation in the conference [Artes do Corpo e Corpos da Arte – 14º Congresso Internacional de Estética Brasil](#) (2018); 2. Participation in the [Congresso UFBA 75 anos](#) (2021); 3. Participation in the [seminar ARTE E NECROPOLÍTICA - da omissão à tomada de posição nas práticas cênicas](#) (VIII Seminário de pesquisa do Programa de Pós-graduação em Artes Cênicas da Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto); 4. [Holding the Ciclo de debates: Teatralidade e performance na política](#) (UFMG/NELAP/2022); 5. Holding the [workshop Performatividades e Teatralidades na Política, no Festival de Verão UFMG](#) (2020); Holding the [Política Contemporânea e Suas Teatralidades](#) course, at the Research and Training Center (RTC) of SESC SP (2021); 6. Holding the short scene and, later, the online convention-show “Quem vai olhar as crianças?” (2021 – Directed by Thálita Motta, Thales Brenner and Raquel Castro. Dramaturgy: Raquel Castro e Sofia Souza; 7. Publication of the articles (Coelho; Guimarães, 2022. Costa, 2023. Costa, 2024. Costa, 2020. Fornaciari et. al., 2022. Fornaciari, 2016. Ladeira, 2020. Ladeira, 2022. Melo, 2019).



reduce the gender cleavage in elections. Therefore, it proposes to analyze the scenic productions of tradwife influencers such as domestication campaigns and the use of adjunct women, especially first ladies in the elections of 2022, as a spectacularization of the construction of binary and stereotyped gender places for women in micro- and macropolitics in an associated way.

In the Translation section, in **QAnons, anti-vaxxers, and wellness influencers: a semiotic-discursive perspective on the links between conspiracy theories, spirituality and wellness**, Paolo Demuru analyzes, from semiotics, the mechanisms that act in the overlap between conspiracy theories related to the QAnon, anti-vaccine acts, discrediting Covid-19, spirituality, and well-being. Based on translation concepts Lotman and discursive semiotics of Greimas, the author also addresses the contact between these diverse semiospheres, which act concomitantly in far-right productions, and how spirituality and well-being were used to soften and disseminate fake news and extremist positions on social media, creating content that is difficult to analyze.

In **Notes on the aesthetic roots of fascism**, João Guilherme Paiva unfolds the hypothesis of Peter Sloterdijk, in “Critique of Cynical Reason”, according to which the emergence of fascism is due to the establishment of a cynical ethic in culture. The author states that, unlike Greek cynicism, which is accustomed to a disruptive logic, modern cynicism is built from a “self-reflexive consciousness [that] does not cease to ask itself about the validity of action”. The author brings aesthetic principles, such as parody and self-irony, closer to the governing way of current figures descended from fascism by the analysis of dramatic characters that appeal to a cynical reason typical of modernity, such as Peachum, by Bertolt Brecht (*Threepenny Opera*), and the Nephew, by Denis Diderot (*Rameau's Nephew*).

In **The poetic of mockery against the far-right's disinformation machine in digital platforms**, Luciana Mizutani focuses on the attacks of the far-right on one of the foundations of democracy: the concept of truth. The analysis details the workings of the global disinformation machine operated by these groups and proposes strategies to confront it. The text identifies disinformation as a central factor in the radicalization of the electorate, which is a force that dissolves shared reality and creates an episteme detached from other sectors of society, and suggests artistic principles to put together tactics that exploit the vulnerabilities of this machine. Digital art is highlighted as a strategic tool against the far-right, exemplified by the experience of the artist herself who, in the 2022 Brazilian elections, used humor and entertainment on digital networks as a form of activism.

The article **The clapping gesture in the performance against Gisberta** addresses how the rise of the far-right enhances the suppression and marginalization of transgender people from social spaces, including theater. For this, Marcio Freitas brings the case of the solo show *Gisberta* (2017) by the cisgender actor Luis Lobianco, who played the true story of the Brazilian transgender woman of the same name, murdered in Portugal, due to transphobia. Such “transfake”—and the continued exclusion of trans people from the cast and crew of the show—generated protests from trans collectives and, despite this, the show continued to be staged and applauded. The gesture of



applause is analyzed by the author, having its apex in a 2018 show, at the Vidal Theater, in which the symbolic violence produced by the audience when applauding the show after a protest by protester Dandara Vital is highlighted as a reflection of far-right politics in Brazil.

From the work *La Bête*, the article **To save the beasts: *La Bête* and Brazil eight years later**, by Daniel Freire Guerra, investigates the reverberations of Wagner Schwartz's performance, eight years after the impact that polemicized it in 2017, when it fell into a Bolsonarist web and was used in its rhetoric of customs for eligibility purposes. The author analyzes the formal procedures in the face of the great critical fortune of the work, using the artist's autobiographical novel, which was released in 2023. Three main procedures are analyzed—interruption, suspension, and transformation—as ways of thinking about social conflicts in Brazil and questioning the current conflicts in the contemporary art field.

The article **Freedom of artistic expression and conservative counterpublics: an analysis of the controversies in *Desenhando com Terços* and *O Evangelho segundo Jesus, Rainha do céu***, by Giuliana Kauark, João Domingues and Caroline Dumas, starts from the concept of “counter-public” to analyze the tensions around freedom of artistic expression in Brazil, highlighting the controversies involving the *Drawing with Rosaries* performance, by Márcia X., and the show *The Gospel according to Jesus, Queen of Heaven*, starring trans actress Renata Carvalho, both taken as targets of censorship linked to religious issues. Although counter-public is usually used to name marginal groups that develop discourses of opposition to the dominant narrative, the article explores it to analyze the censorship strategies imputed by the Brazilian far-right on the shows, precisely because of their disruptive and supposedly *anti-establishment* character of the political performances of this group in the public sphere. The article concludes that, by mobilizing their audiences by “intense disturbances and emotions, such as revulsion and indignation,” such manifestations of the Brazilian far-right promote an engagement that intensifies their presence in the current public arena.

Mobilizing authors such as Roberto Schwarz and dialoguing with researchers, such as André Castro and João Marcos Duarte, Alexandre Dal Farra proposes a tensioning of the dichotomy that opposes the “enlightened us” to the “ignorant them” in the article **The other is an I — part 2**. The text is inscribed as a critical intervention that aims to break with the self-referentiality of the progressive field, opening space for an active listening, not condescending or instrumental, to the political, religious, and ideological other. The author also exposes how his own artistic trajectory, by plays such as *Matthew, 10* (2012) and *Truth* (2022), was crossed by resistance when it sought to represent these subjectivities with complexity and humanity, and not just as enemies to be fought.

Bruna Kalil Othero gives this special issue the essay-poem-manifesto **What's the cattle's thoughts?** traversing the fields of agribusiness, literature, politics, and national identity with acute irony. The author proposes a multifaceted reading of the Brazilian cultural history through the lens of environmental devastation, violent colonialism, persistent misogyny, and the ideological aestheticization promoted by agribusiness, stressing the hegemonic discourses that have hijacked national symbols and aestheticized the destruction of the land under the brand of “agropop.” The



choice for a hybrid style — between chronicle, manifesto, and poetry — reinforces the essayistic character of the text as a kind of insurgent knowledge, committed to the critical reinvention of language and national memory. By questioning what the cattle think about — or if they think — Bruna Kalil Otero invites the reader to reflect on the place they occupy in this system, and on the discourses that they consume, repeat, or resist. Above all, it is a critical exercise in the political and aesthetic reimagining of the country: “and it is difficult, after this, to ruminate on our truth.”

Culminating with **“I have always belonged to the theater, I have always belonged to another place”**: interview with Cida Falabella, which closes this special issue, Juliana Coelho and Thálita Motta spoke with Cida Falabella — actress, director, teacher, and councilor for the PSOL in Belo Horizonte — about her trajectory between theatre and institutional politics. Starting in theatre in 1976 and in politics in 2017, Cida Falabella is a reference in engaged artistic practices, especially at the head of Cia ZAP 18, which is a group based in the peripheral neighborhood of Serrano. Throughout the interview, she reflects on how her theatrical training profoundly influenced her political performance, proposing a praxis that understands theatricality as a kind of creation and resistance both on stage and in public life. From confronting censorship in youth to the collective mandate of the *Gabinetona*, Cida defends the collective theatre as a living structure of thought, formation, and transformation—a power that crosses the micro and the macro, the symbolic, and the institutional. Her account constitutes an important testimony about the intersections between art, territory, and politics, revealing the potential of theatre as a practice of listening, mobilization, and reinvention of everyday life.

Finally, we hope that this special issue will do justice to the complexity of the theme, comprising its various iterative and intersecting analytical axes: violence as aesthetics and language; the fabrication of precariousness as an emulation of authenticity; the economy of attention on the networks; restored behaviors and type staging; the theatricalization of political affections; the clash between scene and censorship; and the problematization of the relations between spectacle and truth, emotion and manipulation, and authoritarian narratives and creative resistance.

We believe we are strengthening a network of critical analysis to broaden the debate on the nexus between performing arts and politics, seeking ways to face the challenges posed by contemporary forms of authoritarianism, by bringing together researchers from different regions of the country, transiting between artistic making and academic research.



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