

SEMANTICS OF POWER IN THE RECENT CASE OF BRAZILIAN “MINOR CINEMA”

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on *Lula's Angels (As Panteras do Lula)*, a fake trailer by Zel Junior which went viral in March/April 2022, this essay discusses the construction of a “minor cinema” within the context of an “impotent aesthetic” in contemporary Brazil. The proposal is grounded on the analysis of Zel’s work, its form and content. Therefore, the text structure is based in the following sections: 1) the filmmaker-artist-interlocutor and his work; 2) the Brazilian sociopolitical context; and 3) theoretical-conceptual perspectives about “semantics of power”, “lines of flight” and “recognition”, through conversations with authors such as B. Epinosa, F. Guattari, G. Deleuze, A. Honneth, W. Brown e J. Butler.

KEYWORDS
Semantics of
Power; Zel Junior;
Minor cinema;
Lines of flight;
Recognition.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This essay is based in an *in-between* space that integrates different fields of knowledge and artistic expressions, such as cinema, literature, reception theories and social sciences in a large sense. From this fusion, interfaces are created with themes related to image and politics – or aesthetics of resistance – in opposition to hegemonic discourses. For these ideas, it is worth to consider Jacques Rancière’s interpretation of “Politics in film”. In *The Intervals of Cinema*, the author argues that

There is no politics of cinema, there
are only singular figures according

to which filmmakers apply themselves to bring together the two meanings of the word ‘politics’, with which we can consider a fiction in general and a cinematographic fiction in particular: politics as what a film speaks about – the story of a movement or a conflict, the unveiling of a situation of suffering or injustice, and politics as the strategy of an artistic approach: a way to speed up or slow down time, to diminish or widen space, to match or unmatch look and action, to link or unlink before and after, in and out. We could say: the relation between a matter of justice and a practice of justness. **How to think about the way cinema can nowadays put into action the relation between the certainties of injustice, the uncertainties of justice and the calculation of justness?** (Rancière 2014, 121, emphasis added).

The theoretical bricolage is here employed as a provocative instrument specific to the essays’ nature, once considered the notion originally proposed by Theodor Adorno in *The Essay as Form*:

The essay does not obey the rules of the game of organized science and theory that, following Spinoza’s principle, the order of things is identical with that of ideas. Since the airtight order of concepts is not identical with existence, the essay does not strive for closed, deductive or inductive, construction. It revolts above all against the doctrine – deeply rooted since Plato – that the changing and ephemeral is unworthy of philosophy; against that ancient injustice toward the transitory (1984, 158).

INTRODUCTION

“A **minor literature** is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language” – written by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (*Kafka - Pour une littérature mineure*), the term in bold serves as the essay’s inspiration, and it is used to describe the idea of “minor cinema” in order to discuss the audiovisual production of an artist motivated by a “will to power” (*volonté de puissance*).

Instrument that challenges dominant discourses, the “minor literature” (*littérature mineure*) constitutes its exercise within a broader language. Put otherwise, it refers to a literature (or any form of art) created by a minority group in a “major” language, which does not imply “better”, but rather “established”.

Therefore, its political interest would precisely lie in the challenge to hegemonies. For the authors, “only at this price does literature really become a collective machine of expression” (*C’est seulement à ce prix que la littérature devient réellement machine collective d’expression*) (2003, 42). As we will see with more emphasis on the 3rd Section, this conception is suitable for *Lula’s Angels*, as well as other Zel’s productions, and also the artist himself, since he operates from a “subalternized” cultural location, according to a certain “established” *ethos*. We will also see how Zel’s creations fits into the concept of “semantics of power” – recalcitrant to the impotence of a neoliberal, far-right and conservative system.

If a major language with its canons – transposed here to the idea of “major cinema” and its huge scheme of production-distribution-exhibition – is appreciated by legitimizing mechanisms of a major structure, Zel’s “minor” movies finds shape inside deviation, becoming, in this way, politically collective.

This essay examines how the *will to power* can be used to produce the *semantics of power*, which is viewed as an enunciation regime that defies conventional grammar. Stated differently, Zel is inspired by this impulse to question prevailing discourses, to forge new routes through “lines of flight” (*lignes de fuite*), and to violate conventional language as a means of interacting with the world.

After presenting the main principles, let’s move on to the plot.

SECTION 1: THE FILMMAKER-ARTIST-INTERLOCUTOR AND HIS WORK

A fashionable group of friends runs down a city street at night when they come across a muscular man with an electronic eye wearing a Brazilian shirt. As soon as he hits the pavement, he introduces himself in a cyborg voice: “I am Bolsonaro’s robot”. With this opening, the spectator is already encouraged to join the journey that will take place over the next two minutes and seven seconds. As follows, the director (also actor, screenwriter, producer, editor, costume designer and creator) uses the “semantics of power” to depict the current political scenario in Brazil.

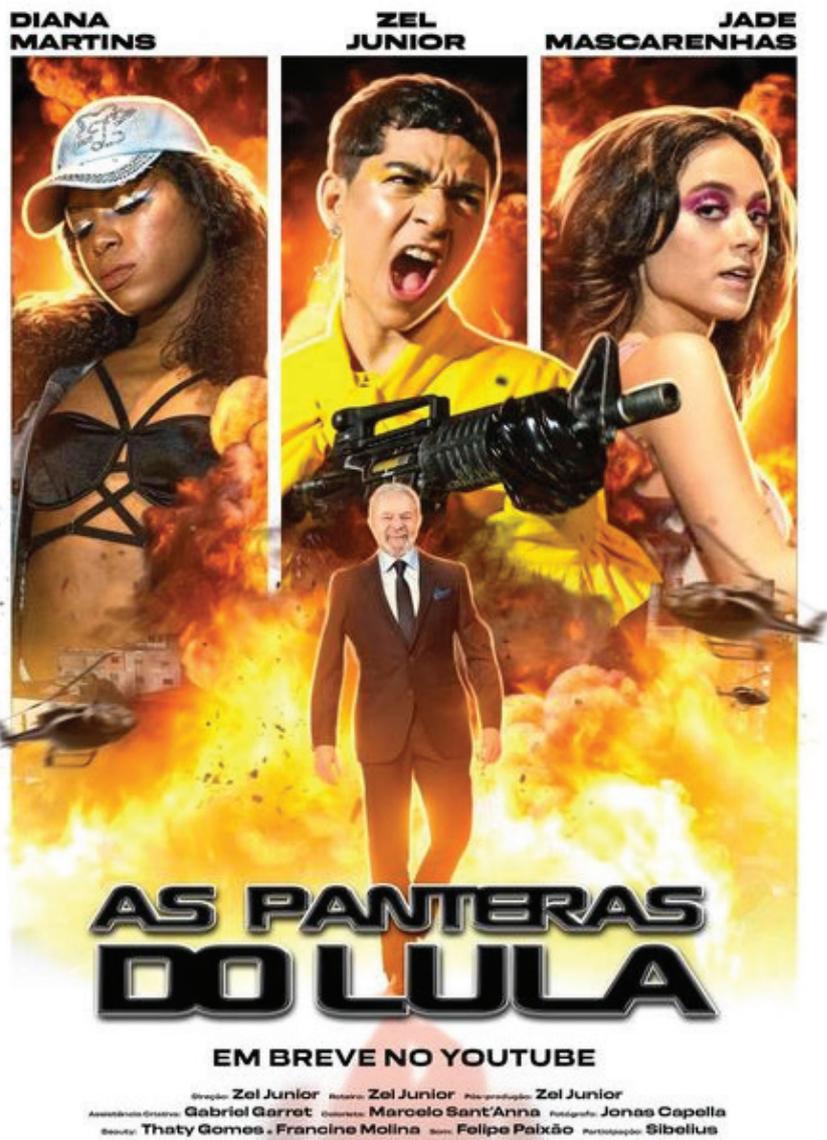


FIGURE 1
Film poster

Produced toward the end of March/April 2022, the short film took about a year to be completed. Zel took this long because, during the seven days of filming, he had to use all of his freelancing income – without any sponsorship – to fund five different gigs. In order to raise money, he also sold personal belongings. In a conversation for the research he revealed that he works alone, in contrast to the film industry, which employs a large number of professionals. The artist claims that

Jade Mascarenhas (actress and my friend) has always given me a lot of support and accompanied me in many things; The



technical crew, on set, consisted of just me and a cameraman, because at that point Jade was more involved in the acting, since she stars in everything with me. Plus, I was always aware that I had to pay everyone, even my friends. Since money was limited, I didn't feel comfortable spending or asking for more things, so I always did everything. *Lula's Angels* was filmed in seven nights, in two of which I had the budget to hire someone to do the makeup. Otherwise, I did everything [directing, screenplay, editing, production, color, sound and visual effects, costumes]. I didn't even put my name on everything because I was embarrassed (January, 2024).

The artist shares his work with his friends, even though he handles all technical aspects. "Everyone helps each other", he says, adding that "everyone knows my work and understands that is essential to put a lot of effort into everything". Therefore, it may be claimed that the collaborative aspect of his work is present both in the mood and spirit of the participants and in the director's feeling, once they share similar experiences.

Zel didn't take an audiovisual training or bother to technically define his work. "If someone asks me what I do, I answer: humorous videos. Until recently, I didn't know that I was directing and acting, because it was something very far from my reality. I didn't have access to those terms... I do my work in guerrilla, you know? I take my cell phone and camera and record with my friends. I have never written a script for my videos" (May, 2022).

Raised as a Christian, Zel didn't have access to series, films and cartoons, such as "*Harry Potter* and *Dragon Ball*, because the Church had very strict statements on this subject". But sometimes he managed to "watch in hiding TV programs or movies like *Charlie's Angels*, *Titanic* and *Kill Bill*". When he started going to internet cafes, he began to draw inspiration from music videos of pop divas, such as Lady Gaga and Charli XCX. Zel shares that

my first access to audiovisual media was following pop videos. I started watching and consuming it when Lady Gaga was emerging, and her music videos had the feeling of a short film, always with a story behind them. To this day, I care a lot about my pop aesthetic. This is one of the big differences of my work. In *Lula's Angels*, I was careful to follow the exaggerated pop line. I'm a pop artist. I think we are the result of what we consume. Sometimes I modify a whole scene to give it more of this characteristic... Each scene is adapted to the costumes and the action. The location must suit the costumes so that it is visually impactful (January, 2024).

The young artist, “gay, peripheral and northeastern,” as he defines himself, emigrated with his family from the countryside of Bahia to São Paulo when he was a child. He has been a Workers’ Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* – PT) voter since the age of sixteen. Today, at 25, he lives in the East Zone with three brothers and his mother. According to the videomaker, “this is why I can make money for my videos, because if I lived alone, it would be impossible. From what I earn, I take part of it to help around the house, and what’s left I do little by little” (May, 2020). Zel remembers that

When we talked about *Lula’s Angels*, I didn’t even know what “shorts” were. We know that all these terms and art itself are not democratic. I live in one of the poorest neighborhoods in São Paulo. I recently discovered, in an article they wrote about me, that *Cidade Tiradentes*, a community in the East Zone, is one of the three poorest neighborhoods in São Paulo. So these terms – “filmmaker, short, feature film, medium film” – are all very new to me. Two years ago, I didn’t even know what that meant. Until *Lula’s Angels*, I created without knowing the roles I took on. I just wanted to create something for the Internet. I didn’t know that I was directing, writing, editing... Today I understand the terms, and I always choose to call it video because I like that everything I do is very accessible to everyone. If I tell my mother to watch my new *short* film, she won’t understand what it is, but if I say new *video*, she will. I like to be accessible to the general public as much as possible, because I’m aware that art is not accessible (January, 2024).

On his *YouTube*, *Instagram* and *Twitter* accounts, Zel chose the following sentence, in capital letters, to introduce himself: “I’M DESPERATE, WATCH MY VIDEOS”. When he declares “I am a product of the Internet”, the artist confirms the importance of networks not only as a source of inspiration for his work, but also as a broader vehicle for dissemination and reception, adapted to the contemporary era. It is worth mentioning that he has almost 90,000 subscribers on *Instagram* and *YouTube*, and on his channel *Lula’s Angels* has over 350,000 views. According to the director, *Gay x Crente (Gay versus Protestant*, one of his previous videos) “goes viral every month. On *TikTok*, it has nearly a million likes and 5 million views. About 2 months ago the film made 3 million from a random *Instagram* account. The problem is that my themes are based on social and political criticism, which ultimately prevents me from doing more work. If you analyze who is at the top of entertainment in our country, these are creators who promote scams, dubious games” (January, 2024).

When asked what motivates him, he answers precisely: “Anger. I am driven by revolt and anger. It’s in all my videos. I put things there that

hurt me and that I want to express. Since I can't deal with it right away, I create to feel relief. When I feel hate, I know good things are coming. I can't express myself in my *stories* or pick up my camera and swear a lot. I actually wanted it, because it would calm me down, but I save everything for what I do" (May, 2020).

It should be noted that, as suggested by Spinoza and discussed in more detail in the 3rd Section, this emotion – anger – can be viewed as an analytical and creative category in a rather uncommon meaning, that of “transformation” and/or metamorphosis. Within the topic of Anthropology of Emotions, authors draw parallels between hatred and fury, understanding the latter as a result of humiliation. Regarding this,

humiliation occurs when the individual feels like an object being squeezed by forces beyond their control. In this case, the subject believes in the intention others have of degrading them. Humiliation can turn into anger and hatred when the person believes that the only way to resolve this feeling is to overthrow the structure that caused it – the movement of inferiorization or degradation (Coelho; Rezende, 2010, 39).

However, it seems that, for Spinoza, “hatred which is completely vanquished by love passes into love: and love is thereupon greater than if hatred had not preceded it” (2018, 27). As we will see, the love that overcomes anger, in Zel's creation, gives way to revenge in the form of a pop allegorical representation.

Besides anger, two elements affect and encourage the filmmaker: the desire for representation and recognition. This double yearning suggests “the desire to see LGBTQIA+ people represented in audiovisual productions, oppressed people taking revenge on oppressors at the same level of equality” (2022); and also a revenge for the situations of injustice and non-recognition that he suffers in his daily life – forms of humiliation and non-acceptance of his style and performance.

Zel was afraid that *Lula's Angels* would not “do well”, be “ignored” or have “little impact”, as he assumed his previous videos had been. His fear was also based on the fact that *Lula's Angels* is a “fake trailer” – a model teaser for a film that will not be released, which “is common abroad, but not in Brazil”. Along with social media, he made posters and handed out flyers in order to promote his work. “I guess I did believe”, he confesses. Concerning the choice to use the fake trailer, Zel states

that's wonderful! It is well accepted on the Internet, in the required formats and times. Today people are more and

more impatient... It's not like before... Another point is that there is a lot of competition, everyone is a potential content creator. So the competition for screen time is high, and the fake trailer has the benefit of enticing people to watch what we've created. There are two more points: in *Lula's Angels*, I needed a video portfolio that shows everything I could do: an explosion scene, a shooting scene, action... That's a lot of effect there. And I wanted to train visual effects and editing for my future. Obviously, there will come a time when I want to create short films, but by then, I will have a lot of experience. Finally, in the fake trailer, I can express myself in different ways, you know? I can put around forty looks and locations, which in a classic short film is more limiting, because you have to tell a story, which makes things difficult (January, 2024).

The millions of views that the video received outraged the Brazilian right and far right. As a result, Zel received protests and death threats on his networks from groups and parties like *Movimento Brasil Livre* (MBL). "You know, I got a ton of pictures of Marielle in the comments on my movies. Many commented on *Facebook* that I wouldn't give up until I got shot in the head. I just have to be careful these days. We live in a country that fears me, but I've had to learn to ignore everything or I would have stopped", he declares.

In response to the founder of MBL, who insinuated that *Lula's Angels* had received party funding, Zel published the following posts on *Twitter* on 05/04/2022:

I'm not going to tolerate this just because a guy finds it very difficult for a gay person, from the northeast and the periphery to be able to direct, write, edit and make special effects [...] There has been a lot of belittling against my image and the image of my friends, insinuating that gays, trans and women are Brazil gone bad [...] They didn't even bother to search my channel. I've been doing this for years, there are videos as good as *Lula's Angels* and I make them with low budget. It will be amazing to see you do some research and come to the conclusion that I did it all alone in my room.

On the other hand, reformist and progressive filmmakers such as Kleber Mendonça Filho and Petra Costa expressed their admiration for the video. The short film was deemed by the latter to be "the new promise of national action cinema".

Zel received invitations from entertainment businesses with exclusive contracts as a result of this prominence. “The proposal was to cancel everything I do”, meaning he would have to stop producing his own content and halt his channel. He refused to accept. “What purpose does it serve? How am I going to quit doing this? It’s still rare to see *transvestites* in leading roles in action movies. Therefore, I believe I can keep going if I’m doing that”. In August 2022, he debuted *Lula’s Angels 2*.

SECTION 2: THE NATION’S SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Zel claims that, despite the film’s recent release, the concepts for *Lula’s Angels* were first developed in 2016, eight years ago. This time frame is known here as the “pre-context” of the nation and includes the “aesthetics of de-democratization”. Developed in the essay *American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism and De-Democratization* (2006), by the political philosopher Wendy Brown, the term “de-democratization” implies selected elements of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, considering their collisions and convergences. One of its exemplary aspects – the effects of which would be attacks on constitutional democracy, the erosion of its values and its institutions – would be the combination of what the author calls fundamentalist Christianity, as an emerging language of public life, and neoliberal ideology as a socio-economic doctrine, resulting in an ultraliberal conservative regression.

Based on this idea, we comprehend that the national sociopolitical pre-context – de-democratizing, to be exact – represents the germ of an ultra-rightist language that began years earlier but formally emerged in Brazil in 2018. As Angela Alonso (2019) suggests, such language can be thought as a set of rules or linguistic framework to define standards of the extreme right, in a sort of “moral community”; or even a “populism reactionary”, according to Lynch and Cassimiro (2022).

It is noteworthy that Zel Junior’s potent semantics – which are interpreted as an action or retaliation in cinematic language – participate in the prevailing grammar’s framework while objecting to it, both in form and content. It is then an antithetical style or even an antonymous aesthetic.

To illustrate the germination stage, let us go back to January 5, 2015, the launch date of *Projeto Lava Jato*, the first Thematic Scenario broadcast by *Jornal Nacional* of *Rede Globo*. These vivid pictures, which are behind the presenters, showed sewer pipes that released banknotes in a red hue as its primary color. From this date – a few days after Dilma Rousseff took office for her second term – the country’s most-watched television news

program began to present, more and more regularly over the following years, such images and their signs.



FIGURE 2

Image taken from the book *JN: 50 years of television journalism*¹

Shortly after the design's release, two events followed: the dismissal of the president, on August 31, 2016, and the arrest of then former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, on April 7, 2018.

In this process, it may be claimed that on April 17, 2016, the day of Rousseff's "impeachment" vote, symptomatic words from the impotent grammar of the previous context were spoken. On that date, the man who would become president two and a half years later invoked the torturer who had been the "terror" of the first woman to occupy the highest office in Brazil. During the occasion, as he voted against Rousseff, Jair Bolsonaro uttered the following sentence: "They lost in 1964, and they lost again in 2016. For the family, for children's innocence, for our liberation from communism. My vote is yes in honor of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, from the Armed Forces, Dilma Rousseff's fear. Brazil above everything, and God above all".

The "aesthetics of de-democratization" already transfigured in its essence – the "aesthetics of powerlessness" – was crowned on 01/01/2019, when the media across the country transmitted the presidential inauguration of the

¹ Image taken from the book *JN: 50 years of television journalism*, Editora Globo Livros. In relation to the thematic scenario, we read in this reference that "...Another notable project carried out by the artistic team in recent years has been the visual identity that illustrates the news of Lava Jato. Corruption scandals have dominated the news and the lives of Brazilians. We had to explain to the public complex diagrams imbued with piles of documents [...] In this process, instead of developing an illustration for each news program, the art channel became the face of the entire coverage programming [...] Since 2015, every time we talk about Lava Jato, the conduits are there". This scenario can also be viewed in <https://revistaforum.com.br/midia/2019/11/27/jn-da-globo-resgata-duto-de-dinheiro-em-materia-sobre-nova-condenao-de-lula-no-trf-4-65053.html>. Last access Sep.11, 2023. On this topic, specifically, see Carrato, Santana and Guimarães, 2021.



former federal deputy, defender of the military dictatorship. This moment and the four years that followed encompass the major and authoritarian grammar in which Zel Junior, with his minor and powerful cinema, confronts not only the signs, but also concrete injustices and violence typical of the Bolsonarist *modus operandi*.

Political scientists and researchers like Fernando Limongi (2017; 2023), for example, have thoroughly examined the aforementioned context, which includes Jair Bolsonaro's years in the presidency, the paths that led him there, his representation, aesthetics, and discursive performance. Limongi also examines the role of the media and public opinion during this time.

Adalberto Cardoso (2020), Sylvia Moretzsohn (2016), Mauricio Moura and Juliano Corbellini (2019), along with other pertinent references, attest the country's sociological changes as well as the intricacy of the political system, its agents and actors. Apart from these, more readings like Faria (2018), Feres Jr. and Sassara (2016) and Feres Júnior, Melo, and Barbabela (2020) provide an overview of the scope of the national discourse on media, television and the legal system.

Due to the limitations of the essay, we will exclusively speculate that the de-democratizing images that broadcast almost daily – for at least four years, in a single Brazilian television news program – have been fundamental elements for the impotent historical moment. Put differently, we run the risk of asserting that, starting in January 2015 at the latest, the images and narratives propagated by the great media would have incited socio-psychological processes that Theodor Adorno had previously examined seven decades earlier.

Concerns raised by the Frankfurter regarding the nature of television as a medium for mass communication and its imagination do not appear to be out of date, since a certain socio-psychic structure of the public, composed of consumer subjects, would find echo in monopolizing discourses in the foundation of a national middle class ontology taking an increasingly authoritarian character (Adorno 1957).

With respect to this viewpoint, we would draw attention to one aspect of our case, which is that *Lula's Angels* and other of Zel Junior's videos take a stand against the dominant media rationalism by demonstrating its tradition of empathy for the "winners". By filming stories from the point of view of the "vanquished" (Benjamin 1969), his productions speak out against the "technical progress added to social regression" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002), in the construction of the semantics of power.

SECTION 3: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL VIEWPOINTS (PLUS SOME OPEN-ENDED ISSUES)

Semantics of power: how did this concept come to be? The first word of the expression derives from the use of antagonistic signs to the far-right grammar. For its part, Spinoza, the “living seer” thinker (Deleuze 1988),² served as the inspiration for the second name. Let’s get to it, then.

In *Ethics*, definition 8 of book IV, the seventeenth-century philosopher reveals his understanding of “virtue and power”, which means the same thing, as it follows: “By virtue and power I understand the same thing, that is virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man” (Spinoza 2018, 159). Spinoza returns to the idea of virtue/power in proposition 20: “The more each one strives, and is able, to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue; conversely, insofar as one neglects his own advantage, that is, neglects to preserve his being” (Ibid, 170).

On the other hand, impotence would be associated with anger and servitude: “Man’s lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call bondage [*servitutem*]” (Spinoza 2018, 186-187). Anger, in turn, “is the desire whereby we are urged from hatred to inflict injury on one whom we hate”. Recalling Proposition 46 from *Ethics*/Part 4, we can go back to our artist and the socio-political context of his production. This proposition states that “**He, who lives under the guidance of reason, endeavours, as far as possible, to render back love, or kindness, for other men’s hatred, anger, contempt, towards him**”. In other words, a person who fights with joy and security in the hopes of defeating hatred with love is able to triumph over hatred (since “Hatred can never be good” – Ibid, our emphasis).

While the representative figure of Government, in the context seen above, preached, through an authoritarian grammar, the annihilation of vulnerable and progressive groups, Zel described how various facets of society subjected him to acts of oppression, animosity and disrespect on a regular basis. One day, “because I was wearing high heels, I was stopped by a Christian couple in a very aggressive way. This happens very often; it is not an isolated case. They forcibly halted me in front of my team while we were filming *Lula’s Angels*, you know? Additionally, a number of my LGBTQIA+ friends tell me of Christian people who have attempted to exorcise them, as well as other similar incidents. So, this is pretty typical” (May, 2022).

In this scenario, at least two curiosities should be highlighted: the artist does not incorporate a policy of suffering, nor does he seek to respond – in

² “*Le vivant voyant, c’est Spinoza sous l’habit du révolutionnaire napolitain*” (Ibid, 35).

the same way or content – to the hatred received. When he declares that he could respond with the same feeling, “but he cannot”, he converts the anger sensation into creative power. Then two observations about his semantics are outlined: A) In opposition to the aesthetics of impotence, Zel creates a critical and targeted allegory challenging men who cultivate hatred – “these are unbearable for themselves” (Deleuze 1988, 31); B) his subjective posture contrasts to the “subject of resentment”, who makes misery or powerlessness his primary passion (Ibid). It’s interesting to observe that, instead of maintaining a resentful position and relying on modern Nietzschean morality, the young artist establishes himself in virtue (or power).

Considering the first point, it’s evident that pop, political and satirical creation is translated into a language of artist’s retaliation. In his films, far-right codes – such as the army ideology, hygiene ideals, and fundamentalist aesthetics, among others – are depicted in an antagonistic manner, as a kind of emotional metamorphosis from sadness to happiness. For instance, in *Lula’s Angels*, national symbols and scenes are given new significance, such as a bomb with the number 17 exploding in a trap and “Bolsominion robots” ironized in a utopian allegory, since superheroines are ready to put an end to the project of destruction of Brazil.

The semantics, which tear apart an impotent grammar, can be interpreted through the mentioned notion of minor literature, formulated by Deleuze and Guattari. In the following passage from *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* Preface it would already be possible to form approximations with Zel’s language analyzed here in the following sense: “Writing for Kafka, the primacy of writing, signifies only one thing: not a form of literature alone, the enunciation forms a unity with desire, beyond laws, states, regimes. Yet the enunciation is always historical, political, and social. A micropolitics, a politics of desire that questions all situations. Never has there been a more comic and joyous author from the point of view of desire; never has there been a more political and social author from the point of view of enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 42).

Regarding the conception of minor literature (*littérature mineure*), philosophers explain: “The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” (Ibid, 18).

How can we verify such categories in Zel Junior’s productions and, more specifically, in *Lula’s Angels*?

By deterritorialization, we can understand a linguistic distortion (of language in the broadest sense) carried out by a certain “subalternized” or “marginalized” group. In other words, the deviation from established or majority languages by agents who consider themselves outside a certain norm. In addition, the term also denotes a displacement from the territory (as well as the detachment of a sign from its meaning context) towards a re-territorialization.

This suggests that desire in Zel is in its own semantics. Put differently, his minor cinema language seeks solutions that can open new paths, notably the production and recognition of agentic subjectivities. These insubordinate subjectivities highlight the two categories mentioned in the extract above: the connection between individual and politics, and the collective action of enunciation. In *Lula's Angels*, individual-collective politics representations are mixed in multiple ruptured expressions.

In regard to the concept of minor, the authors contend that it is a literary condition that, as seen in this instance on “minor cinema”, encourages alternative interpretations that work toward transformative agencies, alternative performances and actions, bodies and spatialities, poetics and aesthetics, in fearless acts that disrupt the *status quo*. Therefore, this name – *minor* – “We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 18).

Guattari (2011) also established the concept of “lines of flight”, which can be used to interpret the new routes, or the deterritorialization-reterritorialization movement. In response to what he perceives as the tyranny or dictatorship of dominant meanings and behaviors, the author examines some methods involved in the encoding and communication of enslaved subjectivities. Starting from the understanding that there is no grammaticality *in itself* and that the power of the State (as well as the media's) can be considered as an instrument of semiotic subjection, Guattari verifies the escape behaviors – discourses that challenge language as a closed system, and critical agencies that flee towards the construction of other possible worlds.

In this way, the “flight” is understood to be an act or a gesture of subjectivation towards a new/other way of life, which emancipates and frees subjects from the “hard lines”. Situated in order and control, the latter normalize and frame perceptions based on stratified dualities, like dominant and dominated. Escaping this cartography would mean subverting this model, deterritorializing it, evading it.



Zel and his friends, who play themselves in the movies and represent the LGBTQIA+ community, tell us about the injustices, threats and violence they experienced. As a result of Zel's escapes from "major" language, we are able to comprehend his/their story. By creating and producing images that transform hatred into good affections, the artist drives that feeling towards other lines, where collective agency is the main target. In one of his speeches, in *Lula's Angels*, he tells his friends that "the best part is not beating Bolsominion, is you". (The video named *I had an affair with a Bolsominion* similarly emphasizes group identification, love and friendship).

Consequently, it should be noted that Zel's political action constitutes a "will to power", which contradicts the ideas about resentment that political philosopher Wendy Brown explores in her essay *Wounded Attachments*.

In reference to contemporary political identities, Brown argues that resentment is fostered in people by modern secular societies, in which individuals are subjugated by global structures of capitalist and disciplinary power that oppress and govern them. The author suggests that a "politicization of exclusion" is a way in which "politicized identities generated out of liberal, disciplinary societies, insofar as they are premised on exclusion from a universal ideal, require that ideal as well as their exclusion from it, for their own perpetuity as identities" (Brown 1995, 211).

At this point, there are two ways we could understand the concept of resentment that Brown brought up: 1) that of Nietzsche himself, who asserts that resentment, according to Judeo-Christian morality, arises as revenge on the part of the weak when they blame the strong for their suffering, feeling their own weakness. "This resentment thus varies from Nietzschean logics rooted in the psychic vicissitudes of weakness" (Brown 2019, 175); and 2) that "symptom" as an antithesis.

According to the first interpretation, the "whole moral systems is born from suffering and rage, offering a formulation of resentment as the basis of their emergence and unfolding. This means the moral system it builds has rancor, reproach, negation, and even revenge at its heart". Brown suggests that "resentment, rancor, rage, reaction to humiliation and suffering – certainly all of these are at play in right-wing populism and support for authoritarian leadership today" (Brown, 2019, 174-175). In the latter scenario, resentment would be inverted since the resentment emerges from those suffering the lost entitlements of historically conferred power [...] then dethroned entitlement would denounce equality and even merit in order to affirm its supremacy based on nothing more than traditional right (Ibid, 179). ("The point is not that these privations are

trivial, but that, without recourse to the White, masculine, middle-class ideal, politicized identities would forfeit a good deal of their claims to injury and exclusion, their claims to the political significance of their difference” - Brown, 1995, 208).

According to the contention, we draw attention to two elements of our our subject-interlocutor. First of all, Zel’s “revenge” proves to be inventive, not resentful. Instead, the faculty of his art is built on the action which reterritorializes affections. Furthermore, his creation manifests as a transgression of conventional grammar (or the aesthetics of powerlessness) in search of recognition. His semantics do not favor suffering over other things. On the contrary, we see in his videos the transformation of this feeling into actionable power. For example, during one of the research talks, the artist expresses his difference both from “heteronormative action films, where the image of the strength of the white man prevails”, and from LGBTQIA+ films, which represent “a sad and suffering point of view, which is important. But showcasing shot films is as important, right? May we have LGBTQIA+ people be seen actively engaging in various endeavors. That’s what I’m attempting to show” (May, 2020).

In an inversion of modern Nietzschean morality, the weak, for Zel, would be precisely the oppressor, who must be faced not with hatred, but with a pop allegorical humor. Instead of a politicization of exclusion, his semantics, based on the desire for recognition, seem to be related to Brown’s proposal, whose challenge lies in the insertion of a “radically democratic political culture” (Brown 1995, 221). This challenge is guided by the author in the following question, among others: “What if we sought to supplant the language of ‘I am’ – with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, its equation of social with moral positioning – with the language of ‘I want’?” (Ibid, 221).

Zel seems to be wanting it “desperately”: “I have numbers that look like those of the mainstream, but no one can see them yet. This is very difficult for me to understand, because I want to record an upcoming video and I am already working hard to pay for it. It’s exhausting. I was sick from so much work when I recorded *Lula’s Angels*, and I’m very afraid of no longer being able to pay for my videos or having to give up before succeeding... The subjects of my videos – religion and politics – are taboo subjects according to the general public. I’m in trouble, then” (May, 2020).

We then realize that the artist’s desire to keep creating finds additional motivation: the desire for recognition. This concept, with which we will conclude the essay, is of unquestionable relevance to Brazilian social sciences as well as to contemporary social and political thought. In a recent survey (2022), based on *Scielo – Scientific Electronic Library Online*, on the word

“recognition”, hundreds of articles were found, excluding journals from other scientific areas. For instance, our search for “Axel Honneth” produced 137 results. Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser, and Charles Taylor are three further writers who are featured prominently in the national discussion.

Specifically, the references are only meant to be a conversation between Zel’s aspirations for three types of recognition: one for his own work, one for his role as an artist and creator, and one for his group – LGBTQIA+ friends, actors, and characters. In his speech, he reports that:

It was my dream to watch a transvestite or a transgender person play a heroine. You know, my transgender friends and I wanted to see ourselves reflected. Nowadays, when someone comes to thank me, I realize how this is even more important, and I feel very frustrated when they don’t see it or don’t recognize it. Nobody gave me space and that’s why I created *Lula’s Angels*, and I made it to get a place. Recognition, for me, is a collection of elements. From the moment people recognize my work, things start to change, the path becomes easier, and that’s what I’ve been searching for (May, 2020).

In addition to his statements, it is possible to verify Zel’s desire in posts, such as:

I put my name in the search engine and there was a boy fighting saying that I deserve more recognition, but he doesn’t even follow me lol [...] Our pride is about fighting (Rainbow Flag) [...] Tell me, what do you think of *Lula’s Angels* 2???? I’ve already posted here, I really want rts [...] Will Petra Costa and Kleber Mendonça still like me after *Lula’s Angels* 2? [...] The visibility I had with the Angels gave me a lot of work, especially as an editor and thanks to that I’m able to record a lot of videos! Continue interacting with me and seeing my content, and I’ll come delight you.

Words like “recognition, pride, struggle, visibility, and work” are all over Zel’s vocabulary. In his narrative, there is a dialogical and inclusive desire for recognition as a basic measure of coexistence in the public sphere. Zel’s and his friends’ agenda seems to find resonance in the three patterns of recognition explored by Honneth, namely, love, legal order and solidarity (2011). However, the artist still deals with the respective forms of disrespect or injustice of the aforementioned standards: physical injury, which inflicts on the subject’s body; the exclusion and denial of rights; and the practices of depreciation and humiliation that result in social shame (Ibid).



On the other hand, Zel experiences an increase in self-confidence as well as finds bonds of affection and acceptance with the public, within his friendship group and in the affectionate reception of his work. In consequence, the artist gains self-assurance, in a positive attitude to realize his desire for reciprocity. To continue pursuing his talents, recognition is undoubtedly a necessary component.

In their semantics of power, Zel and his friends fight for recognition based on lines of flight that lead to Judith Butler's (2009) concept on the productive character of power. This would generate a type of subject that would pave battles for the destabilization of established norms and "frameworks". In *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* the author asks:

The problem is not merely how to include more people within existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate recognition differentially. What new norms are possible, and how are they wrought? What might be done to produce a more egalitarian set of conditions for recognizability? What might be done, in other words, to shift the very terms of recognizability in order to produce more radically democratic results? (Butler 2009, 6).

The interview that Zel Junior and his actress friend Jade Mascarenhas gave to a *YouTube* channel can serve as an example of the possible paths in our case. In this occasion, the director claimed that he received promises from businessmen who would help him as long as he didn't talk about religious issues, LGBTQIA+ and other themes in the videos. "However, I'm a gay artist who was tortured by the Church my whole childhood... Without romanticizing, I'd rather work hard building my own shorts, rather than sell it and do something I don't believe in. Our creations aim precisely to criticize the things that oppress us".

During an episode featuring Judith Butler on the TV show "TransMission" (*TransMissão*), hosted by Linn da Quebrada and Jup do Bairro, Linn poses the following questions to the philosopher regarding her writings on the force of *non-violence* (2021): How is it possible to think about non-violence precisely in a territory like Brazil where violence is already given, institutionalized and approved for bodies like ours, a sophisticated, cruel and daily violence? Is it possible to respond without using violence?

Butler answers: "First, you must react. A broad, local, regional and worldwide response is required, and the anti-violence campaign needs to be extremely large, powerful, and vocal. For me, non-violence is not the same as passivity. Passivity is not related to it at all. The question would be: you should react, but how? I must react, so how do I react? This is the question: how can I be

powerful without being violent? What art form should my anger take? How can we transform our anger into a collective art form?”.

It is possible to argue that the language through which Zel Junior represents his anger is in no way passive, on the contrary, it is strong, noisy and collective. His audiovisual creation produces shared utterances through content that is non-violent in practice, although explosive in its allegory.

May his semantics of power not be suppressed by the “major” impotent grammar, and may the artist and his friends keep discovering, through their “minor cinema”, new lines of flight that help them (and us) to keep confident.

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