

*O Penúltimo Dia [The Penultimate Day]*

Sara Ramo and Matheus Rocha Pitta

life then without callers present formulation no callers this time no stories but mine but the silence I must break when I can bear it no more it's with that I have to last<sup>1</sup>

1. Sara and Matheus approach the issue of multiplicity in distinct and not always complementary ways. A crowd might seem almost multiple, but it is ultimately composed of individuals. Sara and Matheus' complementarity emerges when one realizes that a *multitude* is more than just a collection of people.

2. Elasticating the idea of multiplicity beyond individuals is challenging. Consider how masses are often interpreted as herd animals, led by a leader or bound by pack mentality. In these interpretations, the multitude is rarely seen as transcending humanity without resorting to animalistic metaphors, which often serve to excuse its perfidy. Even the Indigenous perspective in the Americas, which views animals as persons—sometimes confused, but persons nonetheless—does not fully resolve the inconsistencies of collective imagery. When this perspective is absorbed into the desire to modernize multiplicity, it can devolve into resentment, such as frustration over not having enough money to celebrate a poodle's birthday. A real multitude is not an approximation of multiplicity; it simply *is* multiplicity.

3. In this sense, the dialogue between Sara and Matheus is profoundly salutary to contemporary art theory, particularly in its ability to uncover political phenomena. Multiplicity, they suggest, originates in matter, not in people. It should flow right through people, without colonizing animals as diminished versions of themselves. This is how bees become selfish and

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<sup>1</sup> The excerpts in smaller font are taken from Samuel Beckett's *How It Is*.

trees turn gossipy. Politics seeks to master matter to interpret itself positively, but the matter is penultimate—it is a precursor. To see it as such is to neither expect too much nor too little from human multiplicity. It is merely one form of crowd.

4. At Morumbi Chapel, Sara's work *Para Marcela e as Outras* (2017) activates the multiplicity inherent in the clay in the wall. Behind the masks, myriad forms emerge—from genitalia to adornments—evoking the imagination surrounding trans women. Meanwhile, Matheus, in *Um Campo da Fome* (A Field of Hunger), a monumental installation at Usina de Arte, in Pernambuco, transforms earthen vegetables into a garden where hunger is returned to the clay that does not eat. Their works are interconnected, requiring each other to fully reveal the extent of materiality. These are situations where matter traverses crowds, enduring the effects of political cruelty. In Sara's work, though named, no face is expected; in Matheus', the expectation is of the famished. Together, they offer a vivid image of political multiplicity.

5. In the exhibition *O Penúltimo Dia*, Sara and Matheus place two ends of the extemporaneous face-to-face, like masks. Sara waits for the right moment, revisiting herself and aligning past and present as a form of resistance to haste. Matheus, however, accepts the absence of time; the time for having time has passed, leaving only hunger. He revisits the impossibility of certain events and the ambiguity of recent history. For Sara, the mask's eyes are mere passage; for Matheus, they are eyes of the future, from which one cannot interrupt the milking before squeezing blood from a stone. Together, they give full meaning to violence.

6. The multitude is violence—rhythmic matter moving ever faster. Sara shows that violence does not lose its potency as it passes through people, even if some impurity remains. Violence often evokes the sacred, and spaces of worship or celebration reveal what the public fears yet cannot avoid negotiating. Even the sacred is lesser than violence. Deleuze, for

instance, invokes the schizo and its immanent variations to speak of violence.

7. The term *schizo* is crucial because it highlights the need to collect unconventional experiences to grasp the full extent of experience. It also captures the reverberations of violence in politics, which require the internal narrative of schizophrenia to be understood. The schizo is not merely a disturbed individual but a marker that violence precedes as well as succeeds the human mask. Violence reflects desire, which manifests in various ways.

8. Desire's role concerning violence is evident in how Sara and Matheus resist the conventional calendar. For them, the passage of time is circular, akin to Bakhtin's medieval carnival—a reservoir of power for the modern novel, animated by a multiplicity of voices. For Sara, desire is additive, realized slowly through the postulation of implicit rules between matter and creatures. For Matheus, desire subtracts, clamoring to be itself despite the intensity of violence—a desperate vitality, as Pasolini described.

9. Barthes, in his 1977 inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, famously stated, "Language is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech." If Sara and Matheus were to grapple with this idea, we might say that when language loses its violence and becomes purely human, it compels speech. Language obliges; violence does not. What, then, in language, forces speech, even when desire leans toward silence? Orides Fontela reminds us that every word is cruelty.

then from left to right [...] the atrocious spectacle on into the black night of boundless futurity of the abandoned tormentor never to be victim then a little space then this brief journey done prostrate at the foot of a mountain of provisions the victim never to be tormentor then a great space then another abandoned so on infinitely

10. If violence distances language from fascism and cruelty brings it closer, then despite their near-synonymity, there is a fundamental difference between the two. This distinction is crucial for understanding the positive political effects of contemporary art. There is a continuity between violence and cruelty, but there is a gradual difference between the two. Between Barthes and Fontela, between Sara and Matheus, there is a scale of difference in the desire that makes up violence and the desire that makes up cruelty. Violence is ample and reintroduces the unpredictable and is felt more acutely as a state of affairs becomes more consolidated. It is painful and uncomfortable, yet it is not suffering. Cruelty, on the other hand, tends to be self-identical, compelling what one wishes to hear. Its product is suffering, not pain.

11. Sara's *A Banda dos 7* (2010) is intensely violent, driven by the rhythm of a music box. The masked figures' origins and destinations are unknown; they might remain in a circular motion or depart to occupy the Winter Palace. Regardless, they conspire. Matheus's *O Ano da Mentira* (2017) traps us in 365 images of protests, making us suffer to the point of dissociation. The next year, whatever it may be, will not be better. Here, there is no violence—only cruelty: we are going nowhere.

12. If language is fascist, as Barthes claims, and its fascism is cruelty, as Fontela suggests, then the fascism of language is not uniform but evolves as a tendency. The artist's cruelty is not the fascist's; it moves through the motives of violence. There is always a degree of cruelty, while fascism is absolute. Artaud preferred his language "bloody," holding it so that negative feelings could not escape to find relief. In erotics, one might come to like cruelty, but not in art, where cruelty's dominatrix is violence. Artistic cruelty does not seek to command itself. Sara and Matheus's works operate politically, but not in the same way as contemporary art generally does. Politics is not inherently violent, not even contemporary art's politics. However, art can be composed with violence, necessitating the recognition

of the schizo. Sara releases this force directly, while Matheus stirs it to be released indirectly.

13. The mask, as Vernant notes, carries death in its eyes. The Gorgon of the Greeks is not so different from the masks of contemporary capitalism, manufactured through near slave labor as cheap representations of far-right politicians whose language is cruelty, manipulating violence against those who need it most. Despite the contradiction, we must face them. In the endless temporality of celebration, there is a playful, elaborative cruelty, as in the interpellation of contemporary art. Eyes—black, blue, rarely or always blind—look back at us, returning us to the immeasurability of violence. It will not save us, nor is it expiatory or the spear of the angel of history. But since we are smaller and traversed by it, there is the possibility of becoming greater than ourselves.

so true it is that here one knows one's tormentor only as long as it takes to suffer him and one's victim only as long as it takes to enjoy him if as long

14. There is the tormentor, the artist-tormentor, and the artist-violence. The first moves through cruelty for its own sake, the second through cruelty for the sake of violence, and the third through the schizo.

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