

1 “Sexophobic” as an answer

My thoughts are not as disciplined as I would like to, and I am still often attacked by the question that haunted my adolescence: "what is your sexual orientation?". Around 2001 I started to answer that with "sexophobic", which was a bit of a trick. I would like to use that - the label, the trick, and the need for the trick - as a starting point for explaining my perception of some issues related to sex and gender in Brazil, and, maybe, also in other countries where "machismo" runs strong. I will not just point to a problem, though - there is a proposal at the end of the text, but I felt that my proposal would only make sense after lots of preparations, so I'll try to paint a big picture first.

[How people judge you for: success / ways of cruising / how you keep face / how able you are to get what you want // self-help books // abnegation]

1.1 James Dean

I'd like to start with a story that I heard, or read, about James Dean, when I was a teenager, long before the internet; I may have distorted it, and it may be apocryphal. Anyway, the story was that he was so nervous and insecure that when he was not acting he was totally unable to walk straight by the middle of a sidewalk - he would always drift squiggly towards close to the wall, as someone who unconsciously runs to a corner. He *could not stand* in the middle of a room, or even of a sidewalk, as if standing in the middle was a big responsibility; as if he was always being watched, and judged, and being expected to answer somehow, and to position himself. And he was not yet on par to that.

[What can we become able to stand when we call too much attention? Identity / interaction, communication / righteousness / tact / how do we state our position? Academic language vs. journalistic languagevs. what?]

1.2 When Night is Falling

The first crucial scene in the movie happens in a Laundromat. Camille's dog, Bob, has just died, and she is sobbing while she waits for her laundry. The other person in the laundromat is Petra, who is a circus artist, and she talks to Camille to see if she is ok, and to offer help. The laundries get ready at the same time, and Petra switches the bags on purpose, to have a chance to see Camille again.

During the rest of the movie we will have these two creatures from two apparently very different worlds - Camille, who, I forgot to tell, is a theologian who teaches Mythology at a university, and Petra - and they will try to have more contact with one another.

The film lasts 90 minutes. During all that time no one ridicularizes no one else, there are no enemies, and everyone is as sincere as possible - even when they are faced with their own fears and prejudices. That was the first thing that blew my mind - it gave me hope, as it made me realize that it had to be

possible to live like that, that there had to be people looking for these kinds of existences - and that these people could be forming groups, and I would have to find them, to be accepted by them, and to help in building those groups, or ghettos, or whatever.

A few months ago I watched that movie again, and I noticed a tiny detail that I found incredibly touching. When Camille opens the laundry bag she finds Petra's card, and it says: "Petra Soft - performance magician and ideal dinner guest". And the address of the circus.

"Ideal dinner guest".

I would really love to be able to say that, but I don't dare. In Brazil that would probably mean that I would end up in day-long barbecues with lots of beer and smelly guys talking about football and F-1 races and laughing about idiot things.

Where are the dinners that I would love to be invited to? And what am I doing to be the ideal guest for them?

1.3 Shut up

In Brazil people often react to complaints - (micro)political complaints, that urge for changes in policies and changes in attitudes - in ways that dismiss the complainer. If I complain they say I'm whining, that I am a spoiled bourgeois kid with nothing really important to complain about, and tell me to shut up and work hard like the others; but if, say, a tranvestive, an indian, an unemployable black kid, or a primary teacher who has to survive on little more than minimum wage, do complain, or is seen at a protest, or is killed by the cops, then most people react by blocking their empathy and regarding the complainer as little more than shit - someone useless and irrelevant and deserving his fate.

2 Magic

Let me try to paint a picture of how I felt it was to be male when I was a kid. Let me warn you that this is going to sound childish.

When I was about 12 I saw a documentary about sharks. Then can't stop swimming - ever - because they do not float. Being a boy in my generation was like that - I had to do things all the time - or else I would sink down to the depths of our social hierarchy, into some ghostly hell with no return - into faggotness -

[Girls didn't need to do much - they did deserve care, they were precious - being accepted by one meant

Contagion

3 Mind

[How sex didn't work; looked for things that could give me good memories]

4 Heart

Ethimology of *courage* and *corruption* / doing things with all of your self
 (“Heart” is the kitsch word par excellence, but...)
 Reich and the body armour
 Memories and perceptions “contained” in body parts

5 Tact

Letters – > careful not to frighten

in some situations we shut off - involuntarily

If I receive an e-mail from someone who I don’t know well, and who doesn’t interest me, and this person is saying things that are personal and inconvenient, I am going to shut off. I am probably not even going to answer - because I would sort of have to translate my thoughts to a different language to have any chance of being understood - I can’t just speak my mind.

Now consider the opposite situation. I am exchanging e-mails with this person who I consider incredibly interesting, and I want to be able to say more about myself. And there is this one recurring thought that makes me in conflict: I am fascinated by her, I become hypnotized in her presence, and I daydream of touching her, and of the possibility of a hug, and of even, some day, we sleeping close to one another - so: I would like to be able to tell that in a way that is not threatening, that can be taken as a compliment, and that is not inconvenient -

I was discussing this with a friend - we sometimes show drafts of important e-mails to one another - and we noticed how much we pay attention to the tone and the flow of our thoughts when we write - we want to convey our hesitations, our tentativeness - on the one hand we try not to be invasive, on the other we try to be as sincere and as inspiring as possible - we want the other to feel comfortable, and inspired to spend hours writing back to us.

I chose to tell this because I want to make a comparison

6 Storytelling

I think I speak for most of the transgender people out there when I say - and this has been a defining trait in my life - that we spend most of our lives doing activities which allow us, and also the others, to forget our born-with physical sex; and also avoiding mirrors, as we need to make what we do and think and feel be far more intense than our many innate body characteristics that are hard to change. So, we create an image and use it to signal who we are and want to be; we need to be *visible* - a bit, at least - to let kindred souls spot us among the crowds of daily life.

I confess that I envy the people in the pride parades that are in couples, or sexually available, or happy, or that at least have clearly-defined sexual identities. I have felt very suicidal in several periods of my life, and I may not

know exactly what happiness is, but I know I have always equated sadness - no, better: despair and hopelessness - with the certainty of being terminally alone.

7 The 99%

Writing in the first person is a political act - and, I believe, one even more powerful than labelling oneself.

Class consciousness

8 Being welcome by being useful

9 Truth

Notions of truth / medical definitions of sexuality / what ways of defining our sexuality and gender can sound reasonable to other people? / tones: victimizing vs asserting traditions vs what? / constructing an identity and presenting it to people is akin to crafting a story / what makes people believe in a story when it is being presented in a theatre play? / suspension of disbelief corresponds to inviting people to our universe / what do people gain when they watch a play and get involved in it? (cite Peter Brook and maybe David Mamet's "Three uses of the knife") / in many plays the main theme is love, and by immersing oneself in the story the spectators learn something about themselves, and about what is possible (in terms of human relations) / good stories are *honest* / stories about what we look for and what we love are especially important and touching / the ways we have to tell them can be especially transforming