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# Gender Performativities in Democracy Under Threat

Maria Manuel Baptista &  
Alexandre Rodolfo Alves de Almeida (Eds.)



## PUBLICATION INFORMATION

### Title

Gender Performativities in Democracy Under Threat

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### Editing Assistance

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### Cover

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### Editing, pagination and graphic design

Grácio Editor

1st edition: November 2020

ISBN: 978-989-54956-2-7

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Travessa da Vila União, 16, 7.º drt 3030-217 COIMBRA

Telef.: 239 084 370

e-mail: editor@ruigracio.com

sítio: www.ruigracio.com

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**This publication is financed with national funds through Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I. P., within the framework of the project UIDB/04188/2020.**

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This book collects part of the communications presented on the 7th International Congress on Cultural Studies: Gender Performativities in Democracy Under Threat, held on October 21st, 22nd and 23rd, 2020, by videoconference.

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# UNFOLDING OF BODIES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE COUNTERSEXUAL SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

Bruno Novadvorski<sup>2</sup>

Chris, The Red<sup>3</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents the artistic works proposed and developed by the Brazilian visual artists Bruno Novadvorski — with the lambe-collage<sup>4</sup> series ZONA DE PRAZER (Pleasure Zone)<sup>5</sup>, and Chris, The Red with the photo-performance installation CONTRANOME: CHRIS (Countername: Chris). To add up to their research on human sexuality, and its unfolding in society, both feature the concepts of the contemporary philosopher Paul B. Preciado, author of the *Countersexual Manifesto*, a study on contemporary issues that reflect on sexuality, identities, bodies and resignification of social dichotomies, proposing the construction of a countersexual society that has become the guiding thread of the two following series of artistic work, which entitle this article.

## KEYWORDS:

Preciado; countersexuality; body; *lambe-lambe*; photo-performance installation.

## Introduction

Countersexuality is not the creation of a new nature but rather the end of nature as an order that legitimizes the subjection of some bodies to others. (...) Countersexuality does not speak of a world to come. It refers neither to a pure past nor to a better future; to the contrary, it reads the fingerprints of what is already the body's end, as defined by modern Western discourse. (Preciado, 2018, p. 20 e 22-23)

Before discussing the development of the body into the construction of the countersexual society, let us briefly situate our understanding of that society. As mentioned in the two excerpts above, extracted from the book *Countersexual Manifesto* by the Spanish philosopher Paul B. Preciado, the countersexuality is manifested in a society that is not configured as an upcoming one, but rather as a reframed one.

Preciado starts from the reflections of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, among others, to think not about sexuality, but countersexuality. The term as quo-

<sup>1</sup> Article presented to 7th International Congress on Cultural Studies Gender Performativities in Democracy Under Threat.

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<sup>4</sup> In Brazil, a specific technique of street photography was called *lambe-lambe*, which means *lick-a-lot*, due to the fact that the photographer had to lick each film to find the gelatinous side of the emulsion, and lick again the photos to check the quality of the fixation. *Lambe-collage* is a technique of street poster collage as a form of art intervention or advertising.

<sup>5</sup> *Zona* means both *mess* or *zone*, and it is often used to refer to a *red-light district*, an area in the town or city where pleasure is not subjected to society rules.



ted by the author, comes from Foucault<sup>6</sup>. In the sequence, the philosopher addresses the performative nature of gender identity raised by Butler<sup>7</sup> and thus, throughout the book, he points out indications for the construction of a countersexual society with which we are seeking to dialogue in our own artistic works. But after all, how does this construction take place?

After reading Preciado and other authors, especially those quoted here, we have come to an understanding that our Western society still resides in a social structure based on male norms, as well as in a sexuality centered on heterosexuality. Promoting cases of misogyny, racism, LGBTIQA+phobia, our society represses those who somehow avoid or deny its structure. As a result, this system casts many sorts of fears into and upon our bodies, causing trauma and violence, such as the high number of aggressions against women in Brazil<sup>8</sup>, for instance. It is against this system that countersexuality is conceived, which is the reason for Preciado's quotes in the introduction of this article. We feel the urge to rebuild our society through the devices it has offered us with. Thus, to this end we use our artistic work.

*CONTRANOME: CHRIS* (2020) is a photo-performance installation by the Brazilian artist Chris, The Red, in which he relates to one of the features of the countersexual society, which is the idea of Living Bodies (Preciado, 2018, p. 20), a concept that will be presented in the next topic of this article. Based on this idea, Chris seeks to reframe not only his body, but also his identity, causing a rupture with everything that is thrown upon his body from his birth certificate — an important document for the State, by which we are registered as persons so forth identified and belonging to that society. In other words, he cuts off ties with the masculinity that is imposed on him by a masculinized name, thus expressing new perspectives on his body, patching his members in alternative ways.

Bruno Novadvorski, in his work *ZONA DE PRAZER* (2020), addresses another relevant issue for the countersexual re-signification: the *cu*<sup>9</sup>. The artist uses *lambe-lambe* photography to perform this work, which will be presented in the second item of this article. The *cu*, according to Preciado, is important for stablishing countersexuality because, "Through the anus, the traditional sex/gender representation system shits itself." (Preciado, 2018, p. 30) since the heteronormative system is based precisely on heterosexuality, which occurs through a binary system (male/female, man/woman, hetero/homo), propagating the idea that the biological identification of our bodies occurs through the penis and the vagina, it places reproduction as an important product of these binary ties. In this context, the *cu* is an exception because, mainly, it is not susceptible to the reproduction of the species. In addition, the *cu* is important for a countersexual society because it challenges the understanding we have about sexual and reproductive organs, as well as it reminds us of the digestive system — after all, the anus and the mouth are interconnected. Following this same line of thought, pleasure is also moved from the so-called "sexual organs" to the anus, and thus, Novadvorski takes on, through the image of his *cu*, a powerful pleasure zone.

<sup>6</sup> See Preciado, Paul B. (Beatriz). (2018). *Countersexual Manifesto : subverting gender identities*. New York : Columbia University Press. p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> See Butler, Judith P. (2016). *Gender Trouble – Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

<sup>8</sup> See the website *Violência contra as Mulheres em Dados*. Platform that gathers data, research, sources and syntheses about the problem in Brazil with a focus on domestic, sexual and online violence, femicide and the intersection with racism and LGBTTophobia. Available at <https://dossies.agenciapatriciagalvao.org.br/violencia-em-dados/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Cu* means *anus*. The artist Bruno decided to not translate the word and use it in Portuguese because a political choice of him concerning theories and studies he has made about the anus, for example, "A Teoria do Cu", article written by Larissa Pelúcio.



## Contranome: Chris (Countername: Chris)

The time has come for the Post-Pornography Era to be ruled under the Countersexual Culture. It is time to destroy once and for all each and every tie that has been imposed on us. Enough of these oppressive systems that determine our identities, sexualities, genders and bodies.

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Countersexual society exists upon the removal of the designations masculine and feminine, corresponding to what are supposed to be biological categories (male/woman, man/female), from identification cards as well as from all administrative and legal state forms. (Preciado, 2018, p. 32)

So, first, I renounce my birth condition and then recognize myself with a Living Body:

Within the framework of the countersexual contract, bodies recognize themselves and others not as men or women but as living bodies. (Preciado, 2018, p. 20)

As of today, I am the *Living Body Chris, The Red*. My name will no longer make me part of a binary gender world. I will no longer be located in the heterocentric environment and, «to avoid the reappropriation of [my body] as feminine or masculine» (Preciado, 2018, p. 32), I announce that I am adopting the *Countername Chris, The Red*, «a new name without any indication of gender, regardless of the language employed.» (Preciado, 2018, p. 32). I present my countersexual contract. I deny my birth certificate proclaimed by the State. There is no more cock or pussy to define myself in my record, to limit myself in a zone of power.

The Photo-Performing installation COUNTERNAME: CHRIS reflects the moment when I recognized myself no longer as Christian Gustavo de Sousa, born at 8:10 pm on August 8, 1977 and registered under the gender: male, but as the *Living Body Chris, The Red*: high-tech<sup>10</sup> countersexual pedagogical device of knowledge and pleasure — signing my commitment to the construction of a countersexual society.

The artistic work is divided into three moments: *Revogo*, *Assino* and *Crio*.

### Revogo (Revoking)

I invalidate the conditions of the heterocentered system that were placed by the State by means of a birth certificate, in which I am defined as male along with all social, economic and privileged conditions. With 3 original copies of my birth certificate in hand, this first moment consists of a process to revoke these definitions. I erase the first with red adhesive tape. The second, with a scissors. Then, I rip the third one.

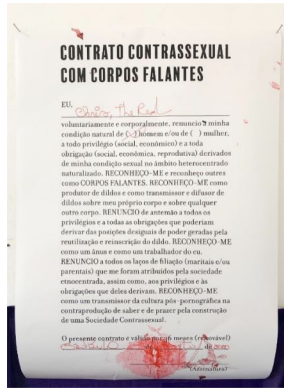
<sup>10</sup> For *high-tech*, Preciado understands that “Countersexual society promotes the destitution of traditional educational institutions and the development of a high- tech countersexual pedagogy in order to maximize the erotic relationship between living bodies as well as diversifying and improving countersexual practices. Countersexual society favors the development of knowledge– pleasure; it favors the development of technologies aimed at a radical transformation of bodies and an interruption of human history as the naturalization of oppression.” (Preciado, 2018, p. 38)





Chris, The Red. Contranome: Chris [Revogo], 2020. Prints, 21 x 29,7 cm. São Paulo/SP.  
Photos: Chris, The Red.

### Assino (Signing)



Chris, The Red. Contranome: Chris [Assino], 2020. Print, 59,4 x 84,1 cm. São Paulo/SP.  
Photo: Chris, The Red.

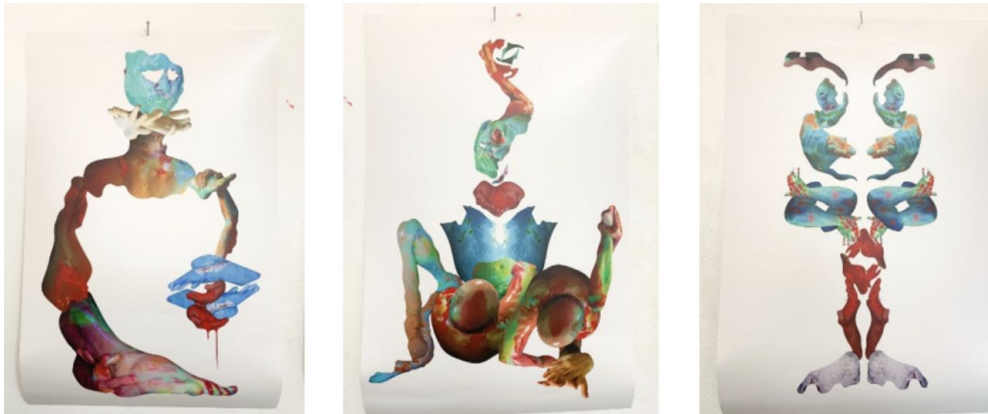
Revoked my condition given by the State by the time I was born, I assume my commitment through a consensual contract signed by me with blood and my anus. In this second moment, I recognize myself as a Living Body by means of the Countersexual Contract printed in an A1-sized sheet, in which I make it official the revocation made in the previous moment and make myself available as a technological device to generate, from my body, creative artistic processes that reflect the principles of a countersexual society.

### Crio (Creating)

At this last moment, my body now becomes a high-tech tool for countersexual inversion practices within the Dildotectonic System presented by Preciado:

Dildotectonics is the counterscience that studies the appearance, formation, and utilization of the dildo. It localizes the deformations that the dildo inflicts upon the sex/gender system. Making dildotectonics a branch of first importance within countersexuality assumes consideration of the body as a surface and territory, a site of the dildo's displacement and emplacement. (Preciado, 2018, p. 41)





Chris, The Red. Contranome: Chris [Crio], 2020. Prints, 40 x 60 cm. São Paulo/SP.  
Photos: Chris, The Red.

Thus, *Crio* is composed of three images formed from parts of the work *Diltopias* (2020)<sup>11</sup> also of my own, created from a homonymous video performance. The pieces are parts of my body and here, they take on other forms. As a countersexual creative device, my living body takes different forms: “dildo-leg, dildo-arm, dildo-chest, [dildo-head]” (Preciado, 2018, p. 43) among others and with these dildo-pieces I am creating body representations outside of the dualities on which the heteronormative system was centered.

### Zona de Prazer (Pleasure Zone)

Using *lambe-lambe* photography, I incorporate into the urban space the sign of a new zone, a specific perimeter, corresponding to pleasure; and, to illustrate this intersection, I use the photographic reproduction of my *cu*, edited in black and white, naming it ZONA DE PRAZER.



Bruno Novadvorski. Zona de Prazer, 2020. Lambe-lambe. Porto Alegre, RS.

<sup>11</sup> *Diltopias* (2020), a work created for the virtual exhibition *SEM*, organized by visual artist Bruno Novadvorski in partnership with the Research Group OM-LAB, from the Arts Institute of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, under the coordination of professor Dr. Tete Barachini. Available at <https://www.instagram.com/omlab.poa>.





Bruno Novadvorski. *Zona de Prazer*, 2020. *Lambe-lambe*, 42 x 29,7 cm. Porto Alegre/RS. Photo: Bruno Novadvorski (on the left). *Lambe-lambe*, 126 x 118,8 cm. São Paulo/SP. Photo: Chris, The Red (on the right).

This work consists of a photo of my *cu* and the sentence that entitles it. For this one, after researching the fonts used on signposts, I opted for a similar typography and it is divided between the top and the bottom in order to draw attention to the image of a centralized, highlighted *cu*. The first *lambe-collage* was made in the city of Porto Alegre (RS), in an A3-sized sheet which was fixed at three distinct places in the city center: on Rua Antonio Carlos Guimarães, on Viaduto João Pessoa and on Rua Otávio Rocha. These streets were chosen due to being regular paths that I would take on a daily basis, as they used to connect my residence, university and internship location then. After this first collage, I could notice that the size of the *lambe-collage* needed to be changed. The visual impact I wanted was not yet sufficiently resolved in the A3-sized sheet, so I increased it to a sheet of 126 x 118.8 cm. This enlarged version of the *lambe-collage* was pasted in the city of São Paulo on Avenida Nazaré in front of the Independence Park, where the Independence Monument is located, on the banks of the Ipiranga Stream, the historic site where the Prince Regent Dom Pedro I proclaimed Independence of Brazil on September 7th, 1822.

Besides the geographic location where this work was performed; being inserted in the urban space, as highlighted in the introduction, *ZONA DE PRAZER* has its inspiration in reading about the ideas proposed by Preciado found in his manifest, mainly making use of the anus as a device for building a countersexual society.

According to Preciado, the anus has three peculiarities<sup>12</sup>. Of these, I highlight the third: “the anus constitutes a technological workspace; it is the countersexual postprocessing facility.”<sup>13</sup>. Thus, I understand that the author touches one of the main wounds of the heteronormative masculinity. I think of the *cu* as this device that Paul mentions quoting Michel Foucault’s sexuality device<sup>14</sup>, expanding his discussions on countersexual devices. The countersexual re-signification proposed regarding the *cu* is the opposition of the heterosexual-normative system. The identification of who we are is carried out by our organs known as

<sup>12</sup> See See Preciado, Paul B. (Beatriz). (2018). *Countersexual Manifesto : subverting gender identities*. New York : Columbia University Press. p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> See Foucault, Michel. (2019a). Capítulo Sobre a história da sexualidade. In: *Microfísica do Poder*. Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

“sexual”, which countersexuality questions as reproductive organs, since the anus can be recognized as a “sexual zone”. The dichotomous oppositions are placed in “checkmate”, since in this way, we can understand that our society still carries the burden of sexuality aimed at the reproduction of the species, privileging the masculine. To expose my *cu* is also to provoke this analysis; it is to think of other spaces to make it meaningful, assuming it as a countersexual device.

Perceiving his discursive potential as a device, Preciado brings Ron Athey as an example of making countersexual art with the performance *Solar Anus* (1999), where the artist tattoos a sun around his anus, taking inspiration from Georges Bataille in the book *The Solar Anus*<sup>15</sup> and, next, self-penetrates dildos that are attached to high-heeled shoes, a performative act that is characterized as countersexual by, first, explicitly showing the anus and secondly, publicly evidencing the practice of anal penetration, pathologized in Western societies as presented by Foucault in his first volume of *History of Sexuality*<sup>16</sup>.

Abel Azcona (1988) is another artist who, in his work *Make America Great Again* (2017), shows the *cu* as a countersexual and artistic device. In his performance, the Spaniard tattooed the phrase that entitles the work around his anal hole. An explicit criticism of the candidate for president of the United States of America at the time who used it as a slogan for his political campaign<sup>17</sup>. Azcona is known for his provocative work on institutions such as the State and the Church, especially the Catholic. This work is part of a performance series in which he criticizes the American society. When tattooing the electoral slogan, the artist draws attention to issues that confront the macho society that uses politics to oppress people who do not allow themselves to fit their standards.

In Brazil, I bring the work *Buraco* by the artist Luluca L, composed of stickers from her *cu* that were pasted around in the space of the Municipal Gallery of Balneário Camboriú (SC) and censored one day after the opening of the *Ruínas* exhibition, according to the article *Exposição que tem foto de ânus é censurada em galeria de Santa Catarina* (Exhibition that has a photo of an anus is censored in a gallery in Santa Catarina) published in the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper<sup>18</sup>. In this one, the artist claims that her work is “a symbiosis with the gallery’s ceiling”<sup>19</sup>. In the face of this censorship, I remark how contradictory our Brazilian society is, after all, it cannot deal with the representation of the anus, but uses terms like “*Vai tomar no cu*” (Get it into your ass!) to offend others. And in this sense, Luluca, in her work *Buraco*, activates the countersexual device proposed by Preciado.

*ZONA DE PRAZER* is a work that brings, among other questions, its insertion in the urban space, significant for its central discursive proposal that is part of the social dogma in relation to bodies and their sexualities. By introducing it on the streets of cities, I enable dialogue with other urban “pleasure zones”, that is, every city has one or a few regions that are cha-

<sup>15</sup> See Bataille, Georges. (1985). *O Ânus Solar*. Lisboa: Hiena Editora.

<sup>16</sup> See Foucault, Michel. (2019b). *História da Sexualidade 1: a vontade de saber*. Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

<sup>17</sup> Mundo ao Minuto (2017). *Artista performativo tatuou slogan de campanha de Trump à volta do ânus*. Available at <https://www.noticiasaoiminuto.com/mundo/759409/artista-performativo-tatuou-slogan-de-campanha-de-trump-a-volta-do-anus>.

<sup>18</sup> Lourenço, Marina. (2020). *Exposição que tem fotos de ânus é censurada em galeria de Santa Catarina*. Available at <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2020/03/exposicao-que-tem-fotos-de-anus-e-censurada-em-galeria-de-santa-catarina.shtml>.

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*.



racterized by the concentration of sexual professional activity. In Porto Alegre, for example, there is Avenida Farrapos located downtown, where I deal with the theme in the summary “FARRAPOS” — *My naked body unfolding space and sex*, published in the annals of the 28th National Meeting of the National Association of Researchers in Visual Arts<sup>20</sup>. ZONA DE PRAZER is part of my Course Completion Essay (TCC in Portuguese), the final stage of my graduation in Visual Arts under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Teresinha Barachini.

124 | In short, the incoherent sexual heteronormativities stigmatizes the cu while rejecting its sexual and political potential. Gender duality is based on this denial. The centralization of sexuality in reproductive organs is one of the ruptures that the countersexuality intends to achieve. For this reason, the recurrence of the appearance of the cu as an artistic object at different times, shows how important this debate is, expanding its countersexual transgression, moving social axes that structure not only the arts but other social fields. ZONA DE PRAZER unravels the body to sew a new social urbanization, contrary to the standardization of sexuality.

## Conclusion

Before pointing out the final questions in this article, we highlight that when we wrote the summary for the selection process of the 7th International Congress on Cultural Studies, we thought about its performance in person. However, the world was faced with a pandemic that in Brazil alone has already left a death toll of more than 120 thousand people<sup>21</sup>. In this way, we adapt our proposal to the new molds. Thus, the photo-performance installation CONTRANOME: CHRIS and the *lambe-collage* ZONA DE PRAZER, which would take place during the event in Aveiro, were already held in São Paulo and recorded for exhibition during the online event.<sup>22</sup>

Having made this clarification, the works presented here bring with them the peculiarities of the artistic work of each one of us, our perspective on the construction of the Countersexual Society, in which we use our own bodies as an artistic device, or rather, we re-signify ourselves in search of breaking with the oppressions imposed by the system in which we were inserted since our birth. Whether by revoking a name that places us or not in a zone of power, or by breaking the existing binary in our pleasure. In addition, regarding intrinsic issues in the reading of the cu in the society, we encourage the expansion of this debate so that, as a social group, we will have a better relationship with our orifices and who knows, understanding its breadth beyond the act of defecating.

Therefore, we find the contemporary art as an excellent path to move towards a countersexual society. Deconstructing our bodies is not something we can achieve by negation, on the contrary, it occurs in its valorization and thus, questioning the actions of the State is also challenging their actions upon our bodies, such as issuing documentation that, instead of freeing us, often exercises a greater prison than the penitentiaries. As well as, activating

<sup>20</sup> Novadvorski, Bruno. (2019). “Farrapos” *Meu Corpo Nu Desdobrando O Espaço e o Sexo*. Anais ANPAP. Available at [http://anpap.org.br/anais/2019/PDF/RESUMO/28encontro\\_\\_\\_\\_NOVADVORSKI\\_Bruno\\_2820-2830.pdf](http://anpap.org.br/anais/2019/PDF/RESUMO/28encontro____NOVADVORSKI_Bruno_2820-2830.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> According to G1. (2020). Brasil registra média de 889 mortes pelo coronavírus por dia na última semana; 3 estados têm alta de óbitos. Available at <https://g1.globo.com/bemestar/coronavirus/noticia/2020/08/29/casos-e-mortes-por-coronavirus-no-brasil-em-29-de-agosto-segundo-consorcio-de-veiculos-de-imprensa.ghtml>.

<sup>22</sup> Videos can be accessed at <http://bit.ly/DesdobramentosDosCorpos>.





devices that corroborate for this confrontation with the normativities that seek to impose themselves in society. And our artistic work is this countersexual device to oppose the apparatus of the State, which is often omitted in relation to our lives, as is the posture of our current President of the Republic (as a political gesture, we will address this person in this way, not to give him importance; on the contrary, we want to highlight the position he holds), who hides himself from the responsibilities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and to Brazilian lives, making our nation have more of this painful blood stain. We use this article to record this inhumane act. We dedicate this text to all the deaths caused by the pandemic in our society! And to all who die in the country that kills most LGBTQIA+ people in the world! LIVES MATTER!

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Only freedom, defended by democratic systems, however imperfect it may still be, can be the field from which all human beings can be fulfilled and express themselves more fully, tolerantly and happily in each dimension. An attack on democracy brings with it an attack on the plurality and freedom of different gender expressions, different bodies, different ways of living and of expressing one's sexuality.

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