

The Body is the Message: Democracy and Authoritarianism in Belmonte's Cartoons (1938-1942)

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ABSTRACT

How to escape censorship when graphic art is under surveillance by an authoritarian government? Which subterfuges can artists use to enforce their message, so to make themselves understood by their audience? These are the two questions inspiring the following paper, which analyzes the production of Belmonte, a famous caricaturist from São Paulo who gained prominence between the 1920s and 1940s. Guided by a Cultural History of the Political and by the documentary method for analysis of images, the article demonstrates how the Brazilian artist experienced and managed to overcome censorship during Getúlio Vargas' Estado Novo. In particular, one of his main strategies, i.e., the performativity of the caricatured characters, is scrutinized.

Keywords: Political caricatures; Censorship; Belmonte; New State; Performativity.

Como escapar da censura quando a arte gráfica se encontra sob vigilância em um governo autoritário? De que tipos de subterfúgios os artistas podem lançar mão para fazer valer a sua mensagem, para se fazer entender por seu público? Essas são duas questões que guiarão a exposição aqui proposta, tendo como objeto de análise a produção do desenhista Belmonte, famoso caricaturista de São Paulo que ganhou grande projeção entre as décadas de 1920 e 1940. Pautado por uma História Cultural do Político e pelo método documentário de análise de imagens, o artigo visa a demonstrar de que forma o artista brasileiro vivenciou e conseguiu se sobrepor à censura do Estado Novo de Getúlio Vargas. Para tanto, uma de suas principais estratégias, a performatividade dos personagens caricaturados, será analisada de forma mais detida.

Palavras-chave: Caricaturas políticas; Censura; Belmonte; Estado Novo; Performatividade.

The 1920s and 1940s saw the maturity of Brazilian illustrated and humorous press. It was, in fact, a golden period for cartoons in Brazil, when artists of high quality and prestige published in a variety of vehicles, either in daily newspapers or illustrated satirical magazines. Rio de Janeiro remained the most remarkable cultural center in the country and its local press could boast a wide diversity of styles and prominent names in this field. J. Carlos, one of the main political cartoonists in Brazilian history, published in the magazine *Careta*, one of the most influential illustrated magazines in Rio de Janeiro and the country. In São Paulo, the local press was experiencing a decisive impulse and the newspapers *Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha da Manhã* (now called *Folha de São Paulo*) gained space, coming to dominate in the state of São Paulo, acquiring a nationwide projection over the following decades, an influence that continues to this day.

Yet, at that moment, this projection was not foreseen. In fact, the political turmoil that the country experienced at the end of the 1920s, that led to the so-called 1930 Revolution and the rise of Getúlio Vargas to the forefront of national politics, left the state of São Paulo in a situation of friction with the new central government and under constant surveillance. The future of São Paulo's newspapers, many of which were forced to close down by the police or declared illegal, was not yet certain. Resistance or criticism automatically made newspapers targets of the police, and the tendency of many newsrooms was towards resignation.

Even so, the first years of Vargas' period set many "*paulistas*" (citizens of São Paulo) in a position of confrontation or resistance to the growing authoritarianism of the regime. In 1932, the state of São Paulo started a military conflict with the central government pleading for a new Constitution. The civil war ended with the victory of the central government, but despite this result, it was summoned a constituent assembly that would result in a new constitutional charter in 1934, one of liberal trend. But a series of conflicts with the communists in 1935 led to repression throughout the national territory based on the National Security Law (Brasil 1935): the result of this action was the imposition of a state of siege that the Congress renewed for the following two years. (Skidmore 2010, 54 *et seq.*). As the state of siege left the legislative agenda, a coup d'état was staged on the pretext of the "Cohen plan", a fabricated conspiracy according to which the communists were planning new attacks. Supported by Brazilian fascists, the integralists, the Estado Novo dictatorship was established on November 10th, 1937.

The cartoonist Belmonte, leading illustrator of the newspaper *Folha da Manhã*, watched the entire unfolding of this national tragedy in a strange position. Making some occasional denunciations, he mounted his own resistance, given that the newspaper he worked for followed a path of certain consensus towards the federal government, focusing many of its articles on foreign policy and avoiding

internal criticism on its pages. After changing owners in Vargas' period, *Folha da Manhã* adopted, in 1937, a position aligned with the interests of the coffee planters of São Paulo. These planters defended a liberal project for the development of the sector, but did not reject the actions of a centralized and strong government to guarantee beneficial prices in the market. However, being a remnant of the previous period, in which the *Folha* had a more popular and openly democratic line, Belmonte's space in the pages of the newspaper was that of an independent and renowned intellectual in/of São Paulo. The memory built based on his actions carries the newspaper's reputation, highlighting *Folha da Manhã* as a publication resistant to Estado Novo, a newspaper that defended individual freedom and democracy. This memory can be understood as a sum of the performances of *Folha da Manhã*, during the Vargas dictatorship, and that of *Folha de São Paulo* (the same newspaper, renamed), during the military dictatorship that Brazil experienced between the 1960s and the 1980s. The memory of a newspaper defending democracy rises after the 1964 dictatorship and is projected into the past. Belmonte's drawings emerge as justifying proof of this memory, an escape from the censorship of the period, even though they were often published alongside texts praising the dictators and authoritarian regimes of the world, especially until the year of 1942, when Brazil enters the Second World War. In fact, in the context of the 1930s and 1940s there was a liberal and democratic project to be defended by the newspaper, that of "aristocratic democracy", which ended with the 1930 Revolution, an art of democracy averse to the masses and that openly maintained that "the State is the place of representation of the 'national elites, the majority capable of thinking and reasoning in favor of the people'" (Mota and Capelato 1980, 74).

Faced with the Estado Novo's projection over society, a nation-building project with strong police and propaganda action (Liebel 2018, 179-204) where the State was considered to be the subject of History, the different perspectives regarding the national destiny and its projects appear in Belmonte's drawings. For a very brief period, his cartoons became a privileged space for the exhibition of an institutional vision of the newspaper, which was clearly expressed two months after the establishment of the dictatorship, in January 1938. Belmonte's pen shows the preferential regime in this cartoon:



Figure 01: Belmonte. Assim falou Franklin Roosevelt. In: *Folha da Manhã*. São Paulo, 5 jan. 1938. 4^a. ed., p. 1.

The cartoon (Figure 01), produced in portrait style (reinforcing the seriousness of the message, since there are no comic traits), comes with a caption taken from a speech by Franklin Roosevelt. It reads: "Our people believe that democracies will exist for years to come and that democracy will be restored or re-established in nations that do not know it today. On that faith rests the future realization of peace." This is a direct reference to the new Vargas' regime; although *Folha* as a whole does not vehemently embrace the cause of Democracy or political Liberalism, Belmonte's cartoon is perceived as confrontational, in a discursive frame which referred to the pre-revolutionary *Folha*, the "Olival's *Folha*" (Capelato and Mota 1980, 16 *et seq.*), as it was known when the values of individual freedom were constantly defended against censorship and the excesses of oligarchic politics.¹

¹ Here lies an apparent schizophrenia of the publication, which since its resumption in 1931 was founded on the defense of a political-economic project based on the development and protagonism of the national agricultural elite (especially the one from São Paulo), and that was rather interested in the economic liberalism in an essentially agricultural country, little used to political questions and the struggle for collective freedoms. But Belmonte's action, which can be thought of as an action of political resistance, is also anchored in his own experience in "Folha do Olival". Belmonte's education and his performance in São Paulo's political scene is strongly linked to that time, and if the owner was not particularly interested in the political sphere, we can conclude that the cartoonist received the support of the newspaper's editorial staff to publish his cartoons. – also, as a sparkle of criticism that, after 1937, censorship no longer tolerated.

As if the ovation for Democracy was not enough, Belmonte published other images that directly or indirectly criticized the new Brazilian authoritarian order. It didn't take long for the editorial staff of *Folha da Manhã*, and the artist in particular, to be placed under observation by the censors. Belmonte even denounces this situation in two cartoons, where he tries to disassociate himself from any responsibility (in an openly outrageous way, announcing that any similarity of his drawings with the national political reality should be understood as mere coincidence) and announces the angry look of censorship and repression:



Figure 02: Belmonte. No title. In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo, 19 mar. 1938, 3ª. edition, p. 1.



Figure 03: Belmonte. No title. In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo, 26 may. 1938, 3^a edition, p. 1.

In these images, the first indication of the central argument of this paper can be observed, which is the articulation of performativity, i.e., of the thematic perception of the emotional framing and the composition of the cartoon. In other words, it refers to the establishment of a specific visual language linked to the political realm, or rather, to the community of (political) meaning linked here to the newspaper, *Folha da Manhã*. More specifically, this community of meaning is linked to the cartoonist Belmonte, taken here as an intellectual whose previous activities enabled him to have a public of his own, which overpassed the changes in ownership and the newspapers' editorial line. This public identified itself with his positions, followed his productions and held the keys to understanding his messages. In Figure 2, the statement of "mere coincidence", possibly an imposition of the censors, is presented by a character, Juca Pato (Belmonte's alter ego), in a pose of disdain and annoyance. It is his face though that further demarcates the contempt of the character (and of his creator) in the face of the action of the press and propaganda regulatory organs. Conditioned and motivated by the censorship, these cartoons demonstrate the artist's inclination towards insubordination – as well as the alteration of his work in the face of the possibility of repression and silencing.

Two months later, after drawing Getúlio Vargas as a punitive agent against immigrant children after foreign language schools were banned in Brazil, Belmonte is once again reprimanded, and his response comes in another cartoon

(Figure 03), where an annoyed Juca Pato complains about the regime, but this time with the angry eyes of the censorship over him. Looking at the eyes that make up this representation, we realize that their focus does not fall directly on Juca Pato, but on the observer, passing through the character's figure. In this way, Belmonte showed not only that the cartoonist was being watched, but also the reader, thus denouncing that the entire population was, after all, under the regime's sights (especially, of course, that idealized "critical and thinking" group from the middle class of São Paulo, the readers of *Folha da Manhã*, who had been following Belmonte's work for years). The idealized demarcation of his public (cultivated and democratic) indicates an ideological condition and, abstractly, a sharing complicity in facing repression. In a conscious and open action, Belmonte indicates the political change in the country, the change in his drawings, and calls the reader to establish a connection with himself and his work. The entire interpretation and reception of the political cartoons published in the following years would depend on this call.

Through the body and expressions of his characters, Belmonte will position himself within the (small) realm of politics that still remained in the dictatorship of Vargas' Estado Novo. As the previous three examples demonstrate, his particular position, as an artist and intellectual, a political actor in the community of the city of São Paulo, was one of contesting the dictatorial regime and supporting democracy. But already in 1938, the cartoonist was forbidden to portray the Brazilian dictator or any theme directly referred to national politics. As a consequence, Belmonte began to dedicate his production to the analysis of foreign policy, the advances of authoritarian regimes and the Second World War, which would have begun in a few months. As if it were a foresight, his ironic message from March 1938 – when he said that any similarity between his production and the national reality should be considered mere coincidence (Figure 02) – takes on the colors of an interpretative key for all the cartoons that would be presented in the following years, with diverse themes, but also with his eyes turned to the national scene. In other words, Belmonte would make himself understood by his readers, denouncing the Brazilian situation through the mirror of international politics.

Belmonte and the *Estado Novo*

Throughout the Estado Novo period, Belmonte permanently suffered from the surveillance of the DIP (Department of Press and Propaganda), the bureau responsible for the censorship and regulation of artistic production and news in the country. Some moments were crueler with the cartoonist, putting him "aside" or leading him to focus on illustrations for different parts of the newspaper,

causing interruptions in his production. The years 1938, 1939 and the first half of 1942 were particularly oppressive, as the cartoonist's production had to adapt to the new reality. From the moment of the establishment of the Estado Novo, on November 10th. 1937, to its end, on November 1st. 1945, 1,165 cartoons were published by Belmonte, generally with great prominence, on the first or last page of the newspapers, with the following division:

Year	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Cartoons	05	81	122	236	145	133	208	179	46

In chronological terms, the cartoons can be divided as follows:

1937-1938	It is the phase of confrontation or adaptation, which we have already evidenced in the previous section of this text. These are the first cartoons published after the beginning of the Estado Novo, especially the one with the portrait-style representation of Franklin Roosevelt and his defense of Democracy. The first openly censored cartoons date from this phase, in which random drawings were printed in places where the cartoons would usually be. The focus on domestic policy is almost completely transferred to foreign policy.
1938-1942	Period of greater concentration on international politics, it is the phase in which Belmonte reaches its greatest aesthetic maturity despite the strong performance of censorship. The uses of metaphors and allegories, as well as the performance of the scenic composition in the cartoons, are shown to be Belmonte's main discursive strategies.
1942-1945	At this phase Belmonte finds fewer obstacles in the face of censorship. It coincides with Brazil's declaration of war on the side of the Allies, which was in line with Belmonte's discursive intentions since the beginning of the regime. Despite a hiatus of almost four months, having stopped publishing shortly before the victory on the Western front and returning only a few weeks before the end of the Estado Novo, this is the phase of greatest discursive freedom. The main strategies used in the composition of the images are metaphors, gender representations, the use of chiaroscuro, and artistic allegories.

	Concerning the latter, the cartoons demonstrate a clear artistic value, with the series of images in reference to the Dantean Divine Comedy gaining prominence.
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From the observation of the images, all produced by the same cartoonist/political actor and published in the same newspaper/political vehicle, it is possible to promote an ideal-typical analysis, identifying a structure, or rather, a central problem of meaning orientation (Bohnsack 2009, 22) that covers all or most images. In other words, it is about observing and specifying a fundamental guideline in the scenic composition and the general discourse of the cartoons. Through the abduction method (Bohnsack 2006, 12), the observation of representations, *habitus* (Bourdieu 1980) and worldviews (Mannheim 1964; Mannheim 1980) that are presented in the cartoons is the main goal. Encompassing the three chronological phases described above, and beyond the simple illustration of the presented international politics, it is possible to observe a constant tension and differentiation between two political lines that confront each other: liberal democracies and authoritarian dictatorships. It is, therefore, a problem of orientation that takes place in the configuration of a macro-political identity, linked to regimes and ideologies in evidence in the world at the time.

Added to this is the characterization of the realm of the political. Even in an authoritarian regime, this is established in the plural and visual confluence of action, that is, in the space of experimentation of interpersonal existence (*Inzwischen*), in which the central element is the people, the experiences, the actors who carry out this action, always thought in terms of plurality, not individuality (Liebel 2020, 4). The (graphic) action that Belmonte promotes in the public space, undoubtedly linked to the community of meaning in which it is inserted, expands the intersubjectivity typical of political action, guaranteeing a wide space that receives (and builds) discourses but also sensitivities and recognitions. This is not only linked to what Jacques Rancière defines as the sharing of the sensible, i.e., the concomitance of the aesthetic and the political that is linked to the sensibilities of political action (Rancière 2009), but also in the most fundamental field of the visuality proper to political action.

In broader terms,

When we conceive the intersubjective relationship as a primacy of the political, the existence of the other² becomes a precondition for the conception of the public arena itself, of a space of experiences that is guided by exchange, reflection, joint

² As theorized by Arendt: "Ser e aparecer coincidem (...). Nada e ninguém existe neste mundo cujo próprio ser não pressuponha um espectador. Em outras palavras, nada do que é, à medida que aparece, existe no singular; tudo que é, é próprio para ser percebido por alguém." (Arendt 2012, 35)

action and, also, through confrontation and opposition. This existence is perceived in the form of an image, providing, in the first place, the coordinates through which the individual will act in the space of the real, giving evidence of the most basic plurality in the world, that of appearance, and, secondly, the representations that serve as a basis for thinking, reflecting and judging. In other words, "the political is seen, heard, felt and apprehended through a sensitive way of being, producing judgment and imagination as functions of sensitivity" (Sjöholm 2015, X). The very production of identities, whether individual or collective, is largely based on appearance, with the constituent exteriority (Staten 1984) being one of its most striking characteristics. Models and counter-models become signs that are appropriated and interpreted in different ways according to the context or history of each one. In short, it is in the relationship between exteriority and consciousness that these images transit, carrying with them specific interpretations and meanings. (Liebel 2020, 6)

In the perception of Belmonte's work in this period of the Estado Novo as a properly political action and constituent or participant of the public and visual space of the political that presents itself restricted in this regime, the qualification of this action as resistant, given the interpretative key he provided and the community of meaning that is organized around, is by no means an exaggeration. Especially, if we consider that there was a real possibility of persecution and active censorship, that the artist was fully aware that his actions could be interpreted as affronts to the established regime, and that his position was undoubtedly in opposition to the dominant authority, which was exercised through the domains of repressive apparatuses and their violent use.

The second of the phases pointed out here is the chronologically demarcated phase of the resistance exercised by Belmonte and his strategies of action (which are, as aesthetic elements, components of the visual space of the political). In the period between 1938 and 1942, his resistance action is elaborated and finds its definitions and compositions, improving the aesthetic-discursive strategies with the goal of communication and the development of the community of meaning created in his surroundings. Thus, in the following pages, we will analyze one of these strategies, linked to performativity and mimesis, which is the stylization of the ideas of democracy and authoritarianism in the scenic composition of the characters presented by him in his cartoons and caricatures. In other words, we will consider how Belmonte's political action becomes visual and emotional from the representation of bodies and actions in his work.

Belmonte and the Resistance of the Bodies

Resistance is done with bodies. Not just in the confrontation between resistants and supporters of the regime on the streets. It is also made through the representations of bodies, a proposal of opposition, of stagnation of an authoritarian fluidity that materializes in censorship, and the search for a "smooth" society, without friction, without resistance, as Byung-Chul Han described it (Han 2019) when thinking about aesthetic culture in the 21st century. In the search for a culture that would present itself without obstacles to the exaltation of Vargas' Estado Novo, the DIP (Press and Propaganda Department) and censorship condition the production of cartoonists such as Belmonte.

This condition already announces a change in his drawings, but in no way a renunciation of the debate and the denunciation of the Brazilian political situation at the time. Taking the frameworks in which he develops his narratives as spaces for transmitting specific messages to his readers, Belmonte was able to configure specific dynamics to the allegories of authoritarian and democratic regimes presented in his cartoons. In the analysis of his cartoons, particularly those produced in the second phase of the documents collected (the phase between 1938 and 1942), it is possible to observe the constitution of such personalized representations that go beyond the usual mimetic derision that caricatures bring about bodies of the represented, but a kind of typology that places representations (or representatives) of democratic regimes and authoritarian regimes on different sides. It can even be said that Belmonte's resistance to the authoritarianism of the Estado Novo is manifested in the bodies of the characters in his cartoons.

One of the historical moments in which this dichotomy is most evident is during the Munich Conference and in the months that followed it, when the demands and threats of Europe's fascist regimes became overt. The language of the bodies that Belmonte presents in the scenic composition of his cartoons explicitly demonstrates a game of power, but also of projection of threats and violence by authoritarian countries (in this case, Germany and Italy), of subjection and, to a certain extent, "humility" on the part of democratic countries.



Figure 04: Belmonte. E Agora? In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo, 13 dec. 1938. 3^a. ed., p. 1.



Figure 05: Belmonte. O Hero'ê. In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo: 31 dec. 1938. 4^a. ed., p. 1.

Both images refer to the post-Munich Conference context when the sealed agreements (the handing over of the Sudetenland to the Germans) resulted from a criticized policy of appeasement. In this process, authoritarian countries advanced their territorial claims, which put pressure on democratic countries and ultimately led to the outbreak of World War II a year later. In the cartoons above, we have representations of authoritarian leaders (Hitler and Mussolini) and democratic leaders (Chamberlain, from England), in scenes that represent the "negotiations" between them. The dialogue reveals its ironic sense. In the first (Figure 04), Chamberlain asks Hitler "But what about our friendship treaty?", while the German dictator replies: "Still standing. Friends, friends, business aside". In the second, Mussolini tells Chamberlain: "You will speak with Deladier, France will hand over Corsica, Tunisia and Djibouti, war will be avoided and Italy will

increase its empire!" Chamberlain asks him: "And what am I going to get?" Mussolini then reveals: "You will get applause when you return to London!"

The criticism lies, of course, in expansionism and the authoritarian countries' imposition of their will. However, the performativity expressed in the images and the scenic composition reinforce the arrogant and violent character of the claims, demonstrating how the actions of authoritarian countries go against the "civilized" norms of diplomacy and threatened democratic values in the world.



Figure 06

An in-depth interpretation of the cartoons is not the intention of this text, although important elements must be raised. In the analysis of this article, the focus is on the bodily elements. These secondary traits promote the gesture of the represented characters and guarantee the expressiveness and performativity of these representations. Body expression is often taken as a minor element of the images since appropriation is almost automatic. As the cartoonist and author Will Eisner points out,

The fact is, however, that the "reading" of human posture or gesture is an acquired skill which most humans possess to a greater degree than they know: since it has to do with survival instincts, humans begin to learn it from infancy. From postures we are warned of danger or told of love. (Eisner 2008, 104)

From this body language, we apprehend Chamberlain's position of concern and passivity in the two images above, as well as Hitler's exercise of power in Figure 04. In Figure 05, Mussolini's expression still goes beyond the idea of power. It manifests itself as an evident threat, which can be observed by the shadows of the characters and by the projection of the gesture, directed at the inferiorized character's head (Figure 06). Mussolini's aggression is shown in his hand on his waist, the raised finger directed in a direct threat to Chamberlain, and the

projection of his body, erect but facing (and moving) forward. Chamberlain's subalternity, in turn, is evident in his bottom-up gaze, restrained gestures and the passive expression of his face.

This general image of democratic powers is maintained throughout the whole period, especially when scenic metaphors are not used in the composition of the images. Around these characters from the daily cartoons, an idea of a *habitus* of restraint is created, aimed at non-aggression, peacekeeping and subalternity in the face of authoritarian powers. A symbol is presented as a reducer of these characteristics, which is the umbrella that Chamberlain usually carries in the images. At other times, when other characters present themselves in the search for an agreement or for the maintenance of peace, they appear carrying the umbrella, indicating a more diplomatic position. In Figure 07, Hitler continues to maintain a gesture of threat and manifestation of power, but carries an umbrella when dealing with the non-aggression pact between Germany and the USSR in 1939.



Figure 07: Belmonte. A Hora do Banquete In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo, 16 sep. 1939. 4^a. ed., p. 1.

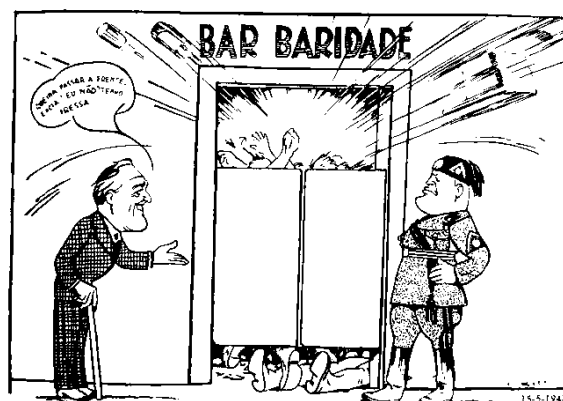


Figure 08: Belmonte. Bar Baridade. In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo: 15 may 1940. 4^a. ed., p. 1.

As a last example (Figure 08), the dichotomy between authoritarian and democratic performativities is evident even in a bar fight (the perfect scenic metaphor for a war where anything goes). Standing in front of the bar, two representative characters of democracy and authoritarianism observe each other. The authoritarian Mussolini, maintains his corporal expression of projection of power and arrogance, while the democrat Franklin Roosevelt, puts himself in a gesture of kindness, presenting the door to his interlocutor and declaring: "Please go ahead, Your Excellency, I'm not in a hurry". Amid a joke that plays with Italy's and USA's reluctance in entering the war, the body language of both reinforces the representation of the *habitus* that Belmonte cultivated for years in his cartoons, linking civility and kindness to the characters representing Western Democracies, and arrogance, violence and expansiveness to authoritarian dictatorships. In this way, values and ideologies are linked to very specific gestures and bodily representations, which, as Belmonte made clear in the first months of the Brazilian dictatorship, exercise criticism and praise; political positions that are understood by those who have the key to their interpretation – the regular readers of the newspaper, a well-defined community in which the cartoonist had an active voice and was seen as a cultural and moral beacon.

Conclusion

In the theatrical plays that Belmonte composes in his cartoons, a specific visual performance is established in the occupation of representative space: it is no longer about national allegories (they come in the form of "typified" characters as Germans, Italians or English, or in the personification of their leaders at that moment, Hitler, Mussolini or Roosevelt), but of representative performativity that refers to the specific concept of each portrayed regime.

At first glance, this performance aims to represent those countries/leaders, and the DIP's policy hides any mention of Brazil and its political situation. Censorship – understood as an act of violence aimed at silencing and removing these voices from the realm of the political – acts as a force of disruption, making it impossible to see the bridges that linked the author/artist to his audience. The signs and meanings of certain messages, in this case the criticism of Getúlio Vargas and the Estado Novo, cease to appear (and, to reinforce, the realm of the political is the realm of appearance). It makes such direct bridges no longer available in the communication between the cartoonist and readers. In this sense, censorship, in fact, imposes limits on the dissemination of ideas and images, seeming, at first, inescapable. Prior censorship, stipulated by the 1937 Charter in Article 122, paragraph 15, item A (Brasil 1937), seems to interrupt direct communication. But

it is from the historical conditioning (or shaped by the historical experience of reading and observing Belmonte's cartoons in previous years) that the relationship between author and readership determines the ultimate meaning of the cartoons that continue to be published, i.e., that continue to have a visibility, to be seen, to have an appearance in the realm of the political.

The term "visibility" is taken here in the most direct way, as the faculty of being visible in a public space. In this sense, it is even possible to think the cartoons, when published and publicized, do not become agents themselves, but carriers of visibility, performativity and discourse. Its performance obeys the logic of its distribution, composing a space demarcated by its presence, an imagined community (in the sense of Anderson 2006) or, rather, a community of meaning that will come into contact with the image, understand its message and, therefore, at most of the times, agree with its content (Liebel 2020, 9). The visibility of Belmonte's cartoons thus constitutes the forefront of his political action, provided, of course, that the right reading key was applied (a key that Belmonte's readers would have, but that the censors, concerned with direct mentions to Brazil and Vargas, would lose). On *Folha da Manhã's* pages, therefore, it was possible to observe the resignation towards the authoritarian regime (demonstrated by the many aligned articles – when not written by DIP itself) coexisting with Belmonte's nonconformism and political dissent.

The censorship practiced by the Estado Novo was not only aimed at restricting ideas and images (visibility) that would ridicule the regime or Vargas himself, but also at building a national image that did not give space to questions about the greatness of the country and the strength of its leader and the authoritarian regime. But it is precisely in this narrative that its weakness can be found, since even without access to the resources of allegory or direct symbology (that is, not being able to represent Brazil or Vargas in its images), the indirect association through concepts and the resources of metaphor and metonymy enable the criticism, mockery and jokes about the situation in the country.

The visibility that is observed is not (only) that of the reality of the most direct event, but it is also the visibility of the concept. The performativity expressed in the characters' bodies, combined with the historical experience of reading Belmonte's cartoons, shapes and expresses well-defined political concepts, such as democracy, authoritarianism, fascism, and communism. The result is an ideological critique of the Estado Novo's regime, always applied to a canvas that, at first glance, only portrayed the chronicle of the Second World War and its time.

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Figure 02: Belmonte. Sem título. In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo, 19 mar. 1938, 3rd. ed., p. 1.

Figure 03: Belmonte. Sem título. In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo, 26 may. 1938, 3rd. ed., p. 1.

Figure 04: Belmonte. E Agora? In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo, 13 dec. 1938. 3rd. ed., p. 1.

Figure 05: Belmonte. O Hero'e. In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo: 31 dec. 1938. 4th. ed., p. 1.

Figure 07: Belmonte. A Hora do Banquete In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo, 16 sep. 1939. 4th. ed., p. 1.

Figure 08: Belmonte. Bar Baridade. In: *Folha da Noite*. São Paulo: 15 may 1940. 4th. ed., p. 1.

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Received: 15/02/2022

Accepted: 23/03/2022