



**“No Brazil exists”:  
Conspiracist Atmospheres  
and Reactionary Worldview  
in Documentaries by  
Brasil Paralelo**

*“Nenhum Brasil Existe”:  
Atmosferas Conspiratórias  
e Cosmvisão Reacionária  
nos Documentários da  
Brasil Paralelo*



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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the conspiracy elements and articulations present in the documentary *Pátria Educadora*, produced by the streaming service Brasil Paralelo. My main hypothesis is that such conspiratorial imaginary must be investigated on the semantic level of the audiovisual discourse, as well as on the dimension of the atmospheres that act as co-adjutants for said discourse. Such an analysis must intersect political studies, affects and communication technologies.

**Keywords:** Brasil Paralelo; Imaginary; Atmospheres; Documentary; Media Technologies.

**Resumo:** Este trabalho tem por objetivo analisar os elementos e articulações de um imaginário conspiratório presente no documentário *Pátria Educadora*, produzido pelo canal de streaming Brasil Paralelo. Minha hipótese principal é que tal imaginário deve ser investigado não somente no plano semântico dos significados produzidos no discurso audiovisual, senão também na dimensão das atmosferas que atuam como coadjuvantes de tal discurso. Propõe-se que tal análise deva se dar na interface entre o campo dos estudos políticos, dos afetos e das tecnologias de comunicação.

**Palavras-chave:** Brasil Paralelo; Imaginário; Atmosferas; Documentário; Tecnologias midiáticas.

The recent success of conservative political and ideological projects at a global level cannot be explained without investigating the imaginary forces that sustain these projects. Although, at least until modern times, it seemed possible to understand the category of the political solely from rational determinations, imagination has always been a fundamental component of popular decisions and the structuring of political systems<sup>2</sup>. Today, however, its impact has not only been enhanced (thanks to the proliferation of electronic media), but it has also become much more clearly perceptible, given the relevance that images, signs and immaterial dimensions of experience have in the daily lives of technologised societies. Referring to the classic concept of the “society of the spectacle”, coined by Guy Debord in the 1960s, Chiara Bottici (2014, p. 2) notes that “the very possibility of locating reality has disappeared”, so that “the virtual risks becoming the most real”. It’s no coincidence, then, that affections and emotions currently take centre stage in research into elections and political campaigns. For Raoul Girardet (1987), mythical thought structures have always been present in the most diverse ideological systems, which function under the influence of powerful imaginary narratives, such as fantasies about messianic figures and conspiracy theories. At a time of tremendous influence from the electronic media, the dimensions of entertainment, imagination and sensory experience could not but play a central role in the constitution of the political scene.

The aim of this work is precisely to investigate the basic configurations of conservative imagery in high-impact media products. To be more precise, the object chosen is a documentary series that can function as a microscopic view of the reactionary imagination in contemporary Brazil. This investigation will take into account not only the construction of images in audiovisual products, but also the atmospheres or ambiances that surround these images and act as coadjutants in the production of certain ideological discourses. In other words, the aim is to understand how the semiotic contents of these discourses are interwoven with the production of non-semantic effects (sound, lighting, colour, etc.) to construct a persuasive conspiratorial image of reality, in which a secret and centuries-old battle between good and evil is taking place.

*Brasil Paralelo* is a streaming service that produces content for conservative audiences. The name is a confession of faith: not only does it seek a supposedly independent (parallel) position to what is considered the “mainstream” view of the

<sup>2</sup> The importance of affections, feelings and imagination in the field of political studies has grown so much in recent years that it has even given rise to the expression “affective turn”. Cf. Hoggett and Thompson (2012).

traditional media (naturally co-opted by a project of leftist domination), but it also produces “parallel” views of history, revisionist narratives, discourses that question everything its owners believe to be a “leftist” perspective. With a turnover of more than 30 million reais a year, the service currently has more than 300,000 subscribers. These are significant figures even for a country of continental dimensions like Brazil, but with enormous inequality of access to electronic media. *Brasil Paralelo*’s speciality is the production of “educational” documentaries that aim to present their audience with the “historical truth” of the facts without any kind of “ideologization”<sup>3</sup> of their content.

The product that particularly interests me is the documentary *Pátria Educadora* (2020), which traces an alternative history of education in the West, marked by the perception of a progressive decay of traditional pedagogical values and good school customs. If education is understood as a “search for truth”, founded on the Christian tradition and the idea of the liberal arts, then certain historical events such as the French Revolution and the Enlightenment are nothing more than essential milestones in this vast process of destroying truth. The enemy to be fought is therefore the secularisation of society, promoted by scientific rationalism and libertarian and progressive ideologies. What I intend to show is that, despite the fundamental importance of the ideological meanings of *Pátria Educadora*, attention must also be paid to the way in which these discourses are “encapsulated” and presented to the public. In other words, I am suggesting that analysing audiovisual material takes on new dimensions when complemented by ways of reading and interpreting it that take into account the extrasemantic dimension of the work, its “atmospheres”, its creation of affective climates and emotional environments. Such a way of reading demands special attention to the *Stimmungen* of cultural objects, in other words, the “materialities of communication” which, without representing a meaning in themselves, are essential components for the production of meaning in the communication process<sup>4</sup>. This perspective is by no means innovative. We can find it in Inês Gil’s work, *The Atmosphere in Cinema*. For the author, atmosphere “governs man’s relationship with his physical and affective environment. It is no coincidence that the German Expressionists associated it with the notion of *Stimmung* - a kind

<sup>3</sup> See the “About us” section on the *Brasil Paralelo* website. Available at: [https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/about?utm\\_medium=home](https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/about?utm_medium=home). Accessed on: 19 Feb. 2023.

<sup>4</sup> The definition comes from Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2004, p. 8): materialities of communication are “all those phenomena and conditions that contribute to the production of meaning without being meaning in themselves”.

of mood and soul emanating from the ‘things’ of the world” (GIL, 2005, p. 18). Its action in the audiovisual domain can take place in different ways, always subtly and sometimes almost imperceptibly, but always an “active phenomenon that can leave an important trace in memory” (GIL, 2005, p. 25).

The German term *Stimmung* derives from voice, *Stimme*, and has to do with phenomena of a sensory nature, with bodily affections, such as sounds or tactile perceptions. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2011, p. 13) defines the reading of *Stimmungen* as a kind of solicitude for the dimension of the forces that surround our bodies as “potentially physical realities and can thus trigger ‘inner feelings’ (*innere Gefühle*)” without a level of representation necessarily being involved. In fact, the notion of *Stimmung* has gained a relevant position in the investigative practices of the human sciences thanks to a series of German thinkers, such as Gumbrecht, Gernot Böhme, Hermann Schmitz or Martin Seel. The second proposition of my approach is the centrality of what could be defined as “conspiratorial atmospheres” in the current conservative imaginary. In other words, it is about creating a sense of permanent suspicion, that something is going very wrong in this world and that the person responsible for these evils can be identified - even if this usually appears as a diffuse, undefined entity. It is no coincidence that today there is so much talk of “fake news”, historical revisionism and conspiracy theories. For the reactionary imagination, temporal linearity has broken down; “time is out of joint”, as Hamlet would say<sup>5</sup>, and it is now imperative to “set it right” once again.

The interesting thing about the conspiratorial imagination is, as Jenny Rice (2020, p. 12) states, the notion that “our familiar frames of evidence, which emphasise empirical validity or fidelity, are too limited for understanding what is going on here”. We therefore need an explanatory *hyperimagination* that is equal to the frightening complexity of our situation. What emerges, then, is a particular idea of evidence as “an *affective* process rather than a static artefact” (Rice, 2020, p. 13). Conspiracy can be clearly articulated on a discursive level while only being hinted at through visual figurations (obscurity, blurred faces, symbols like masks) and auditory ones (spectral and terrifying soundtracks, dramatic tones). The contemporary popularity of conspiracy theories has a lot to do, according to Pierre-André Taguieff, (2021, p. 9), with a globalisation process perceived as uncontrollable and full of threats, a potent generator of social anxieties. This anxiety took a very tangible form with the 2020 World Economic Forum meeting in Davos. Based on the idea that the COVID-19

<sup>5</sup> This is the famous expression used by Hamlet in Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

pandemic would represent an opportunity to “reimagine and redefine our world to create a healthier, fairer and more prosperous future”, in the words of Klaus Schwab, head of the Forum, the expression “The Great Reset” emerged, generating more than 8 million interactions on Facebook and being shared on Twitter more than two million times since its appearance<sup>6</sup>. In the conspiratorial narrative about “The Great Reset”, the initiatives to restrict movement and block borders were not introduced to contain the infection, but to provoke a global economic collapse that would ultimately lead to the establishment of a world socialist government. In this case, the apparent contradiction contained in the idea of a socialist government ruled by millionaires and the global elite is of little importance. The logic of the imaginary, as Gilbert Durand said, is a logic of paradox. The affective dimension thus supplants rational arguments.

How can these conspiratorial signs, atmospheres and fantasies be identified in the microcosm of *Brasil Paralelo*? First of all, it seems symptomatic that the company uses so many financial resources to combat its conspiratorial and denialist image. The intensity of the lawfare directed at investigators or entities such as Wikipedia, with whom the production company has been involved in a legal dispute, is perhaps one of the most obvious indications of *Brasil Paralelo*'s ideological character and revisionist leanings. One of its most popular documentaries, *7 denúncias: as consequências do caso covid-19*, consists, for example, of a series of criticisms of measures to combat the pandemic, such as the use of masks and social distancing. In *Pátria Educadora*, the conspiratorial suggestion already appears in the digital animation that opens the documentary. We see a school with empty chairs, in a dark and sad atmosphere. The blackboard is converted into a cinema screen with images of Brasilia, followed by money tickets that lead to an image of two politicians shaking hands - in a suggestion of deals being made over a world map. The symbolism here is important, as it is about presenting the public with secret global conspiracies. Finally, we see the image of a protest and confusion in the classroom, which ends with the title “Pátria” in stone letters and the word “educadora” below in graffiti. The music is minimalist, with an elementary and repetitive rhythmic pattern, almost monotonous, but implying a certain mystery.

It is important to emphasise the essential role that sound effects and soundtracks play in documentaries. As Inês Gil (2005, pp. 155-157) explains,

<sup>6</sup> See the BBC report “‘Great Reset’: how economic plan became global conspiracy theory”. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-57666500>. Accessed 21 Feb, 2023.

“the sound filmic atmosphere sometimes acquires such importance that it exceeds the visual atmosphere [...] extra-diegetic music often functions as a virtual extension of the representation”. Something is expressed that sometimes has a profound relationship with the images and, at other times, clashes with them, generating an effect of sensory disturbance. In *Pátria Educadora*, the viewer realises, in a didactic way and right at the start of the narrative, that they are about to enter a zone of corruption, the destruction of traditional values and plots to seduce young people through ideological preaching strategies. The music reinforces the idea of a mystery to be revealed, of the repetition of a historical pattern that has been going on for centuries and centuries of attempts to destroy teaching. The theatrical character of this introduction is in line with a general trait of contemporary aesthetic sensibility, of what Gernot Böhme (2019, p. 14) defines as “a theatrical epoch” (*einem theatralischen Zeitalter*), like a new Baroque. The spectacular is a fundamental part of contemporary visual culture, in which atmospheres express “something undefined (*Unbestimmtes*) and difficult to say” (Böhme, 2019., p. 21), beyond rational rectitude. This is the seductive language of the media, which appeals to the sensibilities of a young audience in search of simple, quick and digitally compressed messages. It is a curious fact of our time how skilfully the reactionary mentality has been able to appropriate contemporary media and languages - and possibly more effectively than the progressive camp<sup>7</sup>.

The historical vision of *Pátria Educadora* is that of a progressive decay of pedagogical ideals. The French Revolution and the Enlightenment, for example, are treated as decisive components of this terrible questioning of traditional notions of truth and authority, which reaches its peak with Marxism and the secularisation of society. In this context, compulsory public education - the fault, according to *Brasil Paralelo*, of the Protestant Reformation - is established as a tool of ideological control. It is no surprise, then, that the best schools in this dark world were military or Catholic and that it would now be necessary to defend the role of the family and homeschooling in shaping children’s minds. For Brazil’s conservative mentality, the United States is the last bastion of resistance against the advances of the socialist domination project. All the speeches, so popular today and vigorously defended by far-right celebrities such as Olavo de Carvalho, about the right to own guns or the importance of home education, were entirely imported from the US experience.

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<sup>7</sup> In *The Revolution that wasn't* (2019), Jen Schradie argues that digital activism today favours conservatives and economic elites, who still own many digital platforms.

This expresses a unique aspect of the Brazilian middle-class imagination. The tradition of giving debutantes and children trips to Disney expresses the deep fantasy of North America as a paradise land, where milk and honey flow in the streets and everyone is entirely free to pursue the freedom of enterprise.

It is no coincidence that the term “entrepreneurship” has become a catchphrase in the Brazil of the new right. If you are not rich, it is because you do not work, or maybe you are not entrepreneurial enough. According to Rodrigo Nunes (2022), the notion of “entrepreneurship” is a structural element in the psychology of “Bolsonarism”. The success of right-wing digital influencers and the extreme popularity of conservative vloggers are facts that are closely related to the idea of a large “entrepreneurial movement” that accompanied the reactionary wave. “Even when it doesn’t lead to a career in politics, political ‘entrepreneurship’ always involves pecuniary advantages,” writes Nunes (2022, p. 92). This is the idea behind the creation of *Brasil Paralelo* by a group of young entrepreneurs from the south of Brazil. After all, why not combine a pedagogical project for the new traditionalist Brazil (yes, I realise the phrase sounds contradictory) with a promising source of profit?

In *Pátria Educadora*, the historical path of educational decadence culminates in Brazil with the rise of the Workers’ Party to power. The PT and its alliance with the celebrated educator Paulo Freire were responsible for the introduction of cultural Marxism into universities and the consequent state of penury and disorder (not to mention “shambles”) in educational institutions. As the interviewees in the documentary repeat, universities receive a lot of money but are inefficient, the institutions are sick and the ideologically diverted academic research is dedicated to pornographic themes, paedophilia or the defence of “gender ideology” - issues that do not contribute to the country’s social demands. In the words of one of Bolsonaro’s (many) former education ministers, Abraham Weintraub, universities are “mini-revolutionary factories”.

It should be pointed out that, despite its propaganda of ideological neutrality, *Brasil Paralelo* is very careful when choosing its interviewees. Almost all of them are clear advocates of an extreme right-wing political and cultural project, with the occasional appearance of a left-wing intellectual celebrity, such as Slavoj Žižek, but usually out of context. The speeches of conservatives are generally accompanied by a tranquil, relaxing, inspiring soundtrack, while the speeches of individuals like Paulo Freire or Lula are set against the backdrop of sombre, mysterious and sometimes slightly dissonant compositions. Let us look at what happens during Paulo



Freire's testimony about his family history, whose simple and intimate narrative is enveloped by music with long notes, dragging cadences and almost no resting tonic chords. However, the change in sound atmosphere for the next interviewee, Thomas Giuliano (identified only as a "teacher and author of a book on Paulo Freire"), is very evident. Although just as mysterious, the sound accompaniment now becomes more cheerful and affirmative. The transition feels like a Platonic passage from the world of shadows and falsehood to the light of truth.

The historical vision of *Pátria Educadora* is typical of conspiracy theories. As Michael Butter (2020, p. 21) explains, these theories "are based on the assumption that human beings are capable of directing the course of history according to their own intentions - in other words, that history is plannable. They attribute to conspirators the ability to control the destiny of a country or even the world for years or decades." The progressive degradation of the education system is therefore not the result of a series of complex causes and random events with no necessary connection, but rather a programme that has been carefully and intentionally articulated over centuries of history. In this programme, science, philosophy and schools are social actors that work together to destroy truth (or at least Christian truth). It doesn't matter if the interpretations of the facts are partial, simplistic or biased, what is necessary is to construct a linear narrative in which the events are connected with mathematical perfection. It is based on this proposal that one of the interviewees states, without any embarrassment, that, for Kant, "rational knowledge is impossible"<sup>8</sup>. The archive images are carefully chosen (many, of course, in black and white) and are generally dark, grainy, and sometimes even out of focus, as if to suggest the confusing and disintegrating nature of this story of the disintegration of traditions.

Paulo Freire, the great enemy of good education in Brazil, is given a significant amount of time in the documentary. To explain his worldwide success, including in the paradise of capitalism, the United States, it is necessary to suggest that communist forces have infiltrated university institutions on a global level. However, not even the church escapes this contamination, perpetrated mainly by

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<sup>8</sup> The assertion seems misplaced in reference to a philosopher who wrote: "the law of reason for seeking unity is necessary, since without it there would be no reason and, without the latter, no coherent use of the understanding" (Kant, 1956, p. 611). The characterisation of Kant as an enemy of reason and religion already appears in a polemic exchange in 2019 between Olavo de Carvalho (1947-2022), an intellectual celebrity of conservative thought and a frequent guest on *Brasil Paralelo's* productions, and a group of university philosophy professors. See the report in the newspaper *O Globo* at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/olavo-de-carvalho-esta-errado-nao-entende-kant-dizem-tres-nomes-de-destaque-da-academia-brasileira-23440419>. Accessed on: 20 Feb. 2023.

liberation theology. Paulo Freire's professional career is explained by this network of connections, which links him, for example, to Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, "one of the greatest disseminators of liberation theology in Brazil", as one of the interviewees remarks. Naturally, this network of connections led to the founding of the Workers' Party. Various political articulations unfolded around Paulo Freire, revealing the intimate relationship between the socialist project and a political-ideological programme. For *Brasil Paralelo*, education cannot have political content, as it risks becoming a process of indoctrination.

The three episodes of *Pátria Educadora* make up a microcosmic portrait of the neoconservative imaginary in Brazil. Its basic axes can be summarised in four ideals: 1. the solution to the ills of the present must be sought in the distant past of tradition, in the world of absolute and unique truth; 2. history is seen as the manifestation of a secularist (and communist, of course) plot to destroy truth; 3. truth has a metaphysical foundation which, of course, is based on belief in the God of Christian monotheism; 4. difference and chance are expressions of chaos that must be fought in favour of the return of unique truth. To this end, the fight must be preceded by the revelation of the secret processes of history, of the real intentions of the agents who claim to be fighting for social equality. *Pátria Educadora* is therefore an expression of the Platonic myth of the cave. To win, the light must illuminate the darkness with the rays of reason, but a reason grounded in religious belief (of course, of a specific religion). The combat is fierce and sometimes even requires the use of the enemy's weapons. Spectacularisation and aesthetic appeal are indispensable tools in an era of the "progressive aestheticisation of reality", in the words of Gernot Böhme (2019, p. 7).

*Brasil Paralelo* therefore spares no resources in the production of its documentaries, in an effort to make them palatable and attractive to the widest possible audience. It is hard to say, however, whether the effort is successful. The more than three hours of *Pátria Educadora* unfold painfully, to the rhythm of an off-screen narrative accompanied by illustrations and explanatory subtitles that treat the viewer like a primary school pupil (one of the interviewees, at the end of his explanation of the assimilation of Aristotle by the Christian world, even asks: "did you understand?"). Throughout the three episodes, the historical succession of pictures is accompanied by minimalist, repetitive instrumental music. Admittedly, this innocuous accompaniment does not risk diverting the audience's attention, but it does cooperate in creating a general atmosphere of irresolution, suffocation,

and slowness of time. The environments in which the interviews are filmed often reinforce this feeling. They are dimly lit offices, with the indefatigable library in the background, in which the figures of the interviewees are cut out with soft light.

In this sense, the section in which Olavo de Carvalho “explains” Kantian philosophy is curiously emblematic of the documentary. In front of his apparently vast library, the interviewee states that, for Kant, everything we know is a projection of our cognitive structures. We then see a kind of blackboard on which two circles appear with the words “Appearance” and “Thing in Itself”. In a way, it is as if we were prisoners inside our own minds, with no direct access to the famous thing itself - in other words, to the world as it would appear without the distortions of our perceptual limitations. Again, the dark Platonic cave in which the chained wallow is symbolically evoked. The soundtrack is now sombre, with a violin that seems to intone the sadness of this limited vision, which, according to the voiceover, will lead to contemporary relativism. This presentation of Kant functions almost as a staging of the ambience that runs through practically the entire documentary: imprisonment, limited spaces, and difficulty in seeing anything clearly. The image that follows is of a painting by the German Julius Fehr (1860-1900) depicting a rabbi reading manuscripts in his poorly lit studio. The painter was known for his depictions of human figures, especially farmers, in situations of embarrassment and difficult with the innovations of modern life<sup>9</sup>. Whether by chance or intent, the imagery could not be more significant. Here we are faced with a worldview that cannot cope with the advance of time. In fact, one gets the impression that the West has been going wrong since the end of the Middle Ages. History is seen as a catabasis, as a progressive descent into the hell of post-religious worldliness.

*Pátria Educadora* thus represents the intriguing and paradoxical encounter between a deeply conservative worldview and the universe of digital technologies and environments. The producer’s content can be accessed on platforms as diverse as Spotify, Youtube, Google Podcast and Deezer. Technological progress is thus subjected to a theocratic tribunal and strategically used as a proselytising tool. Its content is very transparent about the imagery on which it is based. However, the symbols and myths of this imagery are always accompanied by the creation of environments that complement the message at the level of sensibility and material

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<sup>9</sup> See the entry for Julius Fehr in the German Wikipedia. Available at [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius\\_Fehr](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Fehr). Accessed on: 20 Feb. 2023.

affection. These atmospheres, like any atmosphere, are not as perceptible as their ideological content, but they are equally important in the construction of messages.

In this context, the task of theory is to investigate not only the production of meaning in the media, but also the constitution of sound and visual atmospheres, the “material” dimension of communication processes. This task is particularly important in the field of politics. According to Chiara Bottici (2014, p. 11), “politics has always been an imaginary, because we cannot think of politics without imagining a public and a clamour for legitimacy [...] the role of images in contemporary politics is such that they can no longer just mediate our political affairs, but that we now run the risk of them doing politics in our place”. The question we need to answer now is: what kind of political imaginary do we want for our society?

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