

To talk as if they had a manifesto in their mouth (video)

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abstract

The act of writing and/or reading a manifesto is inherently political: bearing the weight of historical struggles and contemporary aspirations. Situating the camera inside my mouth, this video art piece reclaims the manifesto as an intimate, visceral experience, grounding it in the physicality of the body.

This artistic approach invites the viewer to traverse the blurred boundaries between reader and performer, queerness and academia, provoking contemplation on the deeply personal and subjective nature of the inside of my mouth. My body is a manifestation of queer activism and activity, highlighting that it's not merely about the words spoken but the understanding rooted in life experiences and embodied knowledge.

As I read my *The Southern Butthole Manifesto* with a dildo camera inside my mouth, the words become unintelligible, mirroring the material, historical, and experiential complexities inherent in the manifesto's message. This deliberate refusal to be clearly understood underscores the challenge of understanding, akin to the difficulty of comprehending the manifold layers of my queer experience as someone from the global south based in the global north (where interpretations of my body differ significantly.)

Reflecting on the expectations such as "learn German to get a better job", or "if you don't speak English, you won't be part of the international art market", or "if you don't change your voice, you will never have a partner", or "you need to change the way you speak to stay here" (it was at the end of my first semester in Social Sciences, in 1998), reinforces the disparities in how my body and voice are perceived in these two contrasting worlds.

The division between South and North transcends mere geopolitics; it extends into the realm of discourse, influencing our experiences, freedoms, movements, and ways of being. These discourses shape our possibilities, our accesses, and our ways to be understood. Consequently, when my southern language is not comprehended by northern ears, I grapple with the question: What should I do? In response to Gayatri Spivak's query about whether the subaltern can speak, I

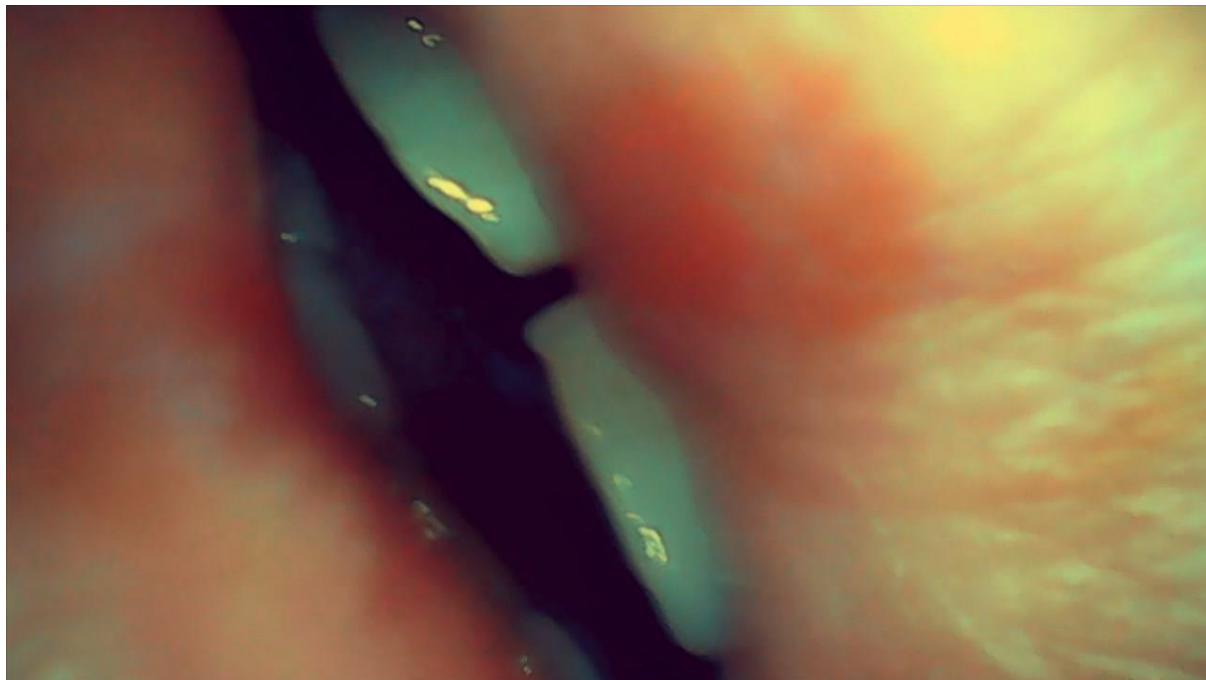
affirm yes, the subaltern can speak. The issue lies in the unwillingness of those in power to listen. To maintain this lack of receptivity, they have devised tools that are intentionally inscrutable, elusive, and inaccessible. While some embrace so-called "science" with its narratives and empirical evidence, others rely on whispers, prayers, and dreams to understand the world beyond its surface. The question here is what holds more significance: what is said, what is heard, who is speaking, within or outside the confines of the mouth, what is sense, or what the eyes perceive.

This multifaceted work challenges conventional perceptions of language and communication, inviting viewers to delve into the intricacies of embodied knowledge and the relentless struggle for recognition in the face of linguistic, political and geographical disparities.

keywords

manifesto, queerness, Global South, language, embodied knowledge

Pêdra Costa | To Talk As If They Had a Manifesto



TO TALK AS IF THEY HAD A MANIFESTO IN THEIR MOUTH

(Pêdra Costa, 2023, 03:51. Video still,
courtesy of the artist.)

Based on "The Southern Butthole Manifesto"
(Pêdra Costa, 2017).

The Southern Butthole Manifesto

The butthole's investigations are theoretical and practical, always. Theory is on the skin and the practice comes from life. The theory only exists if there is the experience. It only transforms itself if it goes through the body. The Southern Butthole is movement. The constraints and rigid systems of the body do not

flow in these studies. We do not fight against anything. Our fights were always defeated. We already learned about this in the history of the world. We are Sorceresses and Healers. Our dance and our Ginga¹ is our fight, our way of loving, playing, being in connection with our community. We are always collective, never individuals. The artfulness is the basis of our whole life against the colonizer's project. Artfulness is not learned and taught.

Our knowledge would never be recognized if they were not appropriated by white and/or Europeanized knowledge and bodies. Our voices are not audible. Thus, we have all the autonomy and authority to found such studies. Try as we might, we will never be authorized as a field of knowledge by whiteness. We do not need its approval!

We move forward criticizing the „colonial fantasies“ about our bodies and, specifically, butts. Our fierce criticism comes from our buttholes. Our butthole is our power. So many interdictions, religious and colonial fantasies about our butts. Anthropophagy does not unite us anymore. We already ate them as a condition violently imposed by the colonial civilizing education. Now we vomit them and we shit them. To the South of the world, to the butthole of the body.

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notes

- 1** Ginga is the basic movement of Capoeira.