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**The power of failure, the  
uprising of the wild: an  
interview with Jack Halberstam**

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ISSN: 2175-8689

### ABSTRACT

On May 25, 2023, the North-American professor and researcher Jack Halberstam from Columbia University was in the city of Rio de Janeiro (RJ) to participate in the Queer Aqui - Together in Hard Times Conference. During this conference, Halberstam gave an interview to researchers Ribamar Oliveira (UFRJ) and Dieison Marconi (UFRJ), now published by Eco-pós Journal. In the following pages, Halberstam makes productive comments on topics such as transfeminism, non-binary populations, politics of alliances and the conservative upsurge marked by the anti-queer and anti-trans offensive. In addition, the researcher comments on some of his main works, offering Brazilian readers a new opportunity to get to know the trajectory of one of the most prolific and provocative researchers in contemporary queer studies

**KEYWORDS:** *Queer Theory; Jack Halberstam; Gender; Body; Politics.*

### RESUMO

No dia 25 de maio de 2023 o professor e pesquisador norte-americano Jack Halberstam da Universidade de Columbia esteve na cidade do Rio de Janeiro (RJ) para participar da Conferência Queer Aqui - *Together in Hard Times*/ Juntas em tempos de luta. Por ocasião dessa conferência, Halberstam concedeu uma entrevista aos pesquisadores Ribamar Oliveira (UFRJ) e Dieison Marconi (UFRJ), agora publicada pela Revista Eco-pós. Nas páginas seguintes, Halberstam tece produtivos comentários a respeito de temas como transfeminismo, populações não binárias, política das alianças e o cenário de recrudescimento conservador marcado pela ofensiva anti-queer e antitrans. Além disso, o pesquisador comenta algumas de suas principais obras, oferecendo aos leitores brasileiros uma nova oportunidade de conhecer a trajetória de um dos pesquisadores mais prolíficos e provocantes dos estudos queer contemporâneos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Teoria Queer; Jack Halberstam; Gênero; Corpo; Política.*

### RÉSUMÉ

Le 25 mai 2023, le professeur et chercheur américain Jack Halberstam de l'université de Columbia était à Rio de Janeiro (RJ) pour participer à la conférence Queer Aqui - Together in Hard Times. Au cours de cette conférence, Halberstam a accordé une interview aux chercheurs Ribamar Oliveira (UFRJ) et Dieison Marconi (UFRJ), qui a été publiée par le journal Eco-pós. Dans les pages qui suivent, Halberstam fait des commentaires productifs sur des sujets tels que le transfémisme, les populations non binaires, les politiques d'alliances et la poussée conservatrice marquée par l'offensive anti-queer et anti-trans. En outre, le chercheur commente certains de ses principaux ouvrages, offrant ainsi aux lecteurs brésiliens une nouvelle occasion de connaître la trajectoire de l'un des chercheurs les plus prolifiques et les plus provocateurs des études queer contemporaines.

**MOTS-CLÉS:** *Théorie queer ; Jack Halberstam ; Genre ; Corps ; Politique.*

On May 25, 2023 the Queer Aqui - Together in Hard Times Conference was held at Casa da Glória, a cultural events centre located in the central region of Rio de Janeiro (RJ), which brought together a group of Brazilian and foreign researchers around themes such as queer studies and politics of difference. Researchers such as Daniel da Silva, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Denilson Lopes, Eng-Beng Lim, Gil Hochberg, Arnaldo Cruz-Malave, Licia Fiol-Matta, Tavia Nyong'o and Jack Halberstam constituted a transnational fraction of speeches around the theory, art and queer politics in the global context, anti-gender movements, anti-trans offensive, solidarity networks, transnational activism and strategies of political resistance to global capitalism. On the occasion of this conference, which was organized by Columbia University and the Columbia Global Centers, professor and researcher Jack Halberstam, who most recently gained prominence in Brazil due to the translation and publication of his book *The queer art of failure* (Cepe Editora, 2020), gave an interview to Ribamar Oliveira (PhD student at the Post-Graduate Program in Communication and Culture at UFRJ) and Dieison Marconi (Post-doctoral student at the Post-Graduate Program in Communication and Culture at UFRJ).

The queer art of failure (2020) is just one piece of Halberstam's prolific and provocative study and research trajectory, an intellectual attentive to the contemporary reality of vulnerable populations and to the global, capitalist and state mechanisms of production of control, violence and precariousness. Currently Professor of Gender Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, Halberstam is also the author of books such as *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Duke UP, 1995), *Female Masculinity* (Duke UP, 1998), *In A Queer Time and Place* (NYU Press, 2005) and *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Beacon Press, 2012). Halberstam's last book, released in 2020 by Duke UP, is entitled *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* and so far none of these works have been published in Brazil.

Halberstam, as he himself says, is a counterintuitive teacher and researcher, with a tendency to use terms that are initially unwelcome, such as failure and savagery, to unblock systems of thought, normative cultural engineering and aesthetic and political conservatism, thus producing a sparkling thought of light and shadow that opens some gaps, or "wormholes", as he also tells us, and that reveal the possibility of demolishing a world and building other possible worlds. Far from the simple rhetoric that could demonstrate a mere naive projection of utopian futures, and even flirting with the antisocial theory of queer studies, Halberstam's notorious work, as well as this interview, demonstrates his overwhelming positive confidence

in political alliances through shared precariousness. That is, alliances and solidarity networks that are not constituted only by markers of body, gender and sexuality, terms generally conceived as objects par excellence of queer theories, but also broad solidarity networks that take into account the vulnerabilities imposed by systems of differentiation of race, ethnicity, social class and, consequently, precariousness imposed by global capitalism, by climate change and by the democratic fractures experienced by populations from different countries of the globe in recent years.

Producing uprisings, body and epistemic movement from the past, not only from more distant or recent historical times, but also uprisings inspired by an anarchic childhood that insisted on asking why things are the way they are, this “childish and immature” fantasy of not being conformed, is perhaps one of the highlights of an interview that walks through many urgent issues: transfeminism, non-binary populations, critical appreciation of art produced by LGBT people, queer children and the docility of adult bodies, transnational political alliances, production of knowledge in peripheral countries, capitalism and contemporary neoliberalism are some of the topics addressed in this interview, through which we hope to contribute to making Halberstam's work better known in Brazil and also contribute to the debate around the politics of difference.

We are very grateful to Jack Halberstam for his kindness and enthusiasm in granting this interview. We wish you all a great read!

**Dieson Marconi**  
**Ribamar Oliveira**

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## The power of failure, the uprising of the wild: an interview with Jack Halberstam

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** His work as a researcher distances itself from conventional knowledge, contemporary neoliberal optimism and so-called high theory, dialoguing strongly with an alternative theoretical and methodological field (the "low" theory, popular culture, cartoons, queer films, life experiences diverging from the norm, etc.). Still, a large part of its empirical, theoretical and methodological references come from the countries of the global North, a region that to this day occupies a hegemonic position in the production of knowledge and is responsible for different forms of intellectual colonisation. How do you see queer knowledge produced in countries, such as Brazil, that occupy a peripheral position in the production of knowledge? And what contribution can this queer knowledge produced in the global South offer to countries that still occupy central positions in the production and dissemination of knowledge, even in minority fields of knowledge such as queer studies?

**Jack Halberstam:** You know, I think this is partly what the conference on Thursday is about. Is to say that so much of the knowledge about queer existence life theory has come from North America, that it has only limited application everywhere else. And that part of the goal for Thursday is to bring queer researchers to Brazil. Yes, to speak, but more to listen. Yeah. And to try to create the beginnings of what I hope will be a longer dialogue about the different challenges in a place like Brazil, with multiple multiracial histories and you know, different sites of struggle and contestation. I don't pretend to know in advance what all of those sites are, but I do know that the liberal scripts of personhood that govern a North American context will not apply at all in the same way in Brazil, where I'm absolutely sure that personhood and histories of deviance and interactions with the State have very, very different narratives attached to them than the ones in the US. So yes, in my work I am very much trying to grapple with the discursive field produced within this hegemonic context. And I think probably the hegemonic context in Brazil, is really different. There are different kinds of relations between wealth and poverty, different scripts that govern real estate, land, dispossession and possession, sexuality, and resistance. These are all different values here, so hopefully we find out.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** And let me ask about the translation of queer words here. In Brazil, we have many words like *viado*, *bicha*, *sapatão*, *traveco*... What do you think about the translations of these complex queer words?

**Jack Halberstam:** I think that we should not be translating everything into English, I really, really do. Like, if you take a word like transgender: transgender is already a made-up word. And, you know, comes from Greek and Latin roots and so on. And in Brazil, in Spanish speaking contexts, in many, many different language contexts there are different words for trans. And because of this global human rights discourse, everything gets translated back into a recognizable terminology from an English-speaking context. And then people look for subjects that match up with that to, and in the process you miss all the different ways that people are trans or queer in a locality. And so, I actually think that we need more linguistic variation rather than simplification, because simplification always means back to English. And the back to English means that people have to be recognizable in terms of being established by a Euro-American context, and that becomes another site for how we're differential. So, I don't know what you think about that. I mean these terms in Portuguese seem really different, right? And they have different histories, and they attach to different communities and like, *travesti* doesn't mean what transgender means. And it might be associated with community or trans women who do sex work, or we live together, or are part of cultural resistance movement, whereas transgender might just mean a middle-class person who decides to avail themselves of certain medical operations. You know, so it's... It's really a moment for linguistic plurality.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** Currently, we have noticed that the critical appreciation and public debate around works by women artists, black and LGBT people has become unenforceable or extremely turbulent, especially in digital networks. The argument, not always exposed, but occasionally observable, is that negative aesthetic judgments regarding works produced by subjects enrolled in minority groups should not become public, because they would only be tools for discrimination and silencing of these groups. It has also been common understanding, especially in activist contexts, that a work of art is nothing more than a representation device and that it should be linked to the strategies of activism organized around egalitarian agendas or oriented towards action and social change. In this case, it seems to us that

there are two very important moralist limitations: one that concerns the freedom of cultural criticism and artistic expression, and another that reduces the existence of art to the politics of representation (generally stationed in the binarism of negative representation and positive representation of certain social groups). Considering that your work is strongly linked to the aesthetic value of works of art, including those that we might at first judge as depoliticised, what understanding do you draw from this scenario?

**Jack Halberstam:** When people are not well represented, it limits the kind of critical discourse that can be directed at that book. And, on the other hand, there is a question about the idea that art is nothing more than a device of representation and that it should be linked to strategies of activism. Well, I mean, I guess I don't think of art that way. For example, I don't think of artists as a place to promote a position. Or as a place where we must treat the work of people from minorities differently. I think that, unfortunately, we favor the work of the white man, and we must try to understand how this happens aesthetically. But I think the rest of the question is a little unclear to me. Maybe I'm not understanding correctly. Yeah, well, for example, in my work, I've really tried to defend work that's not... On the one hand, I write a lot about popular culture. On the other hand, I write about queer and trans art that is abstract, in order to say that work about queer and trans people should not be reduced simply to the body or the figure. Because then you can only have the politics of representation in which the human body is central, and that limits what can be said about the queer or trans body. Therefore, for 20 years I have been advocating that we should use forms of abstraction to broaden the sense of what equity or transgenderism is. So that's part of the question. But the other part is what you're saying, that art shouldn't just be a place where you make a point. Yeah, it needs to be the place where maybe new ideas are forged or articulated because, you know, the form of representation is not easily transformed into an argument. But on the other hand, I have a different opinion when it comes to popular culture. I often say that pop culture can offer us a pedagogical base from which we can discuss complicated things. You understand what I want to say? So I use the movie Finding Nemo, or a cartoon, as a text to open up ideas that would otherwise be extremely complicated. But if you read the supposedly childish or immature texts, you can play in different ways, as there is a playful character to these texts, like the children's cartoons I write about.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** A constant argument in your work is that queer lives have the power to build other worlds by refusing recognised forms of success such as maturity, accumulation of wealth and reproductive capacity. In your critique of these models, you often use the example of children's animations, while in Brazil, as in other Western countries, the anti-trans and anti-queer offensive has used the figure of the child as something to be intensely protected against everything that can be sheltered under the term queer, for example we had in our country at least 69 anti-trans bills (Data from Folha de S. Paulo), presented on federal and municipal axes since the beginning of 2023, which adds up to almost one such bill per day. How do you recognize in childhood a rescue of an anarchic and undisciplined life that, in some cases, precedes the adult life of discipline and control?

**Jack Halberstam:** That's a really good question. So, your question is... you know how the child is being used in contemporary politics, but also how, you know, the cultures that are produced in relationship to the child can tell different kinds of stories about the world that we live in. So, I've pushed in both directions. On the one hand, I'm somewhat convinced by an argument like, Lee Edelman's in *No Future* where he says we always use the figure of the child to guarantee a better future. And we do so because if you say something is for the children, no one can argue against you, right? It's a politically pure position. And Edelman says we should not think in terms of these politically pure positions which I agree with. But my argument is different. My argument is that threatening ideas about the revolutionary, the anarchistic, the ungovernable and the unmanageable have been projected onto or removed from adult modes of representation and quarantined in children's culture in order to make them completely safe and domesticated. Because if you say: "oh yes, there can be uprisings, but that's a childish, immature fantasy of why?" Then it becomes something that people can affect to when they're young, but they then grow out of. It and so one of my, one of the things that I pointed to in the query out of failure how often children's films were about rebellion? Which of course is a common theme of childhood. Because children are being raised by adults with whom they do not agree, and against whom we expect them to mount at a pole battle, you know, at a pole refusal. And so as long as we put all these narratives then about ants rising up against grasshoppers who are stealing their food in *A Bug's Life*, or bees who refuse to give humans their honey in *Bee Story* or in *Chicken Run*, where the chickens don't want to become the commodity. As long as those overtly anti-capitalists and



often anarchist narratives are consigned to childhood and are almost never represented in films directed at adult subjects. Then they no longer appear as even possibilities, and that then leaves us with this crazy situation representation within which we literally have no films that are about revolution in a US context. And that's another difference in many other cinematic traditions, films about peoples' revolutions are very common in China, in Russia. I'm sure in Brazil there are a number of films that feature either queer subjects living in poverty or impoverished people who see very clearly the terms of their subjugation. But not in the US and not so much in Europe. So that was my take on the child. But nowadays we can see again that the idea of protecting the child is, as you say, the justification for all of these anti-trans bills that are being passed. And that comes from a different source. That material the legislative assault on trans and queer people on behalf of a fictional child comes from the fact that in today's world, with the Internet, with TV and movies many, many young people identify as queer, trans, or non-binary. Huge, huge numbers and so the conservatives have no other option but to say: "our children are being radicalized; we can't have that". So, let's try to nip this discourse in the bud, in the schools. That's what's happening. But here's the good news: you can't put the genie back in the bottle, you know? You can't unsee all of this information that's available on the Internet. You can't eradicate. Children are quickly finding their way to all of this material, despite the best intentions of their parents and teachers to prevent them from doing so. And so, in ten years, we'll find that those conservative measures were unsuccessful, but it's still going to be a battle to get there. But why do I say that with so much confidence? Because there are so many children now who have come out early as queer, trans or non-binary. So many. Are those people suddenly gonna change their minds? I don't think so. It's and it's like, it's close to 50% to more children. So, how's that going to work? If you just simply say "you can't teach this in the schools", "you can't give them these books", "you can't show them these films". They'll find them online. So, this is, you know, on the one hand the Internet facilitates and maximizes global capital, but on the other hand counterintuitive logics and discourse and information also becomes viral online. TikTok, Twitter, you know the social media platforms that young people use is full of queer and trans material, and they that they cannot legislate away unless, as in China, you give people very limited access to the Internet. So, it's a good question.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** In "Trans: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability" (2017), you recount that when you came out of the wardrobe in the 1980s, some white feminists maintained a barrier to transgender people, with trans people often being seen as infiltrators in this space still crystallised and centred by "women-born-women" who fought against the culture of patriarchy, which consolidated a version of feminism that instituted for a long time in the legitimacy of cisgender women. Your reading is thought-provoking because you speak that feminist spaces should not be the only spaces for transgender women nor for trans men, and that it is necessary to exhaust this foundational binarism of man and woman. We remember when you consider in the book "Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal" (2012) the gesture of launching into crisis, thinking with the absurd and working around a bodily revolt and antinormative rupture. What are the challenges of searching for this common ground of transfeminism and how does rethinking transgender politics allow us to think about these new "constellations of alliances" that emerge?

**Jack Halberstam:** I mean the first part of your question is really about these new forms of anti-trans so-called feminism. So, one thing about the TERF culture, the Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist Cultures. It's not radical, and it's not feminist. It's a misnomer. And I try to say that in trans\* that I don't think we should be calling these women feminists. They're trans exclusionary, but they're not radical feminist. They are part of an anti-gender movement that is now global. And that anti-gender movement as we were just talking about is responsible for all of this legislative pushback on the education of young people in queer theory and so on. And when we make these women who are anti-trans, when we say that, they're feminists one of the outcomes is that we make feminism into a bad word. And when we do that, we limit our ability to join trans politics, clear politics, and feminist politics and then we can no longer see that, for example, anti-abortion movements are filled with the same people who are anti-trans. And now we've, we've given up on feminism, so we don't have a discourse to fight the anti-abortion people, you know? So, it's... we also don't have a language for thinking about why around the world, most people who live in poverty are women with children. And we don't have a language to oppose patriarchy. And we don't have a language to deal with gender inequalities. So, we can't give up on feminism, and therefore we shouldn't consent to a narrative about anti-trans activists by calling them feminists. We should call them what they are, which is anti-gender conservatives.

They're usually Christians, they're usually Republicans in the US and Bolsonaro acolytes in Brazil. And they have very narrow goals for society, which is to maintain social hierarchies between rich and poor men and women, queers, and straight people. To maintain the grip that a small percentage of the population has on capital globally. To basically use thinly veiled, you know, Christian said rhetorics to launch political campaigns and to maintain the family as the basis for intimate life. And all of those things are under attack by a majority of people around the world. Why a majority? Because most people don't benefit from global capitalism at this point, right? So, if most people don't benefit from global capital, then most people could be persuaded that this is something that we should all be opposing and most people, you know? Are either middle class or working class, those people need to join together and so on. So, in Argentina we've seen a very, very effective feminist movement in the last decade that has been written about in a fantastic book called Feminist International by Verónica Gago. And she explains how it is that a massive coalition of activist groups united under the term trans feminism took to the streets, pushed back on an anti-abortion law, pushed ahead with trans protection, and basically articulated a political agenda within which the rights of trans women, poor women, sex workers and the unemployed were central. That has already happened. It happened in Argentina and if it can happen in Argentina, it can happen in other places and when they take to the streets in Argentina, it's not like 50,000 people who take to the streets it's 2, 3, 400,000 people. I'm not saying that they've been completely effective. There's still right-wing governments in Argentina, but they're not or to pass the same kind of anti-abortion legislation that you see on the box in Brazil and the US.

**Ribamar Oliveira:** Absolutely! Just a detail, I love Gaga Feminism because I'm a little monster.

**Jack Halberstam:** Yes, of course we all are! So, yes, that's what I mean by these new alliances, constellations of new alliances. We know that people are ready to think outside of those identities and ready to start political activity that emerges from more than one interest.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** Since "In a queer time and place: transgender bodies, subcultural lives" (2005) you have provoked the question about a queer space and time, that is, in that place in opposition to the institution of family, the heteronormative arrangement and reproduction itself and in that time that is not restricted to birth, marriage, reproduction and death. According to his view, we can think that this queer time may have emerged at the end of the twentieth century, in gay communities that faced life contraction due to AIDS. If there is a dialogue with a future in constant decline, when taking post-pandemic scenarios of Covid-19 and this queer temporality as a way of being in the world. How do we inhabit this queer temporality today and in what ways excavate queer historiography?

**Jack Halberstam:** Well, I mean, I think it's a, it's a question of sort of capitalizing on the fact that in many, many places, marriage has turned out not to be intuitive or universal as a life narrative and many young people are not accepting heteronormative time, not rushing into marriage and reproduction and do understand that there are other temporalities and that the fantasy that you meet one person and you get married and then that's the end of the story. I mean that has completely disappeared; I think. That's a silly thing to say, but it's the only narrative that people are exposed to yeah as young people. And so, at least in the US it's very clear that people are getting married much later than they did it even a decade ago. Men, in particular, are not getting married until they're in their late 20s, early 30s. And women who used to get married early 20s, it's now late 20s. That's very significant, very significant, because it means that your early years are not all preoccupied with marriage and children. In Euro American context this has created a kind of panic about birth rates but when you hear that it usually means white people. You know that there's concern that white people aren't having babies and that immigrant groups are having babies at the same rate as traditional families and then this creates a kind of national crisis around race and the trajectories of demographics and so on. All of that seems to me to be a sign that there are going to be, in the near future, shifting understandings of what is a majority group and what is a minority group. I mean, I think soon we won't use the term minoritarian. In many of these industrial, postindustrial – you know, your former colonial countries who have been used to thinking in terms of majority and minority – I think that we won't see that anymore. But will that change the power dynamics? Depends. Depends on how global capitalism plays out because, of course, in a place like South Africa post-apartheid, white people were a distinct

minority but have continued to hold economic power there. And that's my concern, is that on the one hand the temporality of straight life is broken down and on the other hand, what breaks down in a heterosexual context is bolstered up in a racial context, you know? And so, the panic around white life and white birth rates and so on enacts and is the occasion for increasingly dire racist policies, forms of exclusion and exploitation and that's the danger here. That we don't just transition to queer time and everything's great but that there are there are new forms of exploitation. And that takes us back to the last point, which is that's the reason that has to be broad, cross through cross and interracial cooperation and solidarity moving forward. It's not about LGBT people and what they need to do within any given nation state. It's how LGBT people are connected to other struggles and to the extent that they're not, then you're just part of a hegemonic regime.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** How do you see the non-binary studies inside a queer perspective?

**Jack Halberstam:** Nonbinary has been a very contested term. I think we're talking about the term that has a history of maybe five years. It's very new, but because of its elasticity and its vagueness, it's has been taken up by an enormous number of people. So, in any given, you know, group of young people there are increasing numbers of people who call themselves non-binary, particularly in white middle class, let's put it that way. But at the same time, it's a term I think it's also being used by people of color. Not sure, we'll see. It's being used for anyone who thinks that they are somehow a little bit outside of the norm and that has occasioned also, a critique of it. And so now there are also essays that are critiquing it for pretending to be outside of binary operations, but in fact being the very installation of a binary opposition in a binary with cis or in a binary with binary or in, you know in it's in in a whole set of binaries and just as queer did four decades, five decades ago, it proposes to be a resistant position loaded with kind of counter hegemonic possibility. But that, that is not clearly its trajectory. It may just be a catch all term and this would be the critique of it for people who want to say, "I'm a little bit different". And to that effect, it doesn't have a lot of political possibility embedded in. So where is the political possibility of not binary? For me, the political possibility of non-binary goes back to our earlier conversation about children and about all the anti-trans legislation that's being passed in

Brazil and in the US and in France and in many different places right now. That legislation is directed to children, directed at children who are saying fuck you to their parents who have ruined the environment, who have passed on debt to them and who have created a real estate crisis within which young people cannot expect to own houses, can expect at some point in their life to be housing precarious, and who do not have the same opportunities that their parents had. In that context, non-binary is not just about gender, it's saying no, not to people who are saying "we're mommy and daddy, you have to choose what kind of subject you're going to be". In that respect, it's an interesting formation but it has to kind of live up to its potential and become that larger script rather than just remaining in the very narrow world of "I'm not man and I'm not woman". To the extent that that's what it means, it means very little. To the extent that it means "you, older people, who are trying to define me and who are trying to define who we are, what we should read, what we can do, fuck you!". That's when it's powerful. That's my feeling.

**Ribamar Oliveira:** In his latest book "Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire" (2020) we find the premise of rediscovering the wild through and with wildness. Which presents dialogues with your work since "Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters" (1995). It is interesting when you talk about the wild not being limited to the natural world and having a life extended to aesthetics, desire and politics, since the wild would be in itself an epistemology, a way of relating anti-coloniality, anti-capitalism and radical queer thought. Dedicated to José Esteban Muñoz and thought shared with Tavia Nyong'o, the debate on wildness, new materialisms and alternative imaginaries seems to us something that potentiates queer, above all, by avoiding the order of things. In what way can the term "wildness" of this chaotic force of nature, far from categorizations and closer to other forms of incorporation, through the tangle between human and animal, show us other ways of making worlds and kinship in a future that we do not know will arrive?

**Jack Halberstam:** Okay, so you know, I... And you picked up on this in these very perceptive questions, which I deeply appreciate. I'm kind of a counterintuitive thinker and I tend to think best with excluded or negative terminology like failure, for example. And wildness seems like it's full of romantic possibility, but of course it's part of a colonial narrative in which an order of civilization has to eradicate wild things. Because wild things are part of a different epistemology,

a different relation to nature, wilderness, power, body, that cannot be governed by liberal systems of law, right? So, to the extent that we think of the wild in that way it offers immense potential in terms of thinking outside of the scripts of modernity. And throughout the book I try to show these sort of crisis points, where attacks that is produced within a so-called civilizational order and has a romance with the kind of fantasy of the wild is pulled into the wild through an operation of kind of love, fascination, seduction, and something else happens. And so, in the chapter on falconry, for example, I say: “Ohh, how weird! There are all of these gay men who write narratives about identifying with falcons and ours”. What's that about? And then I say: “but are they gay?” Why do we say they're gay when in fact the desire is so clearly not for the bird or for the bird as a metaphor, but for the wild, which the bird both embodies and represents. And that desire for the wild has no word in our language, you know? We don't say “I'm a wildest”, you know, or my desire is not to be managed by these systems. But that is what some of those young people are saying with the word non-binary. They're saying “I'm off script. I'm not part of the system you've offered. You're saying, are you this or that? I'm saying neither, no”. That's also the wild. It's an attempt to become ungovernable within the systems that are designed to capture you. And that seems to me to be a very powerful political position. And the book is a tricky book because it stays within the canon of Euro American Modernism in many ways. But it kind of has to do that in order to find these little wormholes where something else happens. And so, in the chapter *The Rite of Spring*<sup>1</sup>, you know, I'm able to show them how a Native American artist Kent Monkman returns to the rite of spring and all of its indigenous material and pulls a completely different story out of it. An anti-colonial story in fact within which the tribal and folk rhythms that are imported or exported into this modernist symphony take on their own life and become their own material. And then we return to the rites of spring and see that what makes the rites of spring amazing is exactly that it's being contaminated by the wild. In the attempt to just like, borrow and appropriate, it became contaminated in a viral way. And the reason that when you listen to that score, you're like: “wow, what is this?”, you know, is precisely because everything that Western harmony tried to suppress, returns. Returns as its stronger form. And that's a very powerful thing that the suppression through the civilizing order has a return and the return is a wild. And it's available in many, many different forms. It's an interesting... It's interesting as a

book, I feel like it hasn't been received in the same way that *The Queer Art of Failure* as, but I think it's because the failure book was sort of a little bit comic and funny and ludic and was about fun and play and this one is more serious. But it kind of has more implications, in some sense, for political life that refuses the script that's being offered to us. You know? And instead goes wild. Goes into a different direction, direction where under the heading of while you can have anti-capital, indigenous unclassifiable sexualities and genders and an anti-civilizing sensibility or epistemology. So, I still think I think a lot with *The Wild* and I think the book will... it's gonna slowly percolate.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** Amazing! And are you working on another book? Another project right now?

**Jack Halberstam:** I originally, I had more chapters in *Wildness and Wild things* that were about anarchy and a kind of anarchistic set of aesthetic practices that I found best articulated through the work of a Chilean American architect, Gordon Matta-Clark, who was the son of a Chilean artist, Roberto Matta. They moved to New York City, and he grew up in New York City in the 70s when the city was falling down and was bankrupt, but was also home to like Warhol, Basquiat, many, many artists who moved there because it was cheap, because you could make a factory out of an abandoned loft or whatever. And this new project sort of goes back to the 1970s and says "well, we're preoccupied with the language of and the political goal of world building, and you even use that and one of your questions for me. In the 70s, people could see that the post-war trajectory was going to rebuild the world and rebuild it in a form that was worse and that far from being anti-fascist it was actually just anti-communist and as an anti-communist kind of set of strategies it was obliterating all alternatives to capital. And in that context, people wanted to unbuild worlds, and I have a whole bunch of examples of people who are unbuilding rather than building. And I asked the question whether unbuilding is a better strategy for queer and trans politics than world building. Not to say well building was wrong or that it's not good to have this kind of utopian fantasy of the kind that José Muñoz wrote about, but only to say that we see what the world is now that post 1970s after a very strong resistance in many different places to reactionary and dictatorial regimes, world came back stronger than ever in the form of global capital. And so, I'm asking, what if we return to some of those languages from the 1970s



that were preoccupied with anarchism, society of the spectacle, you know, this kind of situationism unbuilding, unyielding, unmaking destruction, demolition, violence. How about that? Let's use that language and see where we end up. So, I'm trying to write, put the book together now I have many, many different pieces of it. I have a chapter on a feminist radical feminist film from the 1970s that's very violent. I have a chapter on Gordon Matta-Clark, I have a chapter on Alvin Baltrop, who is a black photographer, and Beverly Buchanan, who is a black lesbian artist who made work with demolition sites and so on. You know, so there are these... Oh, I have a chapter on auto-destructive art, which was a particular strand of art in the 1960s that we wanted to destroy the art that they made so that it couldn't go to the market and become part of a global profit, global profiting on artwork. They would make a piece, you'd see it, and then it would be destroyed. So, all of that it's... I'm preoccupied with violence, destruction and unbuilding.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** *We look forward to reading it!*

**Jack Halberstam:** I'm excited to put it together, I'm really ready for it to be done. I've been working on it for a long time, and I need to finish it now. So, and I was thinking here in Brazil about, you know, there are movements like the Landless Workers' Movement that, you know, have that similar kind of impulse, which is, you know you've just... that wealthy people have grabbed land and then they don't use and that's exactly of a piece with this unbuilding. It's like we will, we are going to sit on the land that you have dispossessed us of and we are going to unbuild your presence on that land and do something else with it. It's a really interesting moment. I also have a colleague at Columbia who's writing about new forms of cooperation. I think cooperation is actually quite a nice term for moving forward, but first you have to unbuild then you can start thinking in terms of cooperation, solidarity, coalition assembly. All of the terms that people are coming up with for larger political entities are really key to this. First we have to take things apart and that's what we don't know very well how to do. Same with the university. University could be an amazing sight for us but first we have to get rid of these disciplines that make it so that if you're in Anthropology, you can comment on economics, and if you're in English you seemingly have nothing to do with political science, right? Those disciplines are there precisely to make sure that knowledge continues to be produced in these straight lines.

So, we have to take those disciplines apart in order to see that there are other ways of producing knowledge that would then have different outcomes for how people understand their relation to one another. Or their relationship to change, or land, or home, or kinship. As long as we only study kinship through anthropology, we only study homes you know, in relationship to real estate or something, we lost, we lost... We're not producing new language, then. And so, first, first destruction, you know? First take it all apart. And then you sit in the interregnum for a minute, you know, the interval, as some people call it. And then only then, will it be clear what the next political project should be. We can't see it from here. We need that space of the internal, yeah. So, it's hard to sell this because people are like, no, I don't want to tear everything down without knowing why. But it's like, but if we could see our utopian goal from here, we'd be doing it, but we can't because we are completely governed by all of these discursive structures, right that we're also teaching.

**Ribamar Oliveira and Dieison Marconi:** Amazing, thank you so much, Jack.

**Jack Halberstam:** Thank you so much for these really insightful questions!

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### Funding

Work developed with the support of the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ).

### Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Professor Denilson Lopes for strengthening ties with Jack Halberstam and making the technical revision of the interview questions.