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Introduction

When I was soliciting submissions for this issue of *Absinthe* in February 2024, my Instagram Reels algorithm kept serving me the "Brazil com Z x Brasil com S" (Brazil with a Z vs. Brasil with an S) meme. The video begins with the caption "Brazil com Z" superimposed on images stereotypically associated with Brazil, often backed by a classic MPB (Música Popular Brasileira) track. The colorful tiles of the Escadaria Selarón, saturated images of Sugarloaf Mountain and Guanabara Bay, Christ the Redeemer with not a tourist in sight. After several seconds of these images, the images and caption—but not the music—shift. Suddenly, we see images of houses made out of unplastered tijolo baiano, a caramel colored mutt sitting outside a boteco, the embroidered kitchen towels protecting the glass stove covers from oil splatters. The caption now reads "Brasil com S."

The basic joke of this meme is that Brazil "com Z" represents a romanticized (and seemingly exclusively Carioca) imaginary of Brazil belonging to those in the Global North ("Brazil" with a "Z" being

the English spelling of the word). Brazil "com S," the Portuguese spelling, then, represents the "true" Brazil of Brazilians—one that, while not glamorized like "com Z," ends up taking on an idealized bent due to its memeification. The copo americano filled with coffee, the concrete graffitied soccer pitch, the tiny thin straws served with Guaraná become points of pride for the brasileir@, things that, while not as romanticized as drinking out of a coconut at Ipanema, become of aesthetic and national importance simply because the gringo just won't "get it."

It's from this meme that "Brazil with an S," the title of *Absinthe 30*, comes. As the title suggests, this issue seeks to challenge and expand the limited vision of Brazil "com Z" by prioritizing narratives from areas of Brazil less seen in global media representations. That said, the germ of this theme lies not with the meme, but rather *me*. I came to the University of Michigan to study architecture and space in Brazilian film and literature, yet I'm now finishing a PhD in contemporary American autofiction and digital studies. When the opportunity to edit an issue of *Absinthe* came up, I understood it as a chance to bring Brazilian literature back into my academic life. But it's also personal insofar as the texts in "Brazil with an S" pay particular attention to the Northeast and the South of Brazil—the regions that my father and mother, respectively, are from.[1]

The internet has shaped my experiences of Brazil, past and present, from the novelty of Skyping family members in the mid-aughts to, more recently, meeting my longtime Brazilian Twitter friends when I studied abroad in São Paulo. But it's not just me—Brazilians, in general, are *incredibly* online (find me an American nostalgic for Orkut—you can't). As of January 2024, 86.6% of Brazil's population was online (compare that to 91.8% of the United States' population). But the onlineness of Brazilians isn't so much about quantity as it is about quality. Brazil, "sometimes referred to as King of Memes," is one of 10 (12 if you count Sealand and Ohio) countries to have

[1] In the past few years, these regions have begun to receive more international media attention. The Northeast for its role in reelecting President Lula da Silva and for Kleber Mendonça-Filho's internationally acclaimed films and Rio Grande do Sul, sadly, for the recent devastating flooding.

its own dedicated meme page on the database Know Your Meme. And in the more circulated of these memes, Brazil is often the butt of the joke, such as with "Come to Brazil," "You're going to Brazil," and "Brazil mentioned." (If you're not familiar with these memes, this footnote is for you.)[2] In these highly circulated Brazil memes, "Brazil" bears a certain desperation: Brazil begs musicians to play there, Brazil clamors at any mention—positive or negative—of itself (which is the seventh most populous country in the world).

Yet there has been a shift in these memes. Brazil memes have taken on a more positive tone, especially evident with the TikTok microtrend "Brazilcore." This trend, which peaked in 2022 when Hailey Bieber posted a selfie in a Brazil-yellow baby tee, constitutes wearing Brazilian colors, soccer jerseys, and Havaianas (obviously the ones with the little flag on the strap).[3] Posited largely by Brazilian celebrities as a reclaiming of Brazil's flag from the far right in time for the World Cup and the 2022 elections, Brazilcore brought national tensions to an international audience. But to explain the political situation of a country through a TikTok microtrend minimizes—my gut response to seeing "Brazilcore" float around the internet for a meme cycle remains "Brazil mentioned." As such, I read "Brazil com Z x Brasil com S" as a response to both the idealistic and even "empowered" affect of Brazilcore and the desperation of "Brazil mentioned." It is a meme that excludes those who don't "get" an "authentic" Brazil unfit for gringo consumption, and, at the same

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[2] "Come to Brazil" originates in 2008. The meme—which took off in 2009 when Justin Bieber joined Twitter—comes from the frequency with which Brazilian users comment "come to Brazil" on videos of their favorite musicians performing. Though perhaps originally posted in earnest, many (including Brazilians) post it ironically. "You're going to Brazil" first appeared in 2020 in a GIF of someone falling down a pit, captioned "NOOO I DON'T WANNA GO TO BRAZIL NOOO STOP AHHH." This meme, obviously, suggests that Brazil is an undesirable place to be. "Brazil mentioned," which can be substituted for other places, first appeared in 2021. The image is of Yui Hirasawa from the anime *K-ON!* celebrating. The meme is often used as a response image when a country—particularly Brazil—gets mentioned in a negative context, suggesting that Brazilians are so desperate to be acknowledged that they'll take even the worst mentions. To explain a meme is always humbling.

[3] The callback to "Come to Brazil" taking off because of Justin Bieber is too good not to point out!

time, it is a meme that rejects the desperate need for gringo acknowledgment. In Brazil "com S," Brazil mentions itself.

In their book, *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*, Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman propose that online Latin American culture takes on what they call a "postregional" positionality.[4] To discuss the postregional in an introduction to an issue so singularly focused on regionality might seem contradictory. Yet it is this very contradiction that underscores Taylor and Pitman's theorization of Latin American digital culture as postregional. In toying with the "unresolved tensions" that the online brings up between the local and the global, Latin American online cultures "dismantl[e]" conventional conceptualizations of "Latin America" through the very engagement with "tropes and discourses of 'Latin American-ness.'"[5] To be regional once again, this issue is not a "Latin American literature" issue—it is a *Brazilian* literature issue. While yes, it is the first issue of *Absinthe* to exclusively feature Latin American authors, it is also one that specifically only features Brazilian authors. Following Taylor and Pitman on the contradictions of the postregional in Latin America, it is precisely this hyperfocus on Brazil as the first Latin American issue of *Absinthe* that can affirm Brazil's status as a Latin American nation[6] while also calling attention to the postregional nature of Latin America more broadly. Furthermore, this issue's focus on regionalism within Brazil works to situate the "regional Brazil" within the context of internal migration from the Northeast to the Southeast (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) and even the South.

This nesting doll of regionalisms and postregionalisms continues. The stories, poems, and plays in this issue don't just deal with the regionalism of Brazilian states or Brazil's regionalism within Latin America—they also speak to Brazil in a global context. For Brazil "com S," global media cultures play a major role in Brazilian

[4] Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman, *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production* (Routledge, 2013), 21.

[5] Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Identity*, 21.

[6] It's worth noting that the US Census does not consider Brazilians to be Latinos and that if one selects both "Brazilian" and "Latino/Hispanic" on the Census, their answers are recategorized.

identity. This practice of adopting other cultures' referents and placing them in Brazilian art isn't unique to contemporary Brazilian literature, but rather it builds on Oswald de Andrade's 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago* (widely translated as the "Cannibalist Manifesto"). The manifesto opens with a pun on Hamlet: "Tupi, or not Tupi, that is the question." Notably, the pun appears in English in the original otherwise Portuguese language manifesto, doubly introducing Andrade's project of theorizing the ways in which Brazilian culture cannibalizes and recasts other cultures as its own. He goes on to write, "Só me interessa o que não é meu" (I am only interested in what is not mine).

This issue of *Absinthe* opens with James Langan's translation of scenes from Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *O imponderável Bento contra o crioulo voador* (1988). The earliest text in this issue, this Cinema Novo script set in Brasília deals with authoritarianism and its relationship to journalism as well as the aesthetic legacies of Brazilian modernism. The other script featured in this issue, a play by Caio Fernando Abreu (Caio F.), also brings very much to mind the ideas of the *Manifesto Antropófago*. Co-translated by Isaac Giménez and Jason Araújo, *O homem e a mancha* (1994) adapts Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* for the stage. In itself a reference and recasting of a European novel into a Latin American context, Caio F.'s script deals with the mediatized nature of personal relationships and the ensuing emptiness that comes with such practices. In a similar vein, one of the stories featured in this issue is Maria Valéria Rezende's "At the End of the World" (2019), translated by Thomas Mira y Lopez. This story takes the form of story within a story: An older narrator recounts her grandfather reading to her as a child a medieval fable set in Galicia. If Caio F.'s text borrowing from a European novel deals with the emptiness of mediation, then Rezende's fable-like tale presents a moment of connection through layers of mediation.

The ethos of "Tupi, or not Tupi" does not solely come up through form. It also comes from stories that emphasize cultural references. In my translation of chapters from Clarah Averbuck's *Máquina de pinball* (2002), the reader bounces from reference to reference to reference to American and British rock bands (especially

the Strokes—the narrator's cat is named "Julian"). The other Caio F. text, "After August" (1995), a short story translated by Julia Garcia, is also replete with references to Twiggy, the Bible, and wordplay and inclusion of other languages such as French, Spanish, and English.

Stream of consciousness narration connects several of the stories in this issue of *Absinthe*. As a scholar of post-internet literature, I find it hard not to link stream of consciousness in contemporary literature with scrolling. In "After August," the stream of consciousness narrator searches for how to live life after receiving an AIDS diagnosis. In Paulo Candido's translation of Marcelo Mirisola's *Quanto custa um elefante?* (2020), the narrator navigates making a deal with the devil in Rio de Janeiro—one might say that the scroll of the fever dream-ish chapter is a doomscroll. "All Anatase" (2019) by Lucas Lazzaretti feels like a more darkly quotidian doomscroll as Lazzaretti intersperses stories of two different middle-aged men experiencing homophobia and shifting power dynamics. In his preface to the piece, translator Emyr Wallace Humphreys discusses the complexities of translating this mode of narration.

Another form that authors in this issue experiment with is the list, which also resembles the online in its overwhelming density of data and information. In my translation of chapters from *Os tais caquinhos* (2021), Natércia Pontes uses lists as form to make felt the act of hoarding in "Hunger Feels So Good" and the feeling of lack in "Mother." "Ants and Cockroaches" (2024), by Maria Esther Maciel and translated by Xavier Blackwell-Lipkind, also explores the complications inherent to mother-daughter dynamics through Maciel's signature use of lists and other utilitarian forms such as encyclopedias and bibliographic entries.

The texts in this issue resemble the online not merely in their form but also in their affect and diction. The poems from the collection *Medo, medo, medo* (2019) by Maria Clara Escobar feel like Twitter in the best way. Written with simple lines and language with erratic capitalization, Escobar's poetry achieves a vulnerability we might recognize from our own social media feeds. In her preface to these poems, translator Miriam Adelman puts Escobar in conversation with the new Brazilian feminism, or the *explosão*

feminista (feminist explosion). This feminism seems to me in conversation with Clarah Averbuck's *Máquina*, which, partially inspired by her blog from the aughts, seems to me to predict the ways in which writing feminine subjectivities takes shape in a time when everyone is encouraged to constantly reveal, share, and post. If Averbuck's online approach to writing women's sexuality feels brash, Natalia Timerman's "From Your Arms" (2019), translated by Meg Weeks, takes a quieter approach to millennial women's ennui and sexual autonomy but retains a certain bluntness in its lack of sentimentality.

This issue also contains a collection of expressly digital stories, all of which consider contemporary anxieties about app cultures. In Sam McCracken's translation of Michel de Oliveira's "Unfollow" (2021), a relationship ends via ghosting because one party wasn't photogenic enough for the other's Instagram. In Tobias Carvalho's "The Things We Do to Come" (2018), translated by Jon Russell Herring, the typical fears of an IRL dating app meet-up ("will I be murdered or will we simply not vibe?") mutate into a queasy class-based paranoia when a Grindr date goes awry. Other stories present less banal, more dystopian anxieties about app cultures. In "Hunting Season I" (spoilers ahead), also by Oliveira, a "dating" app turns out to be more of a home-invasion murder app. "Fire-starter" (2022), by Cristhiano Aguiar and translated by Ana Guimarães, also considers geolocation apps but through environmental catastrophe via disaster tourism in Brazil's sertão rather than intimate relations.

"Fátima" (2016), our second story by Maria Valéria Rezende, also considers the harsh climate of the sertão. In Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey's translation, we follow Maria as she experiences the sertão in comparison to other regions of the world she's traveled to, such as the M'zab Valley in Algeria and the Zacatecas desert in Mexico. The question of landscape introduced in both Aguiar's and Rezende's stories connects to Edimilson de Almeida Pereira's poetry from *O som vertebrado* (2022), translated by Jane Kassavin. Almeida Pereira's poems deal with the inescapable legacies of the colonial environmental exploitation of Minas Gerais and the exploitation of

enslaved Africans brought to work the mines.[7] The legacies of the transatlantic slave trade extend globally, as seen in Cidinha da Silva's stories from *Um Exu em Nova York* (2018), which place Afro-Brazilians within the greater global Afro diaspora. In his preface to the pieces, translator Felipe Fanuel Xavier Rodrigues describes his considerations in translating Pretuguês (a portmanteau of "preto" [black] and "português" [Portuguese]) into African American Vernacular English, ultimately inviting readers to reflect on transnational Black contexts and voices.

If it seems that I'm ending this introduction with Brazil's relationship to the global, I want to bring us back to the regional. Many of the translators for this issue write in their prefaces about the challenges of translating regional slang and dialect—a reminder that even when connecting through themes, the regional is necessarily lost or distorted in translation. Taking one approach, Meg Weeks acknowledges that her translation of Luisa Geisler's "The Orange Tree" (2011) loses the regional slang that clearly situates the story in Rio Grande do Sul to the Brazilian reader. Translator Raquel Parrine takes another approach when translating Moema Vilela's poetry from *Fotos ruins muito boas* (2022)—the feminist themes and casual style of which very much resonate with Escobar's—choosing to maintain particular regional terms in the original Portuguese.

And finally, a plug: For anyone reading and interested in hearing directly from several of the authors featured in this issue, let me recommend the contemporary Brazilian literature podcast *Rumor*.[8]

With that, *Absinthe 30* invites you to "come to Brazil. . . com S."

[7] Such legacies feel especially urgent when considering the continued role of mining Latin American nations for resources used in global information technologies (e.g., the lithium mines in Bolivia).

[8] Available on Spotify, https://open.spotify.com/show/1Rooq56w3SLYs85Mao8Tvy.