WANTED, LINDONÉIA: ON PILLAGE AS CREATIVE PRINCIPLE AND POLITICAL PERFORMATIVITY¹

Larissa Latif²

ABSTRACT
In this article I present the concept of pillage as a scenic creative principle and its procedures and dispositifs in the context of the artistic work in progress Wanted Lindonéia. Focusing on the crossroads between theater and drag queen performativity and in a dialogue with contemporary theories of gender, queer and feminist, this text examines the potentials the crossroads between theater and drag performativity can release while approaching the answers to some leading questions about procedures and dispositifs/devices³ as inductors of scenic action and creation.

KEYWORDS
Pillage; Drag Performativity; Gender Theory; Theatre; Politics.

In 1966, the Brazilian artist Rubens Gerschman presented the work ‘Beauty Lindonéia or Gioconda of Suburbia’, a silkscreen work inspired by a newspaper article that reported the death of a young woman from the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, murdered in a crime with femicide characteristics. The silkscreen was cast on a mirror frame of a very popular style among the working classes at the time, measuring 60 square cm. It depicts a young woman against an orange background. The shadowing effects of the figure’s face suggest marks of physical violence and her enigmatic gaze seems to indicate surprise or disgust. Elements of kitsch and also of pop art can be found in this work, as such as in the flowered frame, the orange background and the presence of a kind of tabloid text that comments and complements the image referring to the pages of newspapers in which the artist found inspiration for this and other works. The words say ‘The 18 year old beautiful Lindonéia died instantaneously’.

In the second half of the 1960s, portraits of political activists sought by the dictatorship as criminals began to be common in Brazil. The pictures were printed in poster format and pasted on poles and public places, using the same technique as old American western movies. This obsolete technique was also employed for the printing and dissemination of pop art works as a complaint against industrial capitalism, but as for the military dictatorship, the art critic Antônio do Amaral Rocha considers that it was perhaps a way to demean and humiliate those whom the state persecuted (Rocha, 2008). As is known, all the work of Gerschman at that time can be read in the context of both aesthetic renewal and political criticism that permeated Brazil in the 1960s.

¹ Paper presented at the Vth International Congress on Cultural Studies: Gender, Human Rights and Activisms at the Symposium 8 - Gender Technologies and Other Violences.
² Postdoctoral researcher in Cultural Studies at the University of Aveiro – Research fellow FCT SFRH/BPD/78195/2011; Researcher at the CECS Uminho; Actress and stage director at the Collective Lindonéia of Performing Arts. Email: larissalatif@gmail.com
³ The word disposiçéo in Portuguese translates also device, in the sense of an instrument, and dispositive, in the Foucauldian sense.
In 1968, Nara Leão participated in the album ‘Tropicalia ou Panis et Circenses’, a fundamental collective work and the first album of the Tropicalia movement. The singer recorded the song ‘Lindonéia’, written at her request by Caetano Veloso, inspired by the work of Gerschman. The song - which became very popular among many generations since then - is a reading of Lindonéia’s disappearance in which the intersection between gender violence and vulnerability and state violence is symbolized by the deletion of the female body.

In 2015, the ‘Collective Lindonéia of Performing Arts’ was created in Portugal by four artists; two of whom are Brazilian (this author and Iara Souza) and the other two are Portuguese (Marta Leitão and Vanessa Lamego). The aim of the collective is to create works that discuss and denounce gender violence. We began a staging process from a feminist reinterpretation of the work by Federico García Lorca ‘Mariana Pineda’. Very soon in the context of the discussions and readings in the collective – inspired also by discussions and lectures held in the ‘Gender Studies Research Group’ of the Doctoral Program in Cultural Studies, of which three of the collective members are members – revealed the extent and depth of gender issues and theories and the need to tear deeper in the debate and to appeal to a performativity able to question gender normativity as a matter of policy, of body disciplines and body technologies.

The creative process within the collective is quite autonomous. The collective rehearsals or meeting are completed by individual experimental work with greater or lesser proximity to partners according to the needs and time availability of each. In this article, I will address my own process of creating the mask-drag queen-cyborg Wanted Lindonéia describing its principles, procedures and dispositifs, pursuing the issue of aesthetic and political potential of resistance and subversion that it may release.

So, I threw myself into an experimental work seeking to weave a network on three levels: art, science and philosophy, which are the layers described by Deleuze and Guattari as three ways to face chaos (Deleuze & Guattari, 1992, p. 253). Thus, concepts, affects and perceptions are interwoven without hierarchy in a creative process that goes from one to another of these layers bumping into their routes and creating unexpected connection points. The connection, as we will see in more detail below, is fundamental to understanding how this process can move aesthetic and political potential into the body crossroads producing an encounter that challenges the norm and flirts with chaos, taking all risks.

Interrogating theater and drag performativity at the crossroads between these two languages in a dialogue with contemporary gender, queer and feminist theories and the Deleuze and Guattari’s thought, this text seeks to step forward with some questions: what potentials can the intersection between theater and drag performativity release? What happens to the theatrical mask when crossed by the parodic performativity of drag? What happens to drag, parody of the female gender performativity, when it is performed in the theater and by a female body? These questions are at the same time a starting point for reflection in the field of concepts and inducers of the scenic action in my experimental artistic process.

But what do I mean when I say mask? The history of masks in the theater is as old as the history of theater and the theoretical construction and criticism about it, as well as experimental works in the performing arts field that are also abundant and fruitful. Nevertheless, it is difficult to definitively characterize the mask, because it is slippery by nature. It has many theatrical and ritual uses and possibilities, but all who use it in creative processes seem
to agree on its catalytic role. In that sense, it is “a collective condenser of images and identities. It is a place of belonging as subjects of a community to their audiences and creators and therefore a place of recognizing themselves in a given cultural context” (Trigo & Latif, 2014, p. 697). But at the same time, it also dispossesses or deterritorializes the performer’s body, opening the way for the creation of another body over it. In other words, the mask opens the way for the body without organs, a body that is a crossroads or a crossing point, a meeting and a collision, it opens ways, it allows the passage, it *lets it come* as they say in the rituals of incorporation of Umbanda, for example, but also in the training of theatrical masks. A mask is therefore a body made of crossroads and belonging. Crossroads because it catalyzes and condenses images from many fields in a presence, belonging because it makes intelligible the unintelligible, it makes belong what does not belong by deterritorializing the normal body. And for all that process, deterritorializing and becoming are fundamental.

In the scenic experimental work presented here, the work of deterritorializing that the mask operates on the body of the performer begins with a set of issues raised in the field of Gender Studies, one of the key areas for Cultural Studies. These questions are inspired both by Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of assemblage, their cartography procedures and by the few but powerful reflections of Deleuze on minority becoming in theater, which reveals the revolutionary power of theater.

To expose the performative nature of gender, Butler (2006) analyzes the cultural phenomenon of the drag queen. Drag raises, according to Butler, a set of questions about gender identity: Is the man who appears dressed as a woman essentially a disguised man who only outwardly looks like a woman? Or is the femininity that he openly displays proof that its essence is, after all, feminine, despite his male body? For Butler, these questions reveal through the example of the drag queen the instability of the relationship between sex and gender and attest to the performative nature of male or female identity.

By its hyper feminine performance (Butler, 2006), the drag queen exposes gender as a cultural code based solely on imitation and repetition without any sort of initial or essential truth. As she says, the parodic grounds of drag performance leads the norms of gender performativity to the edge and thus allows the recognition of imitation as the roots of every structure or identity and the absence of any authentic or primary truth. Thus, the drag performance exposes social coercion on the very basis of the performative nature of identity and opens the way for the break of the illusion of an essential gender identity.

The author also notes that both the notion of a stable identity as an extension of an inner essence and the illusion of sexual body are repressive and dangerous, but at the same time, they can be exposed in their weaknesses and threatened by their very need for repetition of normative action, because each repetition may fail and create new and unexpected ways, an recurring idea among many postmodern theorists such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, among others.

The dialogue between Butler and Spivak (2007) approximates gender performativity and the issues of postcolonial studies regarding the possible forms of resistance for people in vulnerable and precarious situations in contemporary societies marked by globalization – or postcolonial contexts marked by the technological revolutions that compress space and time which allows capitalism to speed up and volatilize the capital/ labor relations.
For the global capital there are no borders, but the same is not true for immigrants and other populations living in precarious conditions, invisibility, and even illegibility, as women, homosexuals, poor people, and transgender people.

The post-structuralism or postmodern thought criticizes the modern presuppositions of identity. Not only the national identity, but all forms of fixed identities which are based on the foundation of a modern subject established by dialectical separation of an ‘other’ and resulting in an optimal uniformity, a universal essence from which all difference is excluded. Thus, gender theories critique women’s institutions as the other of men and of the binary opposition based on the assumption of the naturalness of the heterosexual norm that disqualifies as aberrant and incomprehensible, thus not recognizable, every other form of subjectivity, desire and behavior. The postcolonial critique of the state and of globalized capitalism insists, and rightly so, in their active production of poor people, ‘stateless’ and in the modes of connection and belonging that can be triggered by these people around the world to create resistance networks able to act concretely to make them recognizable and guarantee their rights, which would never be possible through more standardization, but only by the statement of their differences in relation to the normative subject. Indeed, the origin of the exclusion, precariousness and illegibility of these people lies precisely in the formation of this normative subject.

That is the transforming power of the performative theory of gender. It exposes the performative and not essential nature of the norm and implodes the essence of the modern subject by shaking off the first binary opposition: sex as nature and gender as culture, in other words, gendering as the first machinic assemblage or, in the words of Spivak, “the first semiosis of culture”, its first regulation.

The consequences of this binary and heteronormative gendering can be better understood if we think, for example, of the phenomenon of ‘feminization of labor’, analyzed by Donna Haraway (2009) as one of the characteristics of economic globalization. The feminized work is nothing but precarious work made on conditions historically associated with women’s work: the fusion between the home environment and the working environment, the fragility of contractual relations and labor rights, low requirement of qualifications, low wages, and the invasion of rest time by labor time.

Haraway (2009) notes that in the post-technological revolution context of the last quarter of the twentieth century, these working conditions are no longer confined to the work of women. They now also reach men and occur increasingly among historically vulnerable populations. Thus, the exploitation of labor in a girl’s slavery situation in India is reflected in the rising unemployment among the white American male population, for example. This is globalization. Not sharing between equals, but a global system of reduced quality of life and suppression of rights, an informatics of domination. To fight it, Haraway proposes a common language for women in the ‘integrated circuit’ (Haraway, 2009). This common language, however, is not a unified language. It is a heteroglossia, a multiplicity that allows us to speak not a universal feminine essence, this would be only the other to the universal male subject and can do nothing for women in terms of liberating or revolutionary power (Haraway, 2009). Like Spivak, Haraway also highlights the potential of the approximation of the difference.

Haraway’s cyborg connects not what is similar, but precisely what differs. For Spivak (2005) cultural translation is impossible, a culture cannot be learned, but we can use the lin-
guistic semiosis like a surface that allows us to act on the production of culture as a political agency, not by similarity, but through the difference, a usage that we can call subversive language code. Haraway (2009), in her turn, states that the information circulating in the global network can be used to connect the 'new world working class' that is anything but homogeneous, which is scattered and on which precariousness and vulnerability acts in many ways, but always producing more and more precariousness and vulnerability. Thus, the search for possible strategies to give unrecognized people a place to speak is a common feature of the three theoreticians whose works underlies this reflection.

Similarly, both Butler, Spivak and Haraway, destabilize the modern subject and refuse to its mere replacement by its other, as well as the simple extension of normativity to assimilate a part of the difference, reconverting it into uniformity, for every stable and uniform subject will produce others that will be precarious, vulnerable and, ultimately, invisible, illegible, subalterns. The three theoreticians rather support the restless denunciation of the coercivity of naturalized myths of origin and the turning their own weakness against them: the fact that they have no essential foundation but, in fact, depend on the performativity to persist. Thus, parodic, ironic and paradoxical performativity can at the same time reveal the farce of naturalized norm and open new possibilities of subjectivity, belonging and guarantee of rights.

The irreverence of the drag queen as parodic performativity and of the cyborg, this ironic myth that blasphemes against the founding myths of the West and among them the founding myth of feminism as a stable and uniform female identity, seem to me to be useful in destabilizing the power elements as a procedure of the creation of a theatrical mask that aims to challenge the limits of experimental theater as a form of political agency. The failed performativity (parody), the impossible but insistently attempted translation as well as irony and blasphemy are resources that I use in seeking to force a minority becoming on the artistic scene and to release a potential of transformation.

The concept of gender is itself a trigger of lines of flight. Since the 80s, in feminist theory or queer studies, the discussions on gender are more like a theoretical field in which dispossession continues to happen rather than an effort to establish definitive concepts. Dispossessing gender has been precisely the theoretical and practical exercise undertaken by gender theory - this apostate and pirate theory. Therefore, the meeting between gender as a line of flight and the presence of the mask as a crossroad knot seems to be fruitful in this work.

Mask and gender affect me in different ways, but at the encounter of these affects a rhizome knot is created. It is not clear, it takes a long time to find it, and I need to listen to my body, my voice and the images, percepts or concepts that emerge now in the scientific writing process, now in the process of stage creating. I must follow a multi-lane road, sometimes tangled, sometimes superimposed, sometimes zigzagging, and launch lines made of ‘concepts for images’ ranging from writing to stage, and other lines, made of ‘images to concepts’ that goes from stage for scientific text.

This exercise with the mask follows a main creative principle, the pillage, which is divided into two principles of flight: infidelity and interruption in order to try out the three steps of Deleuze’s critical operation: “1) remove the stable elements; 2) put them all in continuous variation; 3) from there also transpose everything to lower (...) “ (Deleuze G., 2010, p. 44). Therefore, I will be unfaithful to the mask by interrupting the body on which it is created, the concepts with which it debates, the images that trigger the becoming of it.
The first step of the critical operation activates the potential of interruption: to block the stable elements of power. What stable elements should be blocked? What are the stable elements of power in a mask? But there is no universal mask to betray, only this mask that is to be betrayed by me here and now. Where is the mask a territory? What is the territory of the mask? The body. The body of a woman. My own body and its subjects: gender, age, training, political affiliation, etc. It is my body which should be destabilized, forced to vary and transposed into minor in order to inquire into my flesh and bones the gender normativity. Through the inscription of the question and the critical operation in my own body, I hope to expropriate it from the norm, come the lines of flight come, as they will guide the return of subjectivity to art and politics as a form of resistance and subversion. The search for Lindonéia begins.

To create such interruptions and infidelities over my own body I play with dispositifs (objects) and procedures (where these are ways of doing), ways of stealing and de-territorializing concepts, functions and sensations - the very use of these terms here, with a specific sense, is stolen from Foucault and also from Deleuze and Guattari.

How am I to interrupt the body in the field of sensations? To whom should the question be addressed? The answer must come from the body itself. It comes from my bones. It is necessary to block the spine. This will shift the balance, change the body, and trigger the becoming and the body without organs. I wonder about my dispositifs and they come to me under the form of prostheses: extensions and couplings opening the body, eviscerating it, turning it inside out, putting the tail in the place of the head, extinguishing the opposition inside / outside, changing the body in pure extension crossed by intensities.

First of all I think of a sort of burka, but it turns into an umbrella because the women from the desert crossed the ocean many years ago and have become my Amazonian ancestors. Then I choose to create a corselet inspired by Frida Kahlo, who, on her mutilated body, built her body without organs - that is the first image. The corselet has a rod, a metal tube that passes through its center, coupled to an umbrella. The stem structure of the corselet extends from my neck to the base of my spine and limits my movements at the level of the trunk, modifies the balance of my body and awakes the point where my coccyx turns into a tail. The corselet tightens my breasts, but does not hide them. The umbrella is erected high above the head; it is heavy and unstable and triggers a ripple, like water and wind.

When all that is ready, I have completed the first phase of the masked drag queen built over the body of the performer, crossed by the affects and percepts of this peripheral woman, this resistance woman, this woman artist, intensities triggered by my procedures and devices. Lindonéia starts to go missing.

The second image, but it may in fact be the first, the oldest, is the serpent. It comes from deep water and imagined deserts. It is born in my back and talks with the voices of all my ancestors. But we need to clarify, I call them ancestors but they are not just my close or distant grandmothers, they are singularities speaking in the interruptions of my narrative of origin, they are voices that interrupt me and let the mask talk. I call them ancestors, but I could call them multiplicity. They are voices and bodies that the mask incorporates, that is, the mask let them pass, let them come, let them talk.

I choose to create the serpent with a knot of twisted and tied rags at the height of my knees, stretching in a very long tail and ending with pieces of twisted metal, also extracted from old umbrellas. The tail of the serpent modifies walking, limits the movement of the
knees and hinders the steps, which are caught in rags lying on the ground. The machine walks, balance, entangles its steps, stumbles, hesitates. No more feet, only a swaying walk; the only way to contain a serpent is to hold it below the head. No more spine, only sway and stumble without feet. Walking machine without feet. Lindonéia disappears a little more. She is becoming wanted.

The second step of the critical operation is to put everything under constant variation. The procedures are the crossing and the misapplication. To cross the space with the help of a blindfold. Walking with the corselet-umbrella, the tail of the serpent becomes stability as the body rebalances and resets the support points. The blindfold makes the steps vary again and on the striated space it creates a plan of composition. Walking become a variation of intensities. Machine from sliding stumbles. Lindonéia moves more and more towards a minority becoming.

The third step of the critical operation is “make it smaller”, create a minority becoming, not allow itself to be stabilized as the dominant language, making its own language strange, betray it, make it become precarious, be foreign in its own language.

The game now is to stop the voice of the performer. Lindonéia - like every drag queen - sings with a borrowed voice, the play back. This procedure is powerful because deterritorializing the voice of the performer implies first of all to remove it, to block it, and then to provide her with another voice that is no longer her own, allowing the flow of the multiplicity of voices. Lindonéia cannot have a single voice, she can only speak as a collective. Singing machine. Making voice machine.

...
which is a percept in which all this becomes a serpent, a ship, a machine that weaves, sings and crosses.

The machine drag queen cyborg Missing Lindonéia, Wanted Lindonéia, the Lady of the Roads, walks without feet, stumbles to slip, shuts up when talking. Many times interrupted, but unfaithful to all these interruptions, she resists and creates her subversive body in the collision between two artistic languages and a political statement of being beyond the norm, a pirate existence that proceeds by pillage to create impossible bodies and worlds, forcing them against cultural intelligibilities and limiting and mutilating policies.

Referências Bibliográficas