

GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE SEXUAL: THE SUBJECT BETWEEN BUTLER, FOUCAULT, AND LAPLANCHE ¹

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ABSTRACT. In this study, we articulate a debate between Butler, Foucault, and Laplanche to think the constitution of the subject through central categories used by these thinkers: gender, sexuality, and the sexual. First, we develop the notion of libidinal games of power, in that power games only sustain themselves with a libidinal subjective support. Then, after introducing Butler's and Laplanche's theories, we sought to open the way for a Laplanchean re-reading of Butler's theory of gender performativity. Thus, we approximate performativity, as the citational repetition of a norm that has no ontological status, to the Laplanchean concepts of translational codes and enigmatic messages. As the background of this debate, we conceive the repressed truth of normative arrangements of gender as the sexual, which defies the attempts to crystalize, in a clear and distinct way, the traditional binary man-woman. From the point of view of the subject's constitution, we conclude by pointing the possibility of thinking about less-deathly and less-rigid treatments for the drive.

Keywords: Gender; sexuality; unconscious; performativity.

GÊNERO, SEXUALIDADE E O SEXUAL: O SUJEITO ENTRE BUTLER, FOUCAULT E LAPLANCHE

RESUMO. Neste trabalho, articulamos um debate crítico entre Butler, Foucault e Laplanche para pensar a constituição do sujeito a partir das categorias centrais utilizadas por esses pensadores: o gênero, a sexualidade e o sexual. Primeiro, desenvolvemos a ideia de jogos libidinais de poder: os jogos de poder foucaultianos não se sustentam sem um suporte libidinal subjetivo. Em seguida, após introduzir as leituras de Butler e Laplanche, tentamos abrir caminho para uma releitura laplancheana sobre um mal-estar na teoria butleriana da performatividade de gênero. Para isso, aproximamos a performatividade, como repetição citacional de uma norma sem fundamento ontológico, aos conceitos laplancheanos de código tradutivos e mensagens enigmáticas. Como pano de fundo do debate, concebemos que a verdade recalcada dos arranjos normativos de gênero é o sexual, que desafia as tentativas de cristalizar, de forma clara e distinta, o binário tradicional homem-mulher. Do ponto de

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vista da constituição do sujeito, concluimos apontando a possibilidade de pensar em tratamentos menos mortíferos e menos rígidos para opulsional.

Palavras-chave: Gênero; sexualidade; inconsciente; performatividade.

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RESUMEN. En este estudio, articulamos un debate entre Butler, Foucault y Laplanche para pensar la constitución del sujeto a partir de las categorías centrales utilizadas por esos pensadores: el género, la sexualidad, lo sexual. Primero, desarrollamos la idea de juegos libidinales de poder: los juegos de poder foucaultianos no se sustentan sin un soporte libidinal subjetivo. Después de introducir las teorías de Butler y Laplanche, intentamos abrir camino a una relectura laplancheana de la teoría butleriana de la performatividad de género. Para eso, acercamos la performatividad, como repetición citacional de una norma sin estatuto ontológico, a los conceptos laplancheanos de mensajes enigmáticos y códigos traductivos. Como paño de fondo del debate, concebimos la verdad recalcada de arreglos normativos de género como siendo lo sexual, que desafía los intentos de cristalizar, de una forma clara y distinta, el binario tradicional hombre-mujer. Del punto de vista de la constitución del sujeto, concluimos apuntando la posibilidad de pensar en tratamientos menos mortíferos y menos rígidos para lo pulsional.

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Introduction

In this work, we sought to make a critical debate between some of the contributions of Jean Laplanche, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, in order to think theoretical articulations that have as a balance an advance in the reading of the subjective constitution, from the central categories with which each one of these thinkers theorizes the subject: Butler, with gender; Foucault, with sexuality; Laplanche, with the sexual. We have in mind that the theories of these authors are not in continuity with each other. There are, on the contrary, several zones of tensions and epistemic clashes. However, we believe it is possible to work some points of convergence between them, with the aim of thinking about the theoretical-clinical advances brought by the Laplanchean concept of sexual, in tension with some of the criticisms and proposals of Butler and Foucault. As a result, we try to pave the way for a re-reading of the Butlerian theory of gender performativity, using the contributions of Laplanche.

For this, we assume as an assumption an elaboration to be made on the Foucauldian discourse-power dyad, including a third term: the libido. In our view, the original dyad – which interweaves discursive practices to power relations to form complexes of power-knowledge – is not without a supplement, a support, a libidinal counterpart, that rests on the psychic

conditions for sustaining the processes of subjectivation. In this sense, we propose that the games of power narrated by Foucault need to be conceived as libidinal games of power, making possible the construction of the discourse-power-libido triad, elements that are intertwined in the formation-production of the subject.

It is worth noting that this idea can also be found, in an embryonic way, in *A vida psíquica do poder*, a book in which Butler (2017, p. 10) poses the following question: “[...] what is the psychic form that power adopts?”. Such a question, according to Butler, requires “[...] that the theory of power be thought together with a theory of the psyche [...]”, a task avoided by psychoanalytic orthodoxy as well as by Foucauldian orthodoxy. In this way, the author proposes to consider subjection as arising from the subject’s own formation, insofar as it is never formed without the passionate attachment, of libidinal order, to those who subordinate it, to the people from whom it depends fundamentally (Butler, 2017, p. 73). We will begin, then, by a Laplanchean reading of Foucault’s *História da sexualidade I*; then we will outline some possible interweaves with Butler’s theories of gender.

Power relations and libido

In his work of the 1970s, Foucault inaugurates a unique way of thinking about power: in addition to its traditional repressive, interdictive, and negative conceptions, it has to interrogate a positive, productive power that builds the realities and objects that it will come to regulate. However, this is not a substantive, static, ontological power, as conceived by classical thinkers. In Foucault (2015, p. 102), power can only be taken at the level of relations; it is not something that one has, but something that is exercised “[...] from innumerable points and amid unequal and moving relations”.

Power, here, is conceived as “[...] the multiplicity of correlations of forces immanent to the domain in which they are exercised and constitutive of its organization” (Foucault, 2015, p. 100). That is, power as struggle, clash, situation, set of strategies, displacement of tactical blocks, a real distribution of forces in the social field, without a central point, without a single focus of sovereignty, without a malignant genius to make its administration. So that power “[...] is only an effect of a set, sketched out from all these mobilities, chaining that rests on each one of them and, in return, seeks to fix them” (Foucault, 2015, p. 101).

Thus, power relations become “[...] both intentional and non-subjective” (Foucault, 2015, p. 103). This means that power is only exercised by a calculation, with a series of aims and objectives, although it does not result from the choice or decision of an individual subject. On the contrary, the rationality of power develops from local tactics that finally sketch out dispositifs, without revealing someone who has conceived or formulated them, thus ensuring “[...] great anonymous strategies” (Foucault, 2015, p. 103) for sustaining relations of power.

From our reading, in a bias between Laplanche and Butler, we add: if power, in Foucault, is intentional, it is in favor of some treatment of the libido; and if power is not subjective, it is by the force of an 'anonymous murmur' of discourse (Deleuze, 1988), but it points out positions for possible subjects. So that, the assemblies of power indicate libidinal supports in which the subjects can flow the drive, facilitated ways to treat the untranslatable excess that inhabits them. In our view, power relations indicate places produced for the flow of libido, so that the identity fictions conveyed by the discourse, such as being a 'true' man or a woman, organize for the subjects facilitated ways of dealing with the drive, linking libidinal practices of power to these fictions.

Judith Butler and Gender Performativity

In the wake of Foucault's thinking, Judith Butler (2015) conceives genders as engendered within power relations. In her text entitled *Inversões sexuais*, Butler (2009) takes up Foucault's reading of the modern invention of sexuality, arguing that the novelty and scandal brought by modernity were a break between "[...] a socio-political regime in which sex existed as an attribute, an activity, a dimension of human life, and a more recent regime in which sex was established as an identity" (Butler, 2009, p. 91). For the philosopher, this was the first time that sex, beyond a mere contingent or arbitrary aspect of identity, becomes a central element, and even a condition of intelligibility of the subjects.

From that historical moment, sex began to constitute our identities with a radical power, so that, more than having a sex, we 'became' our sex. So, in stating that a body is of one sex or the other sex, what is being produced is not a neutral and objective description of bodily materiality; this very description makes bodies emerge within a series of regulatory devices, with a discursive demand that these bodies be produced within a compulsory heterosexual matrix. The binary categorization, male-female, man-woman, causes bodies to be produced according to principles of coherence and integrity, promoting an alleged demand for continuity to elements that would otherwise be discontinuous.

Thus, we are confronted with a heterosexual matrix that creates a binary opposition between the sexes, understood as regimes of corporal regulation that fictionalize the unities of the genders from an oppositional heterosexuality and supposedly complementary, natural, male-female, already debtor of relations of power historically consolidated in the West. As a result, someone "[...] not only is one one's sex, but one has sex and, in the having, is supposed to show the sex one 'is'" (Butler, 2009, p. 91, author's emphasis). This requires that subjects conform to ontologically empty identity matrices, producing, through gender performativity, the retroactive 'optical illusion' that there is a substance behind that identity, a substance that would only be expressed, reflected in genders (Butler, 2015).

However, gender acts as a mechanism that hides its own genesis; the performative repetition of its norms tries to erase the contingency of its conventions and gives rise to the appearance of a need, of naturalness, of a natural, normative and desirable encounter between the two sexes. Thus, for Butler (2015, p. 69), gender "[...] is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory structure, which crystallizes over time to produce the appearance of a substance, a natural class of being". For the philosopher, gender is not thinkable without the concept of performativity: a series of acts, gestures, bodily stylizations, and other elements of discourse which, by their citational repetition, generate the optical illusion that there would be some interior and anterior fixity, a coherent, substantial, unitary and necessary fixity. In such a way that all performatives and performances of gender parody an original that has no ontological status, they cite a norm that does not exist outside its own application. Performatives and performances make the parody from a non-existent original, without making it visible to the subjects.

In *O gênero, o sexo e o sexual*, Jean Laplanche (2015a) argues that in the book *Bodies that matter* (1993), constituting a 'profound review' of *Gender trouble* (2015), Butler would have relapsed into a biologizing stray, immediately reintroducing "[...] the 'biological' of 'sex' and its 'determinations' [...]" (p. 160, author's emphasis) in his theory. Laplanche may

have made a hasty reading here: apart from not being a very enlightening criticism, since it resorts to very few textual elements, this does not seem to be the philosopher's proposal. In our view, what Butler (1993) intends here is to emphasize the idea that any materialization of sex occurs only within regulatory norms; the thesis has never been that "[...] everything is discursively constructed" (p. 8, author's emphasis), but rather that sex is produced, that is, demarcated, circulated, differentiated and perceived as binary only within power relations.

To construct sex is always to do so in the midst of a "[...] constitutive constraint" (Butler, 1993, p. xi): its materialization (of sex) only occurs through the repetition and forced reiteration of regulatory norms, producing, over time, a process that stabilizes, generating an effect of fixity and surface that we call matter, that is, the anatomical sex read as a given and oppositional binary. For this reason, we argue that Butler does not fall into biological determinism, and remains at least in part in tune with the reading undertaken by the French psychoanalyst, whose contribution (which we will present below) could be thought of in terms of the libidinal status of this very materialization of the body in the other's care received by the child. After all, the body demarcation-delimitation of which Butler speaks does not occur without the unconscious dimension of stimulation of the erogenous zones of the *infans* by the adults, so that this materialization of sex can only happen in a libidinal way, so that the phantasmatic assumption of the 'sex' by the subject is possible a posteriori.

Jean Laplanche and Gender as Enigmatic Messages

For Laplanche (1992), an adult can never give up his/her unconscious when caring for a child. On the contrary, the cares of the babies are privileged places to put in motion a series of unconscious fantasies that inhabit the adult in his/her absence and under his/her ignorance. Thus, in dealing with an infant, an adult invariably conveys, in addition to his/her conservative sphere, some of what he/she carries as sexual, that is, of his/her repressed infantile sexuality. This sexual charge, seducing the child, implants in it a series of excitations that will constitute its own infantile, drive-based, perverse and polymorphous sexuality.

It turns out that these excitations are not totally symbolizable by the child, in that they bring an opacity even to the adult, who does not perceive the compromised character of their messages with his/her unconscious: beyond the consciousness of the adult, there are a series of unconscious elements who infiltrate the original cares with the babies, addressing to them a series of enigmatic messages that will signal to be translated. However, there will always be a traumatic remnant untranslatable in these messages, since the adult ignores its unconscious content, committed to the infantile sexual.

Over time, what Laplanche realized was that these enigmatic messages are also generalized, constituting for the infant an enigma that will continue to resonate throughout its life as a sexed being. Butler (2014, p. 124) writes in her article on the Laplanchean reading of genders: "When we talk about these enigmatic adult messages that cross the infant and transmit the adult desire, we are also invariably talking about gender". This takes place from the initial condition of the child's passivity, in its radical helplessness. Being in this position, it is the target of what Laplanche (2015a) called 'identification by' and Ribeiro (2010) calls 'passive identification': an identification made not by the subject but by the *socius* that around the infant, that is, a set of designations made by parents, siblings, grandparents or other close caregivers, designations before which the infant is initially passive.

Thus, to the extent that a baby is identified by 'the adult' as a boy, the treatments, desires and fantasies addressed to it will be radically different from those given to a baby identified as a girl due to the phantasmatic value that each gender gains in the culture. In this way, *socius* messages, which are mainly "[...] gender designation messages" (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 169), will necessarily carry "[...] many 'noises', all those brought by the close adults – parents, grandparents, siblings – their fantasies, their unconscious or preconscious expectations" (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 169, author's emphasis). With this, the child will be bombarded with a series of truly 'prescriptive' rather than descriptive messages, as Butler (2014) reads:

To be called a gender is to be given an enigmatic and overwhelming signifier; it is also to be incited in ways that remain in part unconscious. To be assigned a gender is to be subject to a certain demand, a certain impingement and seduction, and not to know fully what the terms of that demand might be (Butler, 2014, p. 123).

But "[...] the 'signifier' is not decisive in itself. The designation is a complex set of acts that extend in the language and in the significant behaviors of the environment" (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 166, author's emphasis). This is because, for the adult him/herself, some of his/her desires became translated and assimilated, but another part was rejected and was therefore repressed (Butler, 2014). It is these traumatic elements for the adult that will make noise in dealing with the child, in its prescriptive gender designations, also constituting for the child a nucleus of sexual trauma: learning to deal with a desire that is, from the beginning, a desire of the other 'of' the other, a desire belonging to another thing that inhabits the original caregiver, a desire that is another for the caregiver him/herself and yet will implant a drive sexuality in the child.

Laplanche (2015c, p. 169) gives the example of a father who can "[...] consciously assign the male gender to his son, but may have expected a daughter or even unknowingly wish to penetrate a daughter"; Butler (2014, p. 127, author's emphasis) also illustrates ways of assigning identities to the child: "'You be the girl I never was'; 'You be the man my husband refuses to be'; 'You be the girl when I need you to be, and then the boy when I need you to be'"⁴. Thus, gender operates as a fundamental part of the generalized seduction, composing an enigma that will be reiterated throughout the life of the subject. Such enigma will never be sufficiently translated, relaunching the subjects in recurrent attempts to symbolize, to give meaning to this traumatic nucleus.

So, the question posed by the child is not "[...] what gender am I? [...]", but rather, "[...]what does gender want of me?". Or, "[...] whose desire is being carried through the assignation of gender that I have received and how can I possibly respond?" (Butler, 2014, p. 129). Or, "[...] what do my parents want from me when they call me a girl? [...]"; "[...] what is this perpetual 'noise' that we call gender, a demand upon me I cannot know and to which I stand no chance of ever responding adequately?" (p. 130, author's emphasis). Thus, in order to treat this interior foreign, the child will have some of the resources transmitted by culture: the codes and narrative schemes (Laplanche, 2015c).

⁴ These contingencies of translation, from the metabolization that the child will make of the enigmatic messages from the adult, can be taken as that which responds by the failure of the norm. The unpredictable character of the fate to be given by the subject to the ambivalence of the unconscious desires and fantasies of the other opens up an interesting clinical pathway for us to think, for example, of the reasons why one would assume a socially abject identification/position. This question, which does not pervade Butler's preoccupations (more concerned with the constitution of the subject within the norm), can be a fundamental contribution of Laplanche to a psychoanalytic reading of transsexualities.

Bombarded by the series of enigmatic messages involving gender, the child will have to account for these elements in some way; for this, it will have certain resources facilitated – proposed or even imposed – by its *socius*, resources that will help it to repress-symbolize the enigmas of gender. They will constitute a 'translation aid' (Laplanche, 2015b) of the drive for the child, forming narrative schemes, that is, “[...] more or less rich, popular, flexible scripts” (Laplanche, 2015c, p. 286), conveyed by culture to guide the child to “[...] order, to historicize its destiny” (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 202). In our view, binary genders, as we have seen them constructing, operate as translational codes, providing a 'narrative form' (Laplanche, 2015c) for the sexual messages conveyed by adults in their absence and under their unfamiliarity.

Thus, the great narrative schemes of genders help the child to try to treat the disruptiveness of the drive, being reiterated throughout its life. This narrativity is composed of relatively fixed elements, continually assigned to the subject by the *socius*, in the direction of aiding the translation of the unconscious noises that involve the assemblages of the genders. As an example, we have already started with the division of colors when preparing the baby's trousseau: blue for boys, pink for girls; since childhood, the boys will play carts, dolls with representations of manly strength, and girls, dolls, baby dolls, miniature house utensils, and so on. This separation ends up by reiterating the traumatic binary designation that confers different social places to each gender, which is further reinforced in stereotypical jokes that continually redraw the social positions for the minority groups, considered something less than human, of the order of the object.

This production-reiteration of the categories of virility and femininity occurs in an inevitably symptomatic manner, because it depends on its repeated affirmation within narrative schemes to support itself, since the sexual, diffuse and disruptive, is the repressed truth of gender organized clearly and distinct in its traditional binary. Hence, normative discourse can only give a route to the libido in unsatisfactory ways, for these rigid attempts to treat the drive ignore its fluid and subversive displacement. In this direction, sexuality appears as a key concept in Laplanche to promote a detachment from the biological conceptions of sexuality that had hitherto applied in nineteenth-century medicine, conceptions with which Freud's invention will produce a decisive rupture, ambivalent, oscillating (see Laplanche, 1992).

In Foucault's narrative in *História da sexualidade I*, what he seems to criticize is the normative fiction, born around the nineteenth century, that there would be something like a 'sexuality' emerging from the biological of 'sex'; in coextension with this fiction, a whole network of powers-knowledge (in which he includes psychoanalysis) was organized to police the inaccuracies, abnormalities and deviations of a supposed instinct that should guide the subject. Foucault (2016, p. 387) goes on to say that Freud's discovery is not the sexuality, etiology or sexual secret of the neuroses (something that was already swarming in medicine and psychiatry at the time), but rather a 'logic of the unconscious', from which sexuality is “[...] no longer what it was at first [...]”, leading to something totally different. So, the strength of psychoanalysis would not be “*Três ensaios sobre a sexualidade*, but the *Traumdeutung* (Interpretation of Dreams)” (p. 387).

However, following the Laplanchean reading, we know how the text of the *Três ensaios*, in its successive re-editions, has left behind the main discovery of psychoanalysis, named as the sexual. The very 'logic of the unconscious' alluded to by Foucault can be considered, with Laplanche, secondary in comparison with the chaotic sexuality with which Freud originally encountered. In a radical break with the field of instinct (*Instinkt*), Laplanche

(1992) values in Freud the use of the concept of drive (*Trieb*), which sustains an irreducible difference with every biological program of sexuality as it was expressed in nineteenth-century medicine. If the instinct would start from a search for tension relief, with a fixed object, preprogrammed by the species and heterosexually oriented toward reproduction, the drive would otherwise have only a weld with its object, which is an object of unconscious fantasy, variable according to the libidinal history of the subject, and whose satisfaction is aimed at increasing tension from not the genitals, but from erogenous zones and partial objects.

Thus, the drive (which is one of the names of the perverse-polymorphic infantile sexuality in its chaotic multiplicity) marks an unmistakable distance from all biological determination of 'sex', 'sexual reproduction', normative fictions of 'sexuality'. However, this dimension of the sexual is at risk of being erased at all times, by its character often unbearable for the subject. Laplanche's (2015a, p. 162) claim is that the introduction of gender into psychoanalysis may be a means of paradoxically reaffirming the concept of sexual, "[...] intimate enemy of gender". After all, if gender interposes binary sex to produce a repression-symbolization of the sexual, there is a conflict, an antinomy between gender and sex.

In order to work on Laplanche with Butler, we argue that the arrangement of traditional, heterosexualized and clearly organized and distinct genders could only be anchored in a silent, tacit, presupposed notion of a biological, reproductive, coherent, unitary instinct that, by emphasizing the genital attraction between the two sexes, leaves aside precisely the diffuse and disruptive sexual. In this sense, we consider that the sexual is the repressed truth of gender. We believe that this Laplanchean elaboration of the concept of sexual will allow us to re-read Butler's constructions on gender performativity in the light of psychoanalysis. To that end, in the next section, we will try to show some discontents underlying the theory of performativity, in order to present possible contributions of Laplanche to gender trouble.

Performativity Theory and its Discontents

When we take in perspective the development of Butler's work throughout the 1990s, we realize that the philosopher is improving the complexity of her conception of performativity. In considering gender performances, the author of *Gender trouble* seems aware of the importance of taking into account the libidinal status of the psychic life as a fundamental counterpart of the subjection processes. For performance theory, if it were taken only as a stylized repetition of bodily acts and gestures, that would bring about a libidinal deficit to its theory, by falling back on a kind of undesirable mechanicism which she criticizes in Foucault. This panorama is what, from the beginning, leads her to seek a psychoanalytic supplement to the theory of performativity, which accounts for the unconscious and libidinal dimension of the assumption of a gender.

Butler's solution to consider the ambivalence implied in gender is her re-reading of the Freudian concept of melancholy, producing her idea of gender melancholy since *Gender trouble* and expanding it in subsequent books, *Bodies that matter* and *A vida psíquica do poder*. However, if we observe the progression of these three books, we find two different ways in which the author conceives performativity: on the one hand, under the aegis of performance and, on the other, under the call of citationality. If, from the standpoint of

performance, its conceptual grid involves considering gender as resulting from the melancholic incorporation in the self of lost and unrecognized love objects as such, along with the refusal of certain identifications in the Oedipal terrain, giving an unconscious dimension to gender, another scenario can be drawn from the point of view of citationality.

In fact, if performance theory is articulated with the theory of gender melancholy, we can consider that the theory of citationality, elaborated in *Bodies that matter*, opens a different way of thinking about gender in the author's work. This is insofar as citationality is concerned with the ritualized repetition of performatives in the discourse itself, by the repetition-quotation of norms that derivatively produce the materialization of 'sex', taken not as a given, but as a result of specific procedures of power. Although the philosopher, reading Lacan, articulates a proposition about the assumption of the normative phantasy of 'sex' as a way of sustaining something of the libidinal at that moment of her theory, this scenario still maintains the processes of materialization of sex and citation of the norm emptied of libido in what they seem to become specific procedures of productive power.

From this tension, we believe that the re-elaboration of performativity as citationality in *Bodies that matter* allows us to advance another reading about gender, in a way located between Butler and Laplanche. This re-elaboration serves to think a broader horizon for a theory of gender as performative, from a theoretical framework that goes beyond the Butlerian articulation between performance-melancholy, restricted to an Oedipal paradigm that leaves aside central elements for the constitution of the subject, as elaborated by Laplanche (1992) in his theory of generalized seduction. This theoretical supplement will allow us to situate the Butlerian proposal of performance-melancholy in a second moment in relation to the time originated from seduction and gender performatives coming from the adult.

In a Laplanchean methodology, it seems fundamental to think of this prehistory of the constitution of the subject, sustaining a terminological division between the original and the *a posteriori*, and that we will locate between the performative of the seduction and the performance of the subject, taken as a subjective answer, elaborated from the anthropological situation of the baby. This maneuver allows us, at least in theoretical terms, not to lose sight of the prehistory of the subject prior to the formation of the self, even if in practical terms these elements can be confused. After all, the phantasmatic assumption of 'sex' and gender melancholy, because they presuppose the dialectic between choice of object and identification (which is an identification 'with'), can only happen a posteriori to the original seduction, which involves identification 'by'.

If Laplanche (2015c) considers the Oedipus as a code-narrative scheme, secondary to seduction, it is a matter of extracting its consequences for thinking Butler's theory of performance. To the extent that the author takes gender by the paradigm of melancholy, she has in mind the 'child's' ambivalence toward the adult world, which would, for Laplanche, constitute a Ptolemaic⁵ reading of the gender, which turns the individual into the center of the scenario. But in a Copernican turn of psychoanalysis, the fundamental is in the

⁵ Laplanche (1992) metaphorically uses the opposition between Ptolemy and Copernicus to propose the radical decentering that must come from the consequences of something that cannot be limited to a change of center, from Earth to the Sun, in astronomical theories. The Copernican revolution partially opens the possibility of an absence of center; but it is always at risk of falling into a new center, a reprint of Ptolemaic theory. With this metaphor, Laplanche affirms the importance and the difficulty of sustaining the subjective decentralization implied in the concept of the unconscious, always threatened to return with other forms of Ptolemaic recentralization, such as we may find in Butler's earlier readings on gender, for leaving aside the sexual unconscious of the adult, prior to the child. The later ethical shift of her work towards alterity, contemporaneous with her encounter with Laplanche's texts, allows us to recover at least in part this dimension of the other that was not sufficiently emphasized in the early 1990s.

ambivalences 'of the adult world itself' as the child's original situation, so that the Oedipus (and, by extension, melancholy) arises only later as a narrative form that the child finds to translate the enigmatic messages of the other, previous to the oedipal conflicts.

Performatives and their noises

If Oedipus can be considered the secondary scenario of gender⁶, in relation to the original time in which the designations originating from the other invade the baby before its own formation as subject, it seems productive to us to approach the performative as citation as carried through messages of the adults and their translational codes. If from birth, the human subject is confronted with a gendered world, with caregivers who have already performed their genders from the beginning, we can assume that the conscious-preconscious messages of adults to children will also contain repetitions, quotations, designations of gender (committed to the unconscious of adults), which can operate as a discursive-libidinal support for enigmatic messages. Thus, performativity becomes haunted by the unconscious noises that each adult carries with them and transmits in their messages to the child. If these performative elements attempt to promote a semblance of substance, of an earlier-inner ontological matrix that they would only express, we find there one of the roots of the enigma of the sexual for the children, which persists in the adult world.

Even in Freud (1996), we can deduce, it is already this very binary traumatic division of human beings that makes an enigma: with the hypothesis of the visit to the Earth of a purely thinkingbeing, stripped of bodily existence, perhaps the most interesting for such visitor, Freud argues, was the alleged existence of two 'sexes' – which may also mean the two 'genders' – since for both terms there is only in German the word *Geschlecht* – among human beings, who, “[...] although so similar in other respects, mark their differences with very obvious external signs” (Freud, 1996, p. 193). One of the questions that this thinking being would pose could be related to why this binary performative division between the subjects of each sex/gender, manufactured with such rigidity and policing around the heterosexual norm.

In addition, the performative themselves can infiltrate the translation codes, providing to the child a regime of normativities that guarantee means to repress-symbolize the infantile sexual, fluid, perverse and polymorphous. It may be that, in the very provision of the translation codes, the citation of the standard occurs. After all, the child does not translate in any way; there is a cultural transmission, a normative regime, that supports and conveys the drive in ways of flowing more facilitated by the culture than others. Here we follow the idea that the caregiver acts as a 'double switch' (Bleichmar, 1994), that is, at the same time excites and transmits enigmatic messages, but also provides translation elements that will aid the subject in constitution to translate those messages.

In this case, it is in the original seduction that one can operate the materialization of binary 'sex' in the body care engendered by adults. In seduction, there occurs the

⁶ As a consequence, the loss of homosexual attachment that Butler considers originary is also displaced to a secondary place. From a Laplanche perspective, this homosexual loss can only function as a later elaboration, which takes a normative-normative form in the culture to translate the chaotic invasion of the drive in the baby. Thus, the cultural production of the enigmatic danger of homosexuality would function as a misleading code of translation for the diffuse and disruptive sexual, for there is at first no clear and distinct content such as homosexuality that could be delimited as a loss of the subject, but only an untranslatable remnant of enigmatic messages.

unconscious stimulation of the erogenous zones of *infans*, whose body becomes erotized by the drive of the other already constituted. Thus, dual 'sex', organized by the traditional gender, serves as a translational support that guides the care of the adult, based on the constraint of the norm reiterated by the *socius*, which cites these norms in the very dealings with the child. Thus, after this implantation of sexuality, which delimits the corporal contours of the child, the assumption of the normative phantasy of 'sex' can be orchestrated *a posteriori*, as a way of organizing the diffuse and disruptive sexual, in a moment of active resumption of the child in relation to this original time of seduction. If performatives (designations, citations, repetitions) of gender will be linked to the original seduction (with the adult's messages and body care that guide the materialization of the 'sex' of the child), in turn, gender performance will occur in an afterword, as a subjective response to the translations carried out on enigmatic messages, thus engendering melancholy and Oedipus.

In this way, the narcissism of the child and its self will be formed from the original unconscious erotization and the translation codes that come from the adult, something to which the child attaches to given its helplessness before the drive. This generates a passionate attachment to norms, to subjection, to the codes that guide the constitutive translations of the subject, which allow them to appear. Butler (2015) asserts that the meaning of genders, by relying on repeated performance, functions only in the orbit of repetition compulsion. The reassuring arrangements of gender must therefore be repeated, trying again and again to translate, to make sense of the untranslatable remains of the enigmatic messages conveyed by *socius*, remains that insist by translation, without ever reaching it properly. With Laplanche (2015a), we argue that: these remains are the strange presence of the sexual in the subject.

In our view, the elements of discontinuity that Butler (2015) points out are not exhaustible by the demands of coherence and unity of gender, – these discontinuous, incoherent, non-unitary elements are what block the harmony planned by gender, denouncing its naturalization process and pointing to what does not deceive: this irreducible excess in human subjects that is properly the sexual, singular mark that inhabits each subject in its own way. If performativity theory loses sight of something of the drive, we hold the view that it is precisely that which reappears when Butler perceives the elements of discontinuity in sexuality. With Laplanche, we advance that these “[...] internally discontinuous acts” (Butler, 2015, p. 242) that make gender performatives fail can be taken as the rebellious character of the sexual, which does not allow any successful species of complete domestication in the ego of the subject, by infiltrating the breaches of these performatives.

Hence, the sexual is defined as the “[...] unconscious residue of repression-symbolization of gender by sex” (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 155), which indicates that gender rests on the discursive dimension of a binary sex to emphasize-symbolize the perverse-polymorph sexual. Since the normative ideal of sex in Western culture is dual, gender also presents itself in this way, but it could be produced in more plural ways. But Laplanche ends up reifying the construct of sex by claiming that sex is dual “‘by sexual reproduction’ and also by its human symbolization, which fixes and plasters ‘duality’ in presence/absence, phallic/castrated” (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 155, emphasis added), in an affirmation that presupposes an initial duality that will only be plastered by human symbolization. This makes us lose sight of the political aspects of the production of a binary sex from modernity and its libidinal games of power, which materialize sex in this dual, oppositional, reproductive way.

If Butler misses a part of the sexual, Laplanche, in turn, fails to account for sufficiently indicating the libidinal relations of power responsible for this symbolization, making it seem, perhaps, that there would be a pure, dual, male-female body being symbolized within these reassuring arrangements with the phallic/castrated pair. Nevertheless, we agree with Laplanche (2015a, p. 168) when he says that “[...] gender precedes sex”. But we have to make a caveat to the second part of its formulation, that gender, rather than organizing sex, “[...] is organized by it” (p. 168). Laplanche does not seem to realize the power relations that organized the perception of a binary sex. It is gender itself that, based on a heterosexual matrix, discursively produces a binary sex and then feeds on that construct - which it itself produced - to legitimize itself as a binary.

Laplanche continues his argument by trying to differentiate psychoanalysis from traditional naturalist positions. He points out that in this matter the Freudian appeal is not to the biological, but to the anatomy. However, it would not be scientific anatomy, which, in his view, “[...] can be purely descriptive⁷” (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 170). Rather, sex that is symbolized in human relationships would be that of a 'popular anatomy' (Laplanche, 2015a), fantasized, perceptive, and even illusory. This is because, with the transition from human beings to the upright position in the course of evolution, the female genital organ would have become inaccessible to visual perception, so that the difference of the sexes would become 'sex difference'.

This conjuncture would facilitate the translation of the sexes into the phallic logic (presence and absence, phallic and castrated), with the man currently conceived in terms of presence and phallic, and woman, in terms of absence and castrated⁸. Laplanche here seems to appeal to a fantasized anatomy - which we could conceive of as an 'anatomizing' deviation - but losing sight of the set of libidinal power relations that allowed the construction of the 'man' category on the phallic/presence side and the construction of the category 'woman' on the side of the castrated/absence, as if such arrangements gave account of exhausting the sexual sphere. A logic that reiterates the heterosexual identity norm each time it functions as a translational code or narrative schema for unconscious infantile sexuality.

Final considerations

As a balance of the discussion, we note that Butler is more radical in one point: the problem of sex. Whereas Laplanche is more radical in another: the question of the sexual. In addition, both bring a third term for the gender-sex dyad, in order to circumvent naturalizing points of view based on biology: Laplanche, through the sexual; Butler, through the relations of power, with the heterosexual norm. In our reading, it seems to us that it has been possible to propose a space of metabolization of these differences, in which we can think how the sexual intervenes in libidinal relations of power.

⁷ We suspect, together with Butler (2009), the idea that anatomical descriptions can be neutral or objective, since there is always the implication of libidinal relations of power in the field of knowledge.

⁸ It is worth remembering that Ribeiro (2010) already raised suspicions about these propositions, focusing his argument on the unbearable thesis of the original passivity for the subject, articulated with the repression of the orificial and the fantasies of being penetrated. Our argumentative way is not incompatible with his, but we place more emphasis on the historical dimension of the libidinal relations of power, insofar as the matter of the bodies is not dissociable from norms that regulate its materialization (Butler 1993).

In this sense, we understand that the heterosexual norm and gender performatives function not only as pure 'translation aid' (Laplanche, 2015b), but also more incisively as a form of constitutive constraint (Butler, 1993). Compulsory heterosexuality is, in our view, a translation code or, even more, a 'translational constraint' that, although it may be an organizer for several subjects, cannot silence its unconscious noises, making an enigma for the constituent subject.

Going beyond Butler and Foucault, with Laplanche, we reach a conception of the psychic subject that depends fundamentally on the concepts of translation and unconscious fantasy, so that the norm, in its process of incorporation, is parasitized by the sexual noises of who transmits one of its versions. Thus, the performative itself is parasitized with the unconscious sexual, which responds for its failure: the conscious-preconscious message of adults is the support for the performative reiteration of norms; but this very repetition bears the unconscious noises of adults. Therefore, the repetitions of the norm and its failures are at the mercy of the translation processes carried out by each subject, taking into account the libidinal crossings of the relations of power in these questions.

Thus, with the *Novos fundamentos para a psicanálise*, Laplanche (1992) takes the sexual from any essentialist or biological reference, insofar as his conception of the drive, which he rescues from Freud's work, is opposed to any medical-psychiatric notion of instinct. The drive, as seen by Laplanche, originates in the contingency of the encounter with the other, with the caretakers of the child, parasitized with his unconscious, in the fundamental anthropological situation. This proposal is consistent with Butler's (2017) reading, arguing that desire is only articulated from the libidinal history of a subject. This historical origin, both for Butler and for Laplanche, is fundamental to moving towards an anti-essentialism with regard to our conceptions of desire.

Therefore, we believe, in following Laplanche (2015a, p. 171), that it is possible to find "[...] more flexible, multiple, more ambivalent models of symbolization", which are less repressive and less committed to the deadly aspects of the unconscious, models that generate less psychic suffering for the subjects and allow them a less rigid transit between categories of identity, in addition to more fluid games between power relations. After all, the sexual, diffuse and disruptive, is what makes noise in the performatives of gender, which are intended clear and distinct as a way to try to obfuscate the opacity that haunts the subject.

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