



Wolves, horses, bitches and other characters of gender violence in the work of Carolina Bianchi

Luisa Dalgarrondo^{1, 2}

¹Universidade Estadual do Paraná – UNESPAR, Curitiba/PR, Brazil

²Universidade Estadual de Campinas – UNICAMP, Campinas/SP, Brazil

ABSTRACT – Wolves, horses, bitches and other characters of gender violence in the work of Carolina Bianchi – This text analyzes the works of Carolina Bianchi, mainly *LOBO* (2018), *O Tremor Magnífico* (2020) and *Trilogia Cadela Força – Capítulo I: A noiva e o Boa Noite Cinderela* (2023). The article presents the artist, her most recent works and discusses how Bianchi brings into play the debate on gender violence, mainly through three thematic axes: the role of women in the History of Art, exploration of non-normative sexualities and the presence of non-humans in her works, which call for the debate about nature *versus* culture. It is discussed how the artist articulates these elements on stage using strategies that seek to reveal tensions and contradictions, without presenting a resolution, but present an investigation of language and encourage critical and lively reflection.

Keywords: **Contemporary Theater. Gender Violence. Feminist Theater. History of Art. Nature and Culture.**

RÉSUMÉ – Loups, chevaux, chiennes et autres personnages de violence de genre dans le travail de Carolina Bianchi – Ce texte analyse les œuvres de Carolina Bianchi, principalement *LOBO* (2018), *Le Magnifique Tremblement* (2020) et *Cadela Força Trilogie – Chapitre I: La mariée et la Bonne Nuit Cendrillon* (2023). L'article présente l'artiste, ses œuvres les plus récentes et discute de la manière dont Bianchi met en jeu le débat sur les violences de genre, principalement à travers trois axes thématiques: le rôle des femmes dans l'histoire de l'art, l'exploration des sexualités non normatives et la présence d'êtres non humains dans ses œuvres, qui appellent au débat nature contre culture. Il est question de la manière dont l'artiste articule ces éléments sur scène en utilisant des stratégies qui cherchent à révéler les tensions et les contradictions, sans présenter de résolution, mais qui révèlent une langage et encouragent une réflexion critique et vivante.

Mots-clés: **Théâtre Contemporain. Violence de Genre. Théâtre Féministe. Histoire de l'Art. Nature et Culture.**

RESUMO – Lobos, cavalos, cadelas e outros personagens da violência de gênero no trabalho de Carolina Bianchi – Este texto analisa os trabalhos de Carolina Bianchi, principalmente *LOBO* (2018), *O Tremor Magnífico* (2020) e *Trilogia Cadela Força – Capítulo I: A noiva e o Boa Noite Cinderela* (2023). O artigo apresenta a artista, seus trabalhos mais recentes e discute como Bianchi coloca em cena o debate da violência de gênero, através principalmente de três eixos temáticos: o papel das mulheres na história da arte, exploração de sexualidades não-normativas e presença de seres não humanos em suas obras, que convocam o debate sobre natureza *versus* cultura. Discute-se como a artista articula esses elementos em cena a partir de estratégias que buscam escancarar tensões e contradições, sem apresentar uma resolução, mas em uma investigação de linguagem que fomenta uma reflexão crítica e viva.

Palavras-chave: **Teatro Contemporâneo. Violência de Gênero. Teatro Feminista. História da Arte. Natureza e Cultura.**

This article aims to analyze how, since 2015, Carolina Bianchi has produced works in the performing arts that reflect, in their themes and poetics, issues that are fundamental to feminism and gender studies, especially by repeatedly addressing the place of women in history and the arts, sexuality outside the norm and gender violence.

I have been following Bianchi's work since 2008, when she was still a member of Companhia dos Outros¹, in São Paulo, and I began a more formal investigation of her work in 2019, when I conducted the first interview with the artist and analyzed her creative procedures in my doctoral research, defended in the same year. In addition, and inseparably, I also began to contribute to Bianchi's artistic creations, having taken part in various workshops and residencies guided by her and, from 2019 onwards, I became part of the Cara de Cavalo Collective, directed by her, as a performer and assistant director², and I incorporate observation, participation and notes from rehearsals and performances of the works into my research. The analysis made here is related to this accompaniment and dialog with the artist in recent years and, although her stagings are the central object of this text, the analysis and participation in the creative processes related to these stagings were also considered as procedures for understanding the artist's work.

This article will introduce the artist and her dialog with feminism and gender studies in general, followed by an analysis of her authorial works. First, her first works – *Mata-me de prazer* (2015) and *Quiero hacer el amor* (2017) – will be introduced, followed by an analysis of her last three works: *LOBO* (2018), *O Tremor Magnífico* (2020) and *Trilogia Cadela Força Capítulo I: A noiva e o Boa Noite Cinderela* (2023). In this description, Bianchi's main strategies for addressing the aforementioned themes will already be pointed out, and then, with the help of theoretical provocations made by Paul Preciado, in texts from the *Manifesto Contrassexual – práticas subversivas de identidade sexual* and chronicles from the book *Um apartamento em Urano: crônicas da travessia*, and by Donna Haraway, in her *A Cyborg manifesto: science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century*, we will analyze how her poetics fits into contemporary gender debates. This analysis will point out how Bianchi prioritizes the investigation of a language to deal with violent themes, and that this language occurs in

the juxtaposition of materials, within what the artist calls in her latest work the “perspective of confusion”, as opposed to the search for definitive solutions to violence itself.

Bianchi and the feminist perspective in the contemporary scene

Carolina Bianchi is a playwright, performer and director of Cara de Cavalo³, an artistic collective from São Paulo with which she has been working for the last few years. A graduate of the Escola de Arte Dramática de São Paulo and of the DAS – *Academy of Theatre and Dance*, in Amsterdam, Bianchi has been developing her own work since 2015 and her latest work, *Trilogia Cadela Força - A noiva e o Boa Noite Cinderela*, premiered in July 2023 at the Avignon Festival in France.

Bianchi is a stager “with her body present on stage” (Santos; Carvalho, 2019, p. 80), because the scene is written, staged, directed and also acted by her. In dialogue with the contemporary scene, Bianchi’s gender perspective is often combined with an investigation of poetics that challenge more conventional structures, blurring the boundaries between dance, performance, theater and cinema in an exploration of formats such as lecture-performance and autofiction. Although these aspects are not exclusively explored by women on the contemporary scene, multi-layered authorship, also found in the work of contemporary artists such as Grace Passô, Janaína Leite, Leonarda Gluck and Renata Carvalho, necessarily brings a non-universalizing, personal and yet collective perspective, and is thus of interest to those who wish to speak from a non-hegemonic point of view.

In line with Grada Kilomba’s provocation, which asks “What happens when we speak? And what can we talk about?” (Kilomba, 2019, p. 30), the images and themes brought up by Bianchi often break silent pacts and bring uncomfortable themes to the stage, especially about sexuality and violence. If “theater can also be a place of speech” (Bacellar, 2017, p. 27), when the subject of this speech is a woman, there is a change in what is put on stage and, perhaps more importantly, how certain themes are put on stage.

In Bianchi’s case, specifically, it is not a staging based on her statements as a woman, although in some of her works she brings autobiographical data in more evident ways, but a scenic creation that investigates ways

of communicating and relating themes linked to gender and sexuality, with a focus on violence. These forms of communication investigated by Bianchi often escape the schematic exposition of violence, and seek to question dichotomies between good *vs.* bad, man *vs.* woman; and thus question the very nature of these dichotomies and denounce their fragility.

Juliana Moraes (2022, p. 20), who identifies Bianchi as part of a generation of third wave feminist artists, brings a psychoanalytical perspective to this group, noting that in the works produced by this generation, there is an attempt to subvert a “hysterical” corporeality, which translates into “convulsive” bodies that display uncivilized and “feminine” behaviors, in an approximation to animals that “urinate, drool and squirm”, but also move violently, out of control, in a disharmonious and imprecise way.

As early as 2010, Marvin Carlson recognized the tendency towards autobiographical themes in the performances of the 1970s and 1980s in works by women, as a way of taking the reins of the narrative until then dominated by white cisgender male artists (Carlson, 2010). Carlson (2010, p. 168) also points out the tendency to take on multiple roles in creation: “they created their own projects serving as writer, producer, director, designer, cast, and often carpenters and costumier as well”. It is interesting to note this difference: while men’s work often did not involve them on stage or in technical functions, reserving for themselves the place of a creator separated from his creature, women’s tendency to put themselves forward to execute their own ideas also reveals another relationship with the work of art, one that denies precisely this supposedly objective, distanced place and, at the same time, creates the possibility of refusing that, once again, someone else should speak on their behalf.

According to Carlson, male artists would not be so interested in this autobiographical approach, while among women there are recurring works of this type, such as Linda Montano, Barbara Smith and Yvone Rainer, American artists to whom Carlson refers to affirm his point of view. I would add here the hypothesis that this apparent lack of interest on the part of men in talking about themselves is not so much related to a desire to talk about other subjects, but rather to an understanding that all subjects are, in reality, about themselves – when you occupy a hegemonic position, there is no need to make your experience or authorship explicit; on the contrary,

there is a naturalization of personal experience as universal. It is the *subaltern*, the *second sex*, the *Other*, who do not have the right to have their experience of the world told in the usual way, because that experience is then considered foreign to what is universal. In line with this statement, Itziar Pascual (2016, p. 193-205) responds when asked about the feminist perspective in her work:

The moment you put actors on stage, with an interpretation, with a text, there is a point of view. [...] Excellence was thought to be what was objective. I believe that since then, fortunately, a lot of theorizing, a lot of people have come to highlight that when people talked about objectivity, they were talking about a dominant ideology, something that was, in reality, the ideology of a segment that had managed to take over thought and that also wanted to convince people that this was the right thing, the only thing, the accepted thing.

It is therefore understandable that it is female, trans, racialized, disabled and/or migrant artists who bring their experiences to the stage, who feel the need to debate their experiences and oppressions, sometimes even involving “their own gender performativity as an artistic work” (Colling, 2021, p. 5-6).

Bianchi dialogues with her contemporaries in her proposals, indirectly or directly, both through the themes addressed in her works and in the creative procedures and performative practices she develops, often inspired by debates coming from the fields of Philosophy, Anthropology and Gender Studies, with the aim of bringing these discussions to the stage and to the body.

First authorial works: sex and space

Since 2015, when she began her more authorial investigations with the work *Mata-me de prazer*, Bianchi has always touched on the theme of violence and sexuality in some way. In this spectacle, the artist recounts a strange event: a seismic tremor that causes a piece of land to detach from the continent and its population to live according to their own rules, communicating by telepathy and devoting much of their time to various sexual relations. At the end of this work, in its early versions, Bianchi would throw knives at a wooden plaque in the shape of a wolf and invite someone from

the audience to do the same. In a recent version of the work, with few changes to the dramaturgy, the artist puts on rubber gloves and masturbates with a microphone next to her vulva while continuing with the text.

The next work, *Quiero hacer el amor*, 2017, is a performance in which a group of approximately ten women⁴ move around a public place with the aim of “having sex with space”. The performers are not trying to simulate a sexual relationship, but to genuinely investigate bodily how to give pleasure to the space and feel pleasure in this interaction, and thus discover what movements and bodily states are made possible by this orientation. Once again, sex appears as a central theme, based on an attempt to cause a rupture in normative sexual practice – performed by just two bodies, preferably a cisgender man and a cisgender woman, in a private environment, following a predictable script associated with sexual reproduction, that is, penetration of the penis into the vagina and ending with the man’s ejaculation. Taking Paul Preciado and George Bataille (1987) as important references at this time, Bianchi brought to the performance the debate on sexual relations and eroticism as a fundamental political field for maintaining the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist system. If this system is based on the monogamic and cis-heterosexual family nucleus, what happens when *practices that subvert* the norm are explored? At the time, Bianchi was interested in proposing new forms of communication and relationships, both between people and between people and nature, people and space. This interest continues to manifest itself in her work in diverse ways, as we will see below.

A Theater of Wolves and Ghosts

Bianchi then takes up the final image of *Mata-me de prazer* in the spectacle *LOBO*, in a work that returns to the theatrical building and to theatricality itself, although always in tension with performativity⁵. *LOBO* is permeated by very significant moments of representation and artificiality, but it also includes more performative proposals, including a new realization of *sex with space*, this time made by the performers in the theater.

In a structure organized in chapters, without composing a linear narrative, but with a cumulative superimposition of images and text, in its initial part *LOBO* features the work of Artemisia Gentileschi⁶ (1593-1656), *Judite decapitando Holofernes*. Gentileschi’s painting is an important milestone in

the history of art for discussing gender violence: Gentileschi was raped by a teacher who, against the already violent convention of the time, refused to marry her and was then prosecuted by her father. During the seven-month trial, Gentileschi's body and life were scrutinized because, according to the laws in force, it was necessary to prove her virginity in order for the rapist to be convicted. In the painting, it is speculated that the professor was portrayed in this image as Holofernes, while she had made a self-portrait of the woman who beheaded him, as a form of imaginary revenge created by Gentileschi.



Figure 1 – Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judite decapitando Holofernes* (1620), Florence, Italy.
Source: Uffizi Gallery's website.

In *LOBO*, a group of around 20 men organize themselves into a choir, forming a series of oppositions in relation to Bianchi: they naked/ she dressed, they without lines/ she with all the text (on stage and in the projection voiceover), they in a group/ she alone, etc. The tensions between her and the chorus are constructed in several ways throughout the play, both denouncing and subverting structures of gender oppression: at first, she enters the scene like a *femme fatale* from the Wild West, with two guns in her hands, ready to shoot them all and, the next moment, they chase her and

touch her in an increasing way until it becomes suffocating, a harassment. At another point in the play, a romantic couple scene is created, referring to clichés from movie romances, in which Bianchi chases a specific performer, repeating that she gave him the best years of her life, until she throws herself on him and devours his intestines.

There are also *intermezzos* in the play, in which a stuffed fox appears and says texts referring to a strange nature, in which she recounts, for example, her experience of having laid an egg and broken all the bones in her pelvis. In the final scenes, Bianchi brings in the figure of Mary Shelley, author of the first science fiction book, *Frankenstein*, whose work was for many years attributed to her husband – what is said in the scene. We can think of *LOBO* as a very interesting way of bringing the *nature vs. culture* debate to the stage. This discussion has developed between the fields of Philosophy, Anthropology and Biology and has been explored by various authors in an attempt to delimit what is natural and what is socially constructed. In short, such debate is crucial for gender studies. While historically the argument of *natural* attributes was used to subjugate those who were not cis-heterosexual European men, the work of Simone de Beauvoir and later Judith Butler led to the questioning of what would a *feminine nature* really be, and how femininity could then be something artificial, created in opposition to men and performed as a gender.

LOBO refers to what is wild, in the sense of referring to an undomesticated, potentially dangerous animal, but also to the villainous animal of fairy tales – is men's violence against women something *natural* or is it part of a historical construction? Although the debate is not explicitly posed in the work and Bianchi does not offer a conclusive answer to this question, the images created in *LOBO* continue her attempt to organize relationships in a different way.



Figure 2 – Scene from *LOBO*, featuring Carolina Bianchi and Gabriel Bodstein. Performance at SESC Pompeia, in São Paulo, 2019. Source: Photo by Mayra Azzi.

In her next work, *O Tremor Magnífico*, Bianchi moves closer to the field of history, in the form of ghosts, witches and vampires, hauntings that refer to a macabre colonial past that has not been overcome, permeated with violent deaths, persecution of women and parasitic relationships. In the libretto of the work, we can find the following text, which reaffirms the relationship between these fantastic beings and history:

It is impossible to bury History completely. History can be hidden, forgotten, tampered with, but burying it is pointless. There will always be creatures emerging from the earth, the tombs, the walls or the books. There will always be beings crossing the times, which are resurrected and nourished by new life (Dagalarrondo, 2020, local MMXIX.II).

In this work, the artist tensions the violence perpetrated against women with the figure of the violent woman, through the story of Elizabeth Bathory⁷, the countess who allegedly killed hundreds of people – almost all of them young women who were cruelly tortured. Jota Mombaça (2016, p. 12), in affirming the need for a “redistribution of violence”, points out that

[...] the mere imaginative evocation of other forms of violence already has a disruptive effect on this grammar that aims to guarantee the stability of the representation of male violence based on a negative parallel with feminized positions – of cis women, *bixas*, transvestites and other corporealities marked as feminine and represented as necessarily fragile and passive in the face of violence.

Also made up of chapters, the piece begins with Bianchi mounted on a *horse* – a performer positioned on four supports with a towel illustrated with a horse, which hides him, held out in front of him by two people who refer to Adam and Eve – and then the piece that people are about to see is presented: a *bad trip* of a sadomasochistic relationship that we would have with colonial history, with Eurocentrism. This *bad trip* reveals our attraction to European content that goes hand in hand with a profound rejection of these same materials, because the attraction itself is the fruit of coloniality, which simultaneously composes us and wounds us.

The following scenes feature a witches' *sabbath*, a choreography of ghosts and a vampire party, interspersed with a moment in which Bianchi recounts an attempted rape she suffered, linking this violence to the Portuguese invasion of Brazilian territory and the coup suffered by President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Horror, another theme Bianchi focuses on, has clear gender markers, whether in history or cinema: in the play, the woman is both the first victim and the *final girl*, a pop culture character who manages to survive the monster. The final girl of *O Tremor Magnífico* could be Latin America plundered and enslaved, it could be Dilma Rousseff and it could also be Bianchi herself, who escaped being raped in a car in Recife in 2018, as she tells it in the play. The play ends with a dead horse being thrown from above to the center of the stage, which until then had been used to stage Bianchi's own funeral.



Figure 3 – Scene from *O Tremor Magnífico*, featuring Carolina Bianchi, Chico Lima, Larissa Ballarotti and Tomás Decina. Performance at Teatro de Contêiner, in São Paulo, 2020. Source: Photo by Mayra Azzi.

If in *LOBO* Bianchi seems to pose the question of whether gender violence is something natural or something socially constructed, in *O Tremor Magnífico*, the question is reformulated to investigate at what point in history this violence begins and what is the extent of its presence over time.

***Cadela Força* – the enigmatic and open violence**

Her most recent work, *Trilogia Cadela Força - A noiva e o Boa Noite Cinderela*, is the first chapter of a trilogy⁸ and is divided into two parts. Described by Kate Wyver (2023) as a “[...] knockout, a nightmarish odyssey”, the piece opens with Bianchi alone, in a space and in an all-white costume, reading a long text in lecture format. She begins the piece by stating that she is not the protagonist of the work, because the protagonist would be dead, already introducing a central theme of the work, femicide. At this beginning, the artist also announces that the perspective she will bring to this theme is the “perspective of confusion”, revealed in the juxtaposition of materials that have no obvious relationship and reaffirmed in the impossibility of concluding the problems raised.

In the text read in this first part, she deals precisely with gender violence and performances by women artists, bringing as central references the story of Pippa Bacca, an Italian performer who was murdered and raped during her performance *Sposa in viaggio*⁹ (2008), and the performance *La Siesta*, by Regina José Galindo. Bacca’s performance consisted of hitchhiking dressed as a bride, together with her work partner Silvia Moro, on a journey that started in northern Italy and went all the way to Jerusalem. In an attempt to explore a relationship of trust with the kindness of strangers, they crossed areas where there was strong socio-political tension and used the metaphor of marriage between nations through the images of brides. Galindo’s performance, on the other hand, consisted of the artist taking a sedative drug and sleeping on a mattress in front of the public, leaving her body vulnerable and exposed to an audience, also creating a relationship of trust with strangers. Bianchi dialogues with Galindo in a very direct way, by bringing to the stage the practice of the *Boa Noite Cinderela*, a form of gender violence in which a woman is induced to take sedative drugs in a veiled way, is raped and, in general, cannot access the memories of this violence in the days following the crime.

While Bianchi reads the text, which includes a song in Italian – songs and karaoke are also present in the two previous works –, she takes a cocktail of sedative drugs with vodka, her own Boa Noite Cinderela. The performer continues reading her text and, over the course of approximately 40 minutes, she gradually confuses words and becomes drowsy, until she is no longer able to continue and falls asleep on stage, ending the first part of the piece. In the second part, the scenery changes completely: Bianchi's body is left inert on the stage and elements reminiscent of a desert and tombs are brought in, with a car in the background. A group of performers enters the scene and seems to move in a *little efficient* dance, another way of staging the confusion in a choreography that looks more like a blur of a choreography, without a precise tone or rhythm. As if they were the flashbacks of a person who has been doped, the second part follows in a disturbing party atmosphere, with a diffuse and tense sexual energy, violence that is always imminent and with a strong intertextuality with Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, a novel in which the Chilean writer dedicates an entire section to a narrative of the numerous femicides that took place from 1993 onwards in the Ciudad de Juarez region, in northern Mexico. Throughout this section, the presence of people in movement is superimposed, often dancing, with a text that is projected continuously, as if it were the continuity of what Bianchi had read in the first section and, at the same time, as if the text were also part of this interspersed thought of the doped person's memory.

In this work, instead of the wolf or the horse, it is the image of a car that comes as a haunting – a deadly machine, like the cars Pippa Bacca used to get into, like the last car she got into. In Bolaño's novel, often the last time the victim would have been seen was when she got into a car, just as is described in many cases of femicide. In the final part of the play, a *gynecological examination* is carried out on Bianchi, still doped up, in which she is placed on the hood of the car and a camera is inserted into her uterus, with the images projected onto a screen while one of the performers says a text with an analysis by Rita Segato, an Argentine anthropologist, about femicide as a practice of annihilation and also as a form of communication between groups of men, who demonstrate their power and the disposability of bodies through rape and murder. Violence then reveals itself as a language,

as a way of communicating power, not only over violated bodies, but also over space and narrative.



Figure 4 – Rehearsal scene from *Trilogia Cadela Força - A noiva e o Boa Noite Cinderela*, with Carolina Bianchi in front of a projection showing part of Pippa Bacca's performance *Sposa in Viaggio*, by Pippa Bacca. Source: Photo by Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

The (violent) history of art

In her last three works, there are frequent references to women in the history of art, whether erudite, pop, ancient or contemporary: Artemisia Gentileschi, Mary Shelley, Ana Mendieta, Pippa Bacca, Regina José Galindo, Daniela Perez, Tania Bruguera, Lygia Clark, Virginia Woolf. In addition to denouncing the erasure of many of these figures in the teaching and construction of art history, many of the women artists mentioned suffered gender-based violence that was inseparable from their artistic career. Gentileschi, raped by her tutor, Mendieta, murdered by her husband¹⁰, Bacca, raped and killed during her performance, Daniela Perez, murdered by her work partner. Bianchi names them and dialogues with them using different strategies and pointing out different relationships. They are attempts to homage, rituals of resuscitation, rewriting of history, a dialog with the dead, with points of reference to understand herself, Bianchi, as part of a group of artists, of violated and silenced women.

The ways in which these references appear are varied, being both references that Bianchi used in the creative process as inspiration for the

scenes, and moments of intertextuality and presentation of the artists explicitly in the dramaturgy. In *O Tremor Magnífico*, for example, there is a scene in which all the performers are in their backs, leaning against the back of the stage, with their pants down, in a nod to Ana Mendieta's *Rape scene*.

In *A noiva e o Boa Noite Cinderela*, there is a moment of karaoke in Italian, as a tribute to Pippa Bacca, and the very aesthetic of the first chapter – all in white – refers to Bacca's aesthetic. It is not just a question of naming and paying homage to the artists in a merely complimentary relationship, however: as the dialog with these references takes place, important points of tension are also revealed. In this last work, the tension between Bianchi and Bacca is exposed by the colonial imprint on their discourses and beliefs. Bacca, Italian and Christian, believed she could cross the Balkans in an act of faith in humanity. Bianchi, as a Latin American woman, states that she would not be willing to make this act of faith, and reveals how her relationship with Bacca is multifaceted: there is admiration and affection, but there is also a certain rejection of her stance as a white European woman, believing herself to be out of danger. Bacca remains distant from a feminist perspective, corroborating the image of purity attributed to women and praising the normative position of mother and wife in her work, while Bianchi refuses the norm and asks herself on stage: "Does woman exist? Are we performing an impossibility?", taking up the questions posed by Beauvoir, Lacan and Butler.

In the second part, Bianchi resumes this tension, placing herself as a woman who enjoys the privileges of cisgenderity and whiteness, when Blacky, a Black transvestite performer, addresses her in an attempt to bring her out of the torpor of *Boa Noite Cinderela*. It is no coincidence that this performer is the one who brings her back to consciousness. It is clear, as Dodi Leal states, that "[...] the presence of transgender people in scenic processes promotes a turn in cultural studies, calling into question assumptions that were nuanced in the 20th century, especially Oswaldian anthropophagy" (Leal; Rosa, 2020, p. 5) and Bianchi faces this anthropophagy with obvious nausea, as it is no longer a question of simply digesting content and transforming it, but of dealing with the indigestion of these contents.

Questioning the limits of performance and drawing a parallel between the actions of male and female artists, Bianchi reminds us that the risk praised as daring and courageous for the former is the same as that seen as naivety in the latter, and questions the idea of safety, of overcoming, of digestion in these materials. The car on stage has the inscription *fuck catharsis*, on its license plate, and it points precisely to this rejection of the idea of a *cure* or *purgation of evil* through the stage work.

Bianchi is often faced with unsolvable questions, and often this impossibility of conclusion is a characteristic of violence itself and a reflection of the extent of its effects on the world. Just like Juarez's femicides, which seem like impossible puzzles to solve, violence seems to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time: the rapist who dops his victim with *Boa Noite Cinderela* also takes away from her the possibility of remembering her face, knowing her identity and even knowing exactly what crime she has suffered. Bianchi seems to constantly affirm that this is what gender violence is: so structural to our society that it is difficult to get rid of it without breaking with society itself.

Sexual practices in performance

From the very first work described here, in *Mata-me de prazer*, Bianchi already dealt with the theme of eroticism, mainly through sexual practices that were in some way subversive. The artist states that:

[...] I was 30 years old and I started asking myself some questions: How do I have the sex I really want to have? How does the way I have sex affect the way I dance, the way I write? Am I doing this or am I eternally doing the same theater of things that I have accepted? (Bianchi, 2019, p. 223).

The creative processes conducted by Bianchi are particularly focused on developing practices that bring the collective of performers closer to the sensations and images that the artist intends to create, and the director states that “a large part of the elaborated procedures arose from a need to find practices that would approximate of an ‘other logic’”, in an attempt to “transform her desires into exercises”, and to find practices that would make her “imaginary to be practicable” (Dalgarrondo, 2019, p. 140). This is how the proposal to “fuck with the space” came about, for example.

Bringing questions about their sexual practices into their creative procedures and into the scene itself is a way of breaking the pact of silence about this aspect of life and bringing it closer to questions about theatricality and performativity in relation to gender and sex. It is also an attempt to experiment with what Paul Preciado (2017, p. 21) proposes as *counter-sexuality*, namely a supplanting of a social contract considered “natural”, which provides for a relationship between two genders divided in a binary way, towards forms of exploration and relationship that recognize other bodies not as men or women, but as “speaking bodies”¹¹ and seek out the possibilities presented in deviating from this norm, from this tacitly accepted social contract. If, according to the author, we should consider the whole body as “a surface, a terrain for displacement and location of the dildo” (Preciado, 2017, p. 49), the possibility of having sex with space is not a fantasy, an impossibility or a metaphor, but a real counter-sexual act.

If the sexuality of women and other bodies that are in some way *deviant* has historically been transformed into a zone of repression and/or pathologized, it is also with the aim of exploring forms of eroticism and modes of pleasure that are far from conventional expectations that Bianchi brings sex into her work as a theme and practice. It is also a field in which the possibility of disorientation and uncontrol would be more accessible: just like sleep and dreams, in which there is, from a psychoanalytic point of view, a certain suspension of judgment and social restrictions, there is in sexuality, once the subject allows themselves to break free from these restrictions, this space of lack of control, disorder of everyday organization. Sexuality also presents itself as a possible language and as a field for inventing other forms of communication and relationships.

Animals, monsters and machines

There is a recurring element in all the works, which is the presence of non-human beings: animals, monsters and machines. In *Mata-me de prazer*, there are human beings throughout the narrative who seem to behave like non-human animals, with non-verbal communication, an amoral sexuality and a validation of intuition as an agent in decision-making – it would be possible, in the new reality established by the earthquake, to cancel an appointment because you have a strong intuition that you should not leave

the house, for example. In *Quiero hacer el amor* it is the space, the stairs, handrails, doors, benches, balconies – that are elevated to another status since the performers are proposing to have a sexual relationship with them.

In *LOBO*, in addition to the title of the work itself, there is the figure of the stuffed fox, which enters the scene as an interlude, but with its own text and, at the end, there is a lobster-belt – an accessory similar to an erotic toy that consists of an artificial penis attached to a belt, but which in this case replaces the penis with a lobster and is put on by Bianchi while the other performers paint their penises with fluorescent colored paint. In *O Tremor Magnífico*, we have the life-size replica of a horse, already mentioned, and there are frequent monstrous creatures: witches, ghosts, vampires. In *Trilogia Cadela Força*, animals appear in the title and in the opening text, when Bianchi tells a story of a woman who was killed, dismembered and the pieces of her body devoured by dogs – the story of Nastagio dels Onesti, from the *Decameron*, portrayed by Botticelli in a series of paintings and also recalling the story of Eliza Samudio's murder¹² in 2010. Unlike the two previous works, there are no animals on the set, which is organized as several tombs and from where you can see traces of corpses: bones, pieces of clothing and hair. However, there is a car which also has its status as a machine tensioned through the relationships established with the performers: sometimes one of them has sex with the car, sometimes it is the crime scene where one of them is killed, sometimes it is the stretcher on which Bianchi's body is examined.

In Bianchi's work, as previously mentioned, questions seem to constantly arise that lead us to the debate between nature and culture, with the aim of asking: after all, what is a human being? Is there humanity in non-humans? Is a man who kills his mistress and gives her body to dogs more human than the dogs themselves? Is being human a positive thing at all? Where is the origin, the reason for all this violence? Without drawing conclusions to these questions, Bianchi points to fundamental current discussions.

Monsters and animals seem to be important figures for questioning the very status of women and humans in general in the Anthropocene. Preciado calls for a rapprochement between feminism and animality, stating that feminism is not a humanism: "Feminism is not a humanism. Femi-

nism is an animalism. Or, to put it another way, animalism is an expanded and non-anthropocentric feminism” (Preciado, 2021, p. 125). The philosopher also links the animal to the machine, recalling how historically animals have been used as machines in the production and reproduction of capital and, in this same process, women and non-white people have been reduced, firstly, to animals, and then “to the status of (re)productive machine” (Preciado, 2021, p. 126), offering a possible connection between non-human figures as beings who are also close to the condition of woman.

At some point in the same text, Preciado (2021, p. 126) writes what could be a very close description of the final scene of *O Tremor Magnífico*:

Since humanist modernity has only been able to proliferate technologies of death, animalism needs to invent a new way of living with the dead. To live with the planet as a corpse and ghost. In other words: transform necropolitics into necro- aesthetics. Animalism must be a funeral party. The celebration of a duel. A funeral rite. A birth. Consequently, a relationship with death and an initiation into life. A solemn assembly of plants and flowers around the victims of the history of humanism.

We can also understand animals, machines and monsters, these non-human figures, from the perspective of Donna Haraway’s *cyborg*. In her *A Cyborg manifesto: science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century*, Haraway (2009, p. 36) describes the cyborg as “[...] a matter of fiction and lived experience [...] This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” or as “[...] creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted”. In this sense, the cyborg would function as a way of elaborating our collective and individual reality, a figure that unites imagination and material reality in an only body.

Haraway reminds us that the distinction between human and animal has, since the end of the 20th century, become imprecise and a terrain of imprecision. If we used to define *homo sapiens* by language, by the ability to use tools or by its social organization, today research in the scientific field shows that there are several species that share these same capacities and, although there are differences in how this is expressed in practice, the conceptual separation between humans and other animals has become more complex and “d many people no longer feel the need for such a separation”

(Haraway, 2009, p. 40). Thus, the myth of the cyborg precisely occupies the place of this dissolution of boundaries between human, animal and also machine, since, for Haraway (2009, p. 41), the second separation that is weakening is between the living organism and the machine. For Haraway, “pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted”.

The phantasmagoria of machines and, I would add here, of animals, lies precisely in this tension with the supposed humanity that would be in opposition to them, but which is, in reality, made up of characteristics found in people, animals and machines. Although we can place animals and machines at two opposite poles, the animal as the one beyond our control, the symbol of non-civilization, savagery, instinct and unpredictability, and machines as the result and means of the domination of nature, with a functional, predictable and mechanical existence, both are, in some way, the non-human. There is also, in both, a level of functioning that seems to be beyond our control: tuning a radio or seeing a car headlights flashing suggests a manifestation of a vestige of life, of some agency alien to human desires, a phantasmagoria. When we see conventionally human capacities in non-human creatures (and we see this all the time), before theorizing about the failure of the attempt to separate human from non-human, we are amazed and may think that it – be it a machine or an animal – is possessed by a spirit. But the spirit, in turn, is precisely the very *humanity* denied to these beings, in the form of will, agency and other characteristics that we considered exclusive, first to white men and then to other people. When Preciado (2021, p. 83) affirms the expansion of feminism to animals, it is possible to read a call for an end to these hierarchies: “Let’s pick the bananas and climb the trees. All cages must be opened, all taxonomies disarticulated”.

If thinkers like Angela Davis and bell hooks questioned, in the 1980s, how the category of *woman* in feminism was not enough to deal with issues of race and class, and Butler problematized, in the early 1990s, the fact that woman was the subject of feminism, bringing other identities into the discussion, there has been a tendency, especially since the 2000s, with decolonial studies and indigenous epistemologies, to think about how this discussion expands beyond the category of “human”.

Bianchi's work is also a way of relating current issues of feminism, the nature/culture debate and decolonial thought to all the violence and terror of modern and contemporary society. Perhaps the most terrible thing is not a horse falling on our heads or a car threatening us, but the violence that humanity itself was and is capable of imagining and executing.

Final Considerations

From the articulation of these three elements, historical journey, sexuality and non-human beings, Bianchi finds ways to radically question on stage what constitutes us as people, as a society, and is repeatedly confronted with violence in these relationships, especially gender violence and sexual violence. In her writing and acting, Bianchi is often asking what the origin of cruelty is and how we can deal with the terrible events we witness and experience, collectively and individually.

The final scene of *A Noiva e o Boa noite Cinderela*, in which Bianchi's doped body undergoes a gynecological examination, is perhaps one of the most violent images produced by the director. Like many cis and trans women, non-binary people, non-white people and people with disabilities who work in the field of performance, Bianchi places her body as the object of her own work and, in doing so, denounces violence directed at these bodies, seeking to open up other possibilities of relationships that break with these pacts of violence. Wyver (2023) points out how the artist's unconscious body throughout the second part of the play makes that "Bianchi becomes not just a sacrifice to illustrate the story, but a physical symbol of the burden of her research" to be carried by the other performers on stage.

If, historically, these bodies have always been considered as objects, as productive and reproductive "machines" and more likely to be violated and raped, it is not surprising that there is a claim for the presence of these same bodies on their own terms. Moving away from supposedly universal and generalist perspectives, Bianchi brings fundamental elements to update the debate between the arts of the stage, performance, feminism and gender.

As Dodi Leal identifies, the performing arts have "[...] presented themselves in recent decades as a field for the elaboration of social complexities that put the very political dangers of everyday life at risk" (Leal; Rosa, 2020, p. 7), and that, through the establishment of imaginaries and practic-

es, “mutations and interventions in bodies operate, in acts that produce effects of strangeness [...] questioning the normal and its standardization” (Leal; Rosa, 2020, p. 7). The field of Performing Arts then encourages us to reformulate social issues and brings the body and presence to the center of these issues, as forms that are not unrelated to these issues, but are also an “epistemological, political and aesthetic” construction (Leal; Rosa, 2020, p. 8). Through performance and theater, it is possible to establish imaginative processes that reorganize modes of existence.

In all the works analyzed, there is an overlapping of materials that may at first seem excessive. Bianchi superimposes images of baroque paintings, popular songs sung in karaoke, theories from Philosophy and Anthropology, Literature, the crime section of the news and organizes all these elements together with a collective of performers, usually numerous, in dramaturgies of practically uninterrupted text in works of long duration. This juxtaposition of elements shapes strategies for dealing with the subject without either heroic or conformist intentions. More significantly, Bianchi seems to affirm, through her staging, how excessive violence is, how it permeates all our relationships, it is unjustifiably repeated throughout history and, at the same time, is essential for maintaining the social dynamics we live in.

The very narration of violence, which is often linked to the historical figures, does not seem to be the artist’s end point, as it is not simply a matter of exposing the wound and affirming its existence. In her pieces, Bianchi seeks to experience violence, without necessarily staging it in a direct or realistic way. In none of her works, for example, is there a scene of a woman being killed or raped. There is an allusion to an inversion of the subjects of violence in some cases, there are images of extreme violence in the narration of historical events and there is, above all, a slippery violence, implicit within the imagery placed. When the gynecological examination takes place, Bianchi’s body is touched in an extremely careful way and there is a certain tenderness on the part of the people on stage towards the unconscious director. But this relative absence of the artist, produced by herself, alludes to many other absences, of people who have been raped and murdered throughout history.

Violence and its thematization on stage brings with it a recurring problem of how to portray it without perpetuating it, without fostering the

imaginary that establishes who the agents are and who the victims are in a stable way. When staging violence, there is always the possibility of establishing a violent relationship with the audience, which can be intentional or unintentional and can happen in different ways. In Bianchi's case, the audience is not spared, especially in the production of images that it is invited to evoke, but at the same time, *the perspective of confusion*, revealed in her *excessive* and often contradictory strategies, does not allow the work to imprint a univocal sensation on its participants, it does not conclude with the defense of a complete thesis on the subjects dealt with. It is an investigation into how to create a language to deal with this subject without claiming to exhaust it, pursuing a complex network of elements that make up and are made up of violence. If violence is in everyone and nowhere at the same time, there is also violence in how we understand love and peace, for example. Contradiction and the refusal of dichotomous schemes are hallmarks of this language investigated by Bianchi and are present in her work as a director.

The act of taking a sedative and remaining sedated for most of the play, as well as referring to a heinous practice, is also a great gesture of trust with the strangers who are going to see the play, but above all with the people who are part of the collective on stage. Although she strongly refuses to suggest definitive solutions to structural problems, Bianchi points out how theater and performance can create their own ways of addressing these issues and open up possibilities for imagining new social pacts.

Notes

- ¹ Companhia dos Outros was a theater group that existed from 2006 until 2016, created in the capital of São Paulo state by Carolina Bianchi, Tomás Decina, Fernanda Camargo and Pedro Cameron.
- ² I am a performer and assistant director of the work *O Tremor Magnífico* (2020) and I also collaborated with the creation process of the first chapter of the *Trilogia Cadela Força* (2023), in which I was also responsible for translating the play into English.
- ³ The collective was created in the city of São Paulo and concentrated its field of activity in the state capital, but since 2020, with the coronavirus pandemic and

the director's move to Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, the work has developed in a different way, with meetings on online platforms and *immersive* periods of creative process in São Paulo, Amsterdam and Avignon (France).

- 4 Initially, in the call for the residency, Bianchi did not specify whether the performers would be cisgender women or transgender women. There are people who were part of the work who no longer identify as women, but as non-binary people or transgender men. As well as complexifying Bianchi's understanding of gender, I believe that this note is important in the sense of not delegitimizing the identities of the people involved in the work. The same applies to the *LOBO* group, which also includes transgender people.
- 5 Here we understand performativity as proposed by Josette Féral (2008), in her text *Por uma poética da performatividade: o teatro performativo*. Féral proposes the term "performative theater" In an affirmation that theater made from the 1960s onwards began to incorporate many characteristics of performance art. Féral points out that one of the central aspects of the influence of the field of performance on theater is the importance of performing actions, as opposed to representing actions. The author Érika Fischer-Lichte had also pointed to this rapprochement between theater and performance in her works *The Transformative Power of Performance A New Aesthetics* and *Estética do Performativo*, arguing that theater would no longer, from the 1960s onwards, be understood as a space for the representation of fiction.
- 6 Artemisia Gentileschi was an Italian Baroque painter and the first woman to be a member of the Florenca Painting Academy.
- 7 The history of Bathory is told by the Argentin poet Alejandra Pizarnik, in her book *La Condesa Sangrienta* (1966).
- 8 Bianchi is currently developing two other works planned to make up this trilogy.
- 9 Bride in a travel or travelling bride.
- 10 Ana Mendieta died in 1985, after falling from the 34th floor of the building she was in. Carl André, her husband at the time, was charged with the performer's death, but later acquitted, with the legal theory prevailing that Mendieta had committed suicide. The author of this article, along with many other feminist artists and theorists who knew Mendieta and her work, does not believe this version.
- 11 It would then be a refusal of the idea of gender as a "biological truth" (Butler, 2001), a dissolution of binarity and an understanding of gender as performativity, in line with Judith Butler's propositions.

- ¹² Eliza Samudio was a model from Rio de Janeiro who had a child with Bruno Fernandes, then Flamengo's soccer team goalkeeper. Bruno refused to take legal responsibility for the child and ordered the murder of Eliza, who was then killed and her remains left to be devoured by dogs in 2010.

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Luisa Dalgarrondo has a PhD in Performing Arts from the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp). She has a Master's degree in Theater, from 2013, from the Performance and Culture – Interdisciplinary Perspectives course, at the Goldsmiths – University of London, United Kingdom. Bachelor in Performing Arts, graduated in 2011 from the Performing Arts course at Unicamp. She is currently a collaborating professor on the Bachelor of Performing Arts course at the Universidade Estadual do Paraná.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6365-4584>

E-mail: ludalga@hotmail.com

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