



A Bearded Amazon

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ABSTRACT – A Bearded Amazon – The text grounds its methodology in Discourse Analysis. To do so, it mobilizes signifiers with the aim of discursively analyzing the artistic performance of a drag queen. The thesis presented argues that dressing up is a discursive mechanism that creates a symbolic *punctum* that conceals the traumatic reality of growing up unable to associate with the feminine. It concludes that the drag's position, as a tension between masculinist formation and its opposite, represents a liminal, dissenting space of hybridity and transfiguration of pain, repression, and loss. The contribution lies in the fact that it is through this artistic practice that the subject of discourse resists and authorizes oneself to act, to signify.

Keywords: **Drag. Performance. Gender. Discourse Analysis. Psychoanalysis.**

RÉSUMÉ – Une Amazone Barbu – Le texte fonde sa méthodologie dans l'Analyse du Discours. Pour ce faire, il mobilise des signifiants dans le but d'analyser discursivement la performance artistique d'une *drag queen*. La thèse présentée soutient que se costumer est un mécanisme discursif qui crée un *punctum* symbolique dissimulant la réalité traumatisante de grandir en étant incapable de s'associer au féminin. Il conclut que la position de la *drag*, en tant que tension entre la formation masculiniste et son opposé, représente un espace liminal, dissident, d'hybridité et de transfiguration de la douleur, de la répression et de la perte. La contribution réside dans le fait que c'est à travers cette pratique artistique que le sujet du discours résiste et s'autorise à agir, à signifier.

Mots-clés: **Drag. Performance. Genre. Analyse du discours. Psychanalyse.**

RESUMO – Uma Amazona de Barba – O texto sustenta sua metodologia na Análise de Discurso. Para tanto, mobiliza significantes no intuito de analisar discursivamente a performance artística de uma *drag queen*. A tese apresentada é a de que montar-se é um mecanismo discursivo que cria um *punctum* simbólico que encobre o real traumático de crescer impedido de associar-se ao feminino. Conclui que o lugar da *drag*, como tensão entre a formação masculinista e o seu avesso, representa um espaço limiar, dissidente, de mestiçagem e transfiguração da dor, repressão e perda. A contribuição refere ao fato de que é por meio desse fazer artístico que o sujeito do discurso resiste e se autoriza a agir, a significar.

Palavras-chave: **Drag. Performance. Gênero. Análise de Discurso. Psicanálise.**

Introduction

I met *G. Amazone* in 2014, when I was still living in Recife. Over the years I have seen an artist with an absurd aesthetic sense and performative intelligence grow and mature, someone who has clung to the idea of constituting herself as a subject in conjunction with her drag; today, performer and character are one and the same. At first, however, Amazone was separated from the male figure. She appeared a little shy and emulated, as much as possible, the impression of a figure who was culturally and traditionally feminine – the long dress, no body hair, high heels, large turbans and bracelets. This young drag performer goes through a very particular cleavage point – off stage, the performer has folliculitis, and decides, in order to maintain her own health, to keep her hair (including her beard) as a constituent element of the drag character. The term character I am using here is used by Amazone herself, for example when she says that drag is “a female impersonation”, and that it arose from a localized creative demand, centered on a male artist who interprets or creates a female figure: “when I accepted the invitation to the party, I stopped to sit down and try to create a character”, says Amazone in a video interview¹.

The video material will support the discussions in this article. It is a video documentary in which I was able to gather cuts, recordings of scenes, dances, songs, speeches by and about drag queens. The video comprises a series of speeches, recordings of articulated performances and a number of transversal videos that were organized around three points: body, art and discourse. The subjects in the video are drag queens who have kindly helped us to understand the vicissitudes of this artistic expression, and to observe the discourse that gives it meaning. As a result, this study focuses on the reading of this materiality, the documentary *Vra!* (2022), available under a free and public license on YouTube. For legal purposes, then, I follow the determination established by Circular Letter No. 17 of 2022 from CONEP/SECNS/MS, which provides guidance on CNS Resolution No. 510 of April 7, 2016, regulating “projects that use methodologies characteristic of the Humanities and Social Sciences and that are exempt from submission to the CEP/Conep System” (Brasil, 2022). Following Pêcheux (2014), discourse analysis considers some steps as *methodological procedures* of the discursive approach.

Indursky (2019) points out that, first of all, we have to consider identifying the points of misunderstanding that appear on the material surface of discourse, which is language. By points of misunderstanding, we mean lapses, failed acts, ambiguities, metaphors, metonymies, in short, any linguistic manifestation that makes it possible to glimpse a strangeness in relation to meaning. Strangeness here is not affiliated with the Freudian approach, but rather with the suspension of ordinary meaning, the crossing of a saying of another order in the discourse of a subject. Strangeness in discourse analysis is related to the way in which signifiers intertwine in enunciation. The second step is to de-superficialize this saying, in order to make opaque this relationship that shows to be transparent despite awakening the point of equivocation. De-superficialization points to a work with language that considers the historical, social, ideological and economic description that that signifier brings with it.

De-linearizing this signifier means returning it to language, interpreting it with a view to the conditions of production of that meaning, ordered by a subject of discourse, identified with a specific discursive position, which in turn relates to a discursive formation, safeguarded by the ideological formation. The third step, thus, consists of identifying these formations and their functioning through a combination of interpretation and description. Interpretation is linked to the description of the situation and the conditions of production in an attempt to find a possible meaning for the sentences highlighted. Finally, reflection on the relationship between language and the world is highlighted, in order to elucidate the role that ideology plays in the formation of the effect of meaning between subjects, a place where it is possible to observe the intricacies of discourse. Our analysis thus starts with Amazone's words, in which it was possible to perceive a deepening of meaning.

For my part, I see no theoretical gain in defining the drag as a character, a concept that comes from literary studies, but rather as a dissident position in the discourse. In these terms, it is interesting to deal with Amazone as a meeting point and a vanishing point. It is in her that the desire to be and the impossibility of being otherwise are allocated, she harbors a position historically determined as masculine, overidentified with the fact that she replicates the ideal of man, and another contrary to it, a dissident position with dreams of disidentification. This counter-identification position, represented by

drag, is constituted on the edges of the dominant subject position, in response to it. It serves as a turning point, a symbol or epitome of resistance to the system that imputes, compulsorily and through culture, the ideology that sustains the ideal of this masculine being. It is imposed on the male subject to be a man, and this in a way that is antonymous to being a woman. The man is there in the space of the negation of the feminine. Drag emerges with the aim of reintegrating the renegade counterpart of the feminine being into the masculine being, as resistance to the cultural homogenization that prevents the assumption of any feminine characteristic in the “real” man. However, even though it presents itself as a symmetrical opposite – the woman who appears as an antonym to the male subject in dominance, this dissident position rarely includes the desire to over-identify with the female gender². Drag is an escape from the bonds of masculinity and, at the same time, the point that reinforces its continuous bond with the male subject. It pushes cultural boundaries, questions certain social and gender roles, reinvents the subject in the light of what that he was forced to repress in order to be a man – the imaginary of the feminine, and he does so through a particularly interesting mechanism, which I refer to here as *montage*.

It is in the figure of the drag that the contradictions between male and female, signifier and signified are paradoxically expressed and dissolved – the body of this subject is beyond the piece marked by the genitalia, beyond sex and also beyond gender. It is, as Paul Preciado (2014) states in the *Manifesto Contrassexual*, a body made up of incessant becoming, “becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-flower”, a body *in between*, which despite carrying this becoming in its memory, “identifies neither with the woman nor with the insect nor with the flower” (Preciado, 2014, p. 192). Bourdieu (2020, p. 195), in *Masculine Domination*, says that this type of constitutive practice of gay identity, here marked by the drag figure of Amazone, implies its annulment, “[...] everything happens, in fact, as if homosexuals, who had to fight to move from invisibility to visibility, to stop being invisible” were silenced, “and in a way neutral and neutralized, by submission to the dominant norm”. In drag practice, this place of repression is re-signified through *montage*, a practice that enables the return of the real object through the assumption of repressed signs.

The place of drag represents the space for transfiguration of pain, repression and loss. It is through this artistic practice that the subject resists

and authorizes himself to act, to present himself in the way he was conditioned not to be, even if he uses the mask provided by make-up. This form assumed by the drag performer is transformed by language and materialized in a visual amalgam composed of the signs that make up the universe of the interdicted gender – in this case, the feminine. Feminine, as stated by Maria Rita Kehl (2008) in *Deslocamentos do feminino*, is taken here as a discursive construction supported by the creation of knowledge and power that refer to the universe of meanings that sustains the masculinist discursive formation. I thought of calling this formation “virile” or of “virility”, following the example of Courtine when referring to an ideal of man centered on a specific being and appearance (cf. *History of virility*).

However, I believe that this marking would take the settlement of meanings that I aim to classify to another place, more associated with sex, with male performance in the sexual act. As we are talking about a position assumed in relation to a gender designation, alluding to sex could refer to the biological description of gender, which I try to avoid. “Masculine”, by itself, does not accurately describe the position that determines being “male”; “macho” runs into a similar problem. Besides, it is possible to be macho and be a woman, for example. I think that the adjective “masculinist” solves the issue because it refers to the masculine, but makes it clear that this is an attribution that is conferred, qualified, achieved and maintained with a certain virility and violence – especially in relation to the female gender. On the other hand, the dissident position could well be called *enviada* (sent)³, representative of the discursive formation that sends the subject into this space of questioning the masculine order, and which does so through a process that enraptures the body in the act during the drag performance.

Assembling as *drag* is a discursive mechanism that, through artistic language, creates a symbolic *punctum*⁴ that covers up the traumatic reality of growing up prevented from being, acting, walking and talking in a certain way. The *discursive formation* of masculinity that co-opts subjects to degrade the feminine operates with the *cultural formation* that regulates male domination, restraining homosexual bodies and conditioning them to resemble the socioculturally and historically imposed standard – that of the virile and reproductive man, who is only constituted from the negation of the feminine in any instance of agency. It is worth pointing out here that I understand cultural formation to be the “space from which the effects of

meaning to be produced can be predicted” (Leandro-Ferreira, 2011, p. 60), as pointed out by Maria Cristina Leandro-Ferreira in *O lugar do social e da cultura numa dimensão discursiva*. Thus, this is, par excellence, a space to show these settlements of meaning, in which regularity acts in such a way as to make a given interpretation predictable, hence the notion of *prototype* that I explore later in this text.

Montage is not a new term in the drag queens or kings⁵ communities. A origem da palavra no contexto em que é empregada é incerta, mas a hipótese mais aceita é a de que seria necessário montar num salto para completar o processo de produção da *drag*. The origin of the word in the context in which it is used is uncertain, but the most accepted hypothesis is that it would be necessary to mount in a high heel to complete the drag production process. In any case, I revisit the word now in order to operate with it what Orlandi (2013) refers to as *theorization*, a specific discursivization that integrates a treatment intended to give a discursive guise to a signifier or concept coming from another field of research or action. The *montage* I refer to is closely related to montage, a concept explored by Georges Didi-Huberman (2011; 2016) in *Les condition des images*, 2011, and in *Remontar, remontagem (do tempo)*, 2007. For Didi-Huberman, montage is constructed by separating things that are usually united and bringing together things that are usually separated, which we could say about the conjunction between the female image and the beard that Amazone holds. In this way, montage is a process that exposes the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in objects, a procedure that allows politics to be *disassembled* by making visible “the reciprocal clashes of which all history is woven” (Didi-Huberman, 2016, p. 1). The montage operates the philosophical mechanism of retracing history, as Pêcheux retraced the origin of the category of contradiction in 1977’s *Remontemos de Foucault a Spinoza*.

As an exposition of anachronisms, says Didi-Huberman (2016), montage creates a shock, and this is because it uses an interpretation that is related to a political gesture – this dialectical gesture of exposing the contradiction with which Discourse Analysis also usually operates. Montage thus acts as a tool that allows us to “understand the efficacy of these images as fundamentally overdetermined, amplified, multiple, invasive”, as Didi-Huberman (2015, p. 187) states, this time in *Diante do tempo*. The *montage*, similarly, gives form to a position in a complex and dispersed dis-

course, gathers opposites around itself and enhances the body as a paradoxical object; it appears as a fixed counterpart, contour, form, discursive materialization.

Once assembled, the drag, which serves as a totem, a symbol of strength that amalgamates the meanings of resistance to the dominant position of the *masculinist* formation, allows the performer subject to assume the dissident *enviada position*, that I mentioned earlier. Thus, assembling oneself is a discursive process that comprises two stages – first, the recognition of oneself in another body, which involves the gradual transformation of the image of oneself; in a second moment, almost concomitant with the first, is the affiliation of this subject to another discursive position through the *gaze* guided towards a bulkhead that gives contour to the body in production. Generally, the bulkhead in question is a *mirror* (*espelho*, in Portuguese), a reflection that makes the image of the new body in view tangible. The term ‘*espelho*’ derives from the Latin *speculum*, which reflects the eye of the beholder, and is part of a Latin family of words whose centrality revolves around the idea of projection and observation, such as speculation and spectacle. The word can also designate the “point from which one has a privileged view of something” (Rodrigues, 2014, s. p.). It is on this object that the subject looks and, in return, is looked at by this other body in production, the materialization of a position that speaks of an artistic exercise, but also, and above all, of a desire, of an affiliation to a specific network of meanings.

Despite the presence of the material surface of the mirror in this game between the visualization of the subject and the assumption of a position in discourse, it is not uncommon for the position of the drag to be summoned to take up space in the everyday speech of the disassembled subject, dispensing with the use of the imagery reflection, but maintaining the specular function as a discursive mechanism – this time, through the eye of the other, the gaze that summons the existence of the *enviada position*. Nesses termos, a imagem produzida pelo espelho não é posta em significação por causa do anteparo, mas, sim, por meio do discurso que lhe sustenta a possibilidade de significar e que elenca, nesse processo, o olho como ponto central de sua projeção. In these terms, the image produced by the mirror is not put into meaning because of the bulkhead, but through the discourse that sustains the possibility of meaning and which, in this process, lists the eye as the central point of its projection. Examples of this type of interpella-

tion of the drag position into the ordinary discourse of the disassembled subject can be seen when, in interviews, performers respond to a particular question by modulating their voice to a higher pitch, adopting a more upright posture, mimicking or performing certain tics, using feminine pronouns or referring to drag in the first person (to the detriment of the more common register, in the third person. For example, when *Amazon* says that “*she* started out with a much more fashion bias, much more top model, something much more just plastic; and when *I* really started to put into practice what I needed for the party, that’s when *Amazon* started to create a body, to have a name, some characteristics and then *I* could already glimpse, see a very peculiar way of doing my drag”).

The mirror

The question of the mirror in the constitution of the subject of language is explored by Lacan on the occasion of *The Mirror-Phase as a Formative of the Function of the I*, 1949, which discusses the role that this object plays in the formation of an individual’s body image, always in relation to the other who signifies the image formed in the mirror. Being signified by this mirror image and the maternal saying thus is an identification mechanism that is established in the first years of life, and which accompanies the subject’s development until maturity. In the case of drag, there is a mismatch between the image presented and the new image produced. Instead of reaffirming their current identity, that of a male subject, for example, the subject fabricates an image that corresponds to the discursive position they assume in the *montage*, which I have been referring to as the *enviada position*. Faced with this other contour, the performer then begins to signify within another subject position embodied in the modified, assembled body. I gave special preference to video interviews that portrayed the process of *montage* so that it would be possible to observe how this specular passage occurs – from one position to another, even though this transition does not depend solely on imagistic recognition, but rather on a particular discursive identification. This is equivalent to saying that this moment, in which “the mirror stage concludes, inaugurates, through identification with the *imago* of the similar and through the drama of primordial jealousy [...], the dialectic that has since linked the *I* to socially elaborated situations” (Lacan, 1996, p. 101, author’s emphasis). These socially elabo-

rated situations are nothing other than the network of conflicting referents that sustain the existence of the discursive apparatus, its socio-historical real.

At a certain point, in the space where the subject realizes the complementarity of the other position they have created for themselves, the realization that this position is not separate from the subject's identity development, the boundaries between the two positions blur. Amazone states that

[...] in the same way that the security that Amazone has, the haughtiness that Amazone has... not being afraid to always be in front, to always be the center of attention; seeking to be the center of attention, is what Bruno lacks. That's where I try to mix it up. Not wanting to appear, always being in the background, always not having such an outspoken attitude, even though it's a parade float, but restrained. Transform it. Once again: what's in one can strengthen the other. This is constant. When I'm sitting still thinking about a performance or when I'm at work creating something.

Here it is interesting to note that after using the term *to mix*, Amazone's drag, which had been referred to as *her* in sentences such as "the haughtiness Amazone has", is now understood as *me* ("when I'm sitting still thinking"). This subtle syntactic choice reinforces the relations of meaning mobilized by the subject, who now understands that the *enviada position* assumed as a drag performer is the same one that supports her disassembled position – what is effectively changed is the way in which this position is presented on the body. Syntax, then, can be taken as "an instance of manifestation of the process of subjectivation (including, perhaps, in gender identifications), which reveals the symbolic dimension of the subject" as Jacob Biziak (2021, p. 320) postulates in *Uma poética da ambiguidade*. This process works by linking, on a symbolic level, the real (the truth that the drag represents the same position occupied by the subject who designates it) to the imaginary of reintegration – of the "character" with the artist.

Tania Rivera (2018, p. 23), in *O avesso do imaginário*, states that performance creates conditions that allow the body to be observed in another way, it reconfigures the relationship between the performer and their own body, between the object and the space, and this is because, in performance, "there is no coincidence between me and my body"; a condition that leads me to classify *the body as a paradoxical object*. In these terms, the body, as well as serving as the material surface of the subject of discourse, materializes, in the same process, the relationship of displacement of this subject, of

moving away from the body – the passage from object to question. O he subject who poses the body as a question is a nomad wandering through the desert of possibilities of becoming, far from securing the body as a dwelling place, this is a subject who mobilizes other forms of presence, he acts “from his rightful place: ‘from the outside’. It is the ‘gazers’ who ‘make the picture’, in Duchamp’s famous formula” (Rivera, 2018, p. 22-23).

For this performer subject, a subject in contact with contemporary art, the presence of the body is not enough for the body as an object to appear – as a question launched at itself and towards the other, this body appears in pieces that are seen, that appeal to the other, thus recalling its constitution. “Performance thus shows that the subject can only appear ephemerally, fleetingly, as the effect of an act that takes place between the self and the other” (Rivera, 2018, p. 24). Hence the possibility of assuming the drag subject in the interval space, this gap that opens up *between* me and her. In a very particular way, in the very affiliation to the network of meanings that sustains this subject, the position occupied by drag operates in *limbo*⁶, from the in-between, in a space of disidentification with the masculinist formation and, even so, without over-identifying with the feminist formation that serves as a counterpoint to the masculinist FD. As I’ve been saying, it’s a question of an *enviada position*: launched, but not perched or settled.

Thus, when Amazone mentions the *mixing*, it is not, as can be interpreted, about a *synthesis*, the simple fusion of different elements into a new final product, as classical aesthetics would define it (cf. Suassuna, 2013), but rather a work developed in the tension between these forms (artistic forms and forms of being me). Hannah Gadsby spoke about this in her acclaimed *Nanette* (2018): what the artist does is control the audience’s *tension*, the core of the performance is maintaining this state of tension. The same can be said about Discourse Analysis, characterized as an *in-between* discipline, which, as Eni Orlandi stated in *Análise de discurso, ciência e atualidade*, 2013 does not allow itself to be *adjectivized* by one or another area of contact – linguistics, psychoanalysis, historical materialism. Materialist discourse analysis operates in the contradictory space *between* its basic areas, in the *tension* specific to each problem that arises from the contact between ideology, the unconscious and language.

By showing the meeting of different spaces in the same work, the in-between also shows the gaps that exist between one space and another; in

these intervals, says Icleia Borsa Cattani (2004, p. 169), in *Os lugares da mestiçagem na arte contemporânea*, 2004, “meanings cross, as at crossroads – they overlap without merging: they are places of *mestizaje* par excellence”. Carla Süssenbach (2017), in *Espelho Diário* mobilizes the idea of *mestizaje* in art to deal with the tension produced by this miscellany of languages, media, materials and artistic processes; in this way, “there is no fusion without conflict or tension” (Süssenbach, 2017, p. 81). It should also be noted that conflict and the social dissymmetries it generates are at the heart of the discussions on which dialectical materialism is concerned.

The performance is thus elbowed into the middle of these diverse formal systems, its space is constructed in these gaps, in opposition to the other and to the place itself, in an interval and unstable zone, particular for the tensioning of form, of the original and also of its copy, for the meeting of opposites. This is the environment of its production conditions – the full and the empty, the simultaneous presence and absence that characterize contemporary art. The in-between space is fundamental to understanding the *enviada position* held by the drag queen. This is a discursive position that finds itself in the ambivalence of dissenting from masculinist and feminist formations at the same time. The verb *to drag* means the founding practice of the *enviada position*, which drags along with its long dress the meanings of one formation towards the other, without positively affiliating to any of them. It is in the sending (and not in the receiving or posting), in the process of mixing these fragments of meaning (anti-masculinist *and* not exactly feminist), in the tense and inconstant space between her and me, that it is possible to observe the *enviada position*.

According to this logic, the male is only possible through the annulment of the female. He exists as a negation of what is socially considered feminine; there is nothing particular to men but a series of interdictions – not to walk like a woman, not to talk like a woman, not to dress like a woman, at the risk of being read as conjunctively feminine (any non-masculine position, but most commonly that of gay, for example). Although at first the mirror acts in the corporeal delineation of this position contrary to the homogenizing action of masculinist ideology, this subject comes to understand that the social assumption of the possibility of this contradiction to the norm arises as an identity need, resulting from and complementary to the psychological sphere. That is why Amazone appears

as “what Bruno lacks. Where I try to mix things up”, which is marked in the language by the unrestricted exchange between *melher* and *Bruno/Amazone*, as well as in passages like “G. Amazone who is actually me too, today I understand that; more than two separate personas, it’s like yin and yang, they’re part of the same thing, of a whole”. Beyond the mirror, what exists is a space of perception of the conjunction between psychological and social, of the complementarity of the other in relation to the self, to the desire that the self materializes in a dissident position to the masculinist formation, but affiliated to the *enviada position*.

Images

Still in 1969, Pêcheux (1990, p. 82) developed the concept of imaginary formations as a space for the settlement of representations of a present but transformed social place, they “designate the place that A and B each attribute to *themselves* and to the *other*, the image they make of their own place and of the place of the other” (author’s emphasis). From this it is possible to see that the discursive marking of an individual’s presence finds its most concrete existence in relation to the imaginary formations put into play at the moment of discursive production, the linguistic representation that a specific subject operates by anticipating the very moment of enunciation. This is an intricate game of imagery, a series of speculations of the self in relation to itself and the other; these images are indelibly linked to the body of the subject who enunciates and that of his interlocutor, as well as considering the social place they occupy, the moment and the space of enunciation.

It is also worth mentioning that the subject’s reading of the other’s social position is not exempt from the ideological determination that affects the formation of images that are representative of or superimposed on a given cultural formation. This is the case of allocating the other as a man by associating the beard with the dominant position in the cultural formation that sustains the discursive formation of binarity, which predicts the existence of a prototypical male being that is configured in opposition to a female being for whom the beard is a peripheral element. This composition can be understood in the same terms used by the semantics of *prototypes*, by assuming a model in which concepts are “structured gradually, with a typical or central member of the categories and others that are less typical or more peripheral”, as Márcia Cançado (2022, p. 108) stated in her *Manual*

de Semântica. The linguistic understanding of prototype is in line with the idea of imaginary formation insofar as it establishes categorical association as a constitutive mechanism of representation. Suzy Lagazzi (2015), in *Paráfrase da imagem e cenas prototípicas*, establishes a similar connection when addressing the concept of *prototypical scene*. The idea is to define an *already-seen*, along the lines of an already-said; this scene acts as a domesticator of interpretation and refers to the memory of something recognized, already said, already seen, a pre-constructed imagery. This is the case, for example, the visual identification (logo, typography, visual identity) of a particular brand on another product of the same kind.

It is in this precise sense that Amazone's beard produces an equivocation – the subject, set to signify in a way determined by the structure that determines him, is forced to suspend three dominant images in the imaginary formation that affects him: that of a man, that of a woman and that of the drag queen herself, which culture has tried to crystallize as being predominantly focused on the prototypical female representation. For the subject who signifies for Amazone, she is and is not a man, just as she is and is not a woman and a drag queen. This is also why we can say that the drag queen's body presents itself as a *paradoxical object*, the exemplary meeting of contradictions, the point at which they are purposely at the service of suspending the plastering of ordinary meaning, in favor of building a space of strangeness in which the gaze is at the service of the performer – it is she who directs and demands attention, and it is on her that the orientation of presence rests.

The theoretical issue at hand is the complex articulation between the production of images, their crystallization, representation, anticipation and the mechanisms of signification that support the discursive process. The practical issue points to the myriad of processes in this arrangement, highlighting the importance of the instances of culture, the unconscious and ideology, which bring into contact imaginary, ideological, cultural and discursive formations materialized in the language appropriated by a subject of language, embodied by discourse and in action through art. In this way, when I say that Amazone directs the production of an equivocation in the body and that does so in relation to a response from another, I need to make sure that the interlocutor, whom we can call the audience, corresponds to a series of images that surround a prototypical matrix. The per-

former creates a particular imaginary of the audience and organizes the performative act around this figure. Once put into action, however, the performance, due to its happen stance, can reorganize the script based on an unforeseen movement – the promise of actuality that is part of the structure of any performative act, the impossible point that gives it its unique particularity, making each act unique.

Other images

It should also be noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has forced the happen stance structure of the performance out of the space of direct interaction with the audience, far from the presence and heading to cyberspace, to the field of actions and interactions mediated by devices and social networks. This new communication space opened by the interconnection of the computer network, as described by Pierre Lévy (2003), serves as a window on a virtual performance culture. The discomfort that runs through the regularity of performance, especially in a virtual environment, is the anguish that I am the object of the other's perception; I, as Tania Rivera (2018) says, “[...] blend into the scene of the world for an external gaze, and I do not hold the autonomous and imperturbable position that would ensure the world of perception”. What circulates here is an image of the self that does not completely see itself, and therefore mimics the environment one is in.

This is the field of non-existence of the subject as other, as Byung-Chul Han (2018, p. 26) states in *No enxame*, 2018 which stems from the fact that the smartphone “functions as a digital mirror for a new post-childhood version of the mirror stage. It opens a narcissistic space, a sphere of the imaginary in which I lock myself away. Through the smartphone, the *other* does not speak” (author's emphasis). Without the other, that counterpart from which the subject is constituted, the negativity that competes in the formulation of the self-image as a contrast to the other that means me, the subject is purely positive. Didi-Huberman (2013, p. 182), in *Diante da imagem*, also states that “there is a *work* of the negative in the image, a ‘shadowy’ efficacy that, so to speak, excavates the visible” (author's emphasis). Thus, the images put into circulation in cyberspace tend to promote the same, the uniform, the smooth, the beautiful, the mimicable, a place in which the presentification of subjects is crossed by the drama that exists between the master who goes from being the agent of vision to the object of the gaze.

In *Políticas da imagem*, Giselle Beiguelman (2021) states that the body has been cut off from visualization processes; all that remains of it is the gaze, organized and disciplined by a factory logic. In this scheme, the capitalist social conjuncture isolates the gaze, excludes the eye from the joint experience that operates with the other organs, with the intention of directing the gaze's attention to work and consumption. In these terms, "digital images are not versions of analogue images on another support", because this breaks with the "[...] assumption of the separation of the senses and the autonomy of vision in relation to the body, one of the milestones in the re-organization of subjectivity and life, which occurred in the process of consolidation of industrial capitalism and urbanization in the 19th century" (Beiguelman, 2021, p. 7). The idea is that the images circulating on social networks establish an effect, that of being updated readings of an analog practice, portraits of life offline, when in practice they appear as a pile of pixels, informational maps that make connections between the image and an algorithm.

It is the informational calculation that feeds the online database and establishes coordinates that sustain a regime of vision. This system of virtual images is thus formatted within a set of market-oriented practices – what we look at tends to become sedimented and establish a pattern (or, we could say, circumvent a formation), and from there, it is easy to think that this object, product or service is often consumed, desired, replicated, liked. This mechanism also has an impact on the perception of the body, both in establishing an ideal body and in controlling the body of the subject whose gaze is domesticated by the machine. The predominance of visual culture is based on a specific form of perception and enjoyment of images centered on conditioning the body and the gaze in a certain direction. There is, so to speak, a *specular illusion* that "operates 'at the level of the retina' [a phenomenon that is] based on a linear narrative model, in which the image is treated as an analogy of the real" (Beiguelman, 2021, p. 11).

Amazone says that "during the pandemic I really explored photography on Instagram. So, to hit a thousand followers, when on my personal profile I have nothing close to that, is fantastic for me". We are thus "facing a new era of the image. In it, the expansion of non-human photography prevails" (Beiguelman, 2021, p. 13). This new regime of interaction allows us to understand artistic experiences of a different order, or at least from a

new point of view. The existence of performance in this scenario is centered on the formulation and circulation of images, which appears as something that endures, the constant burden of the virtual gaze that signifies the artist in cyberspace. In this scenario, the gaze is the other in the image, what captures and fascinates the gazer, and the performer subject is impelled to give body to this figure based on the new demands made by the relationship with the cold screen. Here, the capitalist logic of production and reproduction (in this case, of images) governs artistic making.

In this way, this exercise of imagery circulation in a virtual environment constitutes “a movement of inscription of this subject on an empty screen”, as Evandra Grigoletto and Rita de Kássia Wanderley state in *A narrativa de si em blogs de moda feminina: entre a subjetividade e a alteridade* (Grigoletto; Wanderley, 2016, p. 71). More: beyond the expansion of the written record, which governs the dynamics of the self-narrative observed by the authors, and towards the imagery record, in this other type of subjective inscription what predominates is an “intervention of narrative identity in the constitution of the self”, as Paul Ricoeur (2014, p. 118) pointed out in *O si-mesmo como outro*. With this, it is possible to say that the identity fabricated by the imagery narrative interferes with the perception of the subject’s “personal” body, or, more precisely, the edited image of oneself affects the contour of one’s own body. The endorsement of the drag image on social media, for example, “duplicates the body in consciousness, making it exist more intensely”, according to Georges Vigarello (2016, p. 272) in *O sentimento de si*.

It is the *montage* that authorizes the subject to signify in the artistic space, since it creates a position whose main effect is that of emulation, separation between the male individual, the subject of law, and his dissident image, the subject allowed to do and say. Drag is allowed to be the artist denied to the subject of law. In the illusion of being separated from the weight of the social determination that governs the body to be male, the drag position manages to manufacture a body that is attentive to the artistic flows desired by the subject. This new position can sing, dance, dub, act, communicate, animate, etc. Thus, incorporating elements of these other arts means resisting the control of bodies and, at the same time, not limiting oneself to a single means of signifying artistically. It should also be noted that this incorporation operates in tension between the fields and their

meanings, without actually synthesizing them into a new arrangement or object. In the open, drag performance manages, in a digital environment, to create the image of another body, one that resists the communicative obstacles of cyberspace.

It's a mirror, a semblance

When mentioning the concept of *trompe-l'oeil*, Hal Foster (2017) points out that, in the act of seeing, the work of art can end up deceiving the eye (*trompe-l'oeil*), making a shield that protects against the *gaze*, which is of the order of the real. The idea is that this work seals what is traumatic in an artistic surface, which tames the gaze by uniting the imaginary and the symbolic against the real. The relationship between the eye, the gaze and the screen is discussed in *Seminário XI*, when Lacan (1985a) more explicitly criticizes the notion of the subject as the center from which the gaze directed at an object develops. Lacan mortifies this subject positioned as a geometrical point of reference in the image by addressing the existence of a gaze that also comes from the object. The subject who directs the gaze is not absent from the scene in which he is looked at by the object. “Undoubtedly, in the depths of my eye the picture is painted. The painting is certainly in my eye. But I, I am in the painting” (Lacan, 1985a, p. 94). In these terms, between the gaze and the object, it is necessary to exist a kind of mediation instance, a function performed by a symbolic bulkhead that serves to protect the subject from the gaze of the object, which is a gaze of the world, radical, real. Animals, Lacan continues, are trapped in the gaze of the world, but we, who have access to the symbolic, can mediate and manipulate this gaze, tame it, contemplate an object in the luminous point of the eye.

We could, in favor of a clearer distinction, speak of an art centered on the illusion of verisimilitude and another concerned with traumatic illusionism, but we would make little progress in the central discussion of this issue, which is the relationship between seduction, illusion and dissolution. In dealing with this point, Lacan uses the anecdote of the dispute between Zêuxis, who paints grapes so realistic as to attract birds to his work, and Parrasio, who paints a curtain on a wall and thus ends up deluding Zêuxis, who asks to see what is behind that fabric. Here the game takes place between the seduced animal and the deluded human, since it is behind the curtain that the gaze is, that which behind or beyond is always seducing us.

Traumatic illusionism, on the other hand, would question the existence of the wall, reminding us that there is, in the first place, a barrier; the aim of this is to propose its dissolution. In the latter case, as Hélène Cixous (2022, p. 42) put it in *O riso da medusa*, “[...] since there is no place from which to establish a discourse, but an ancient and arid soil to crack, what I say has at least two faces and two destinations: to destroy, to break; to foresee the unforeseen, to project”. The option here is for violence, for overthrowing a structure in favor of another that enables the existence of another discourse, its establishment and circulation.

In a similar scenario, but in relation to castration and fetish, the notions of veil, masquerade and semblance come together. This approximation, according to Christian Dunker (2021), in *Semblantes e mascaradas*, stems from the formulation according to which the *veil* is read as a fetish structure; the realization of a fetish gives us indications of what object is being placed as a substitute for the maternal phallus that is not accepted to have been lost. The veil thus promotes an action of deceiving the eyes, tricking the one who deceives the birds, by painting a curtain that hides castration. The fetishist is thus manipulative, he enjoys playing with the phallic appearance alluded by the object, with that which is behind the curtain, behind the veil that causes desire. Enjoyment is found in the lack, in causing – and never fulfilling – the desire. This is also how the *masquerade* works, which represents the way femininity is constructed – not as a direct, ostentatious image, but as something veiled, hidden by a mask. The masquerade is also linked to the causation of desire, but, as Dunker says (2021), is not necessarily connected to the fetish, since the purpose is to make the other discover about the subject – the discovery, always proposed and immediately impeded (and not the impediment of desire in itself), is itself the ultimate end of the masquerade, even if under the mask is another mask.

Between the notion of the veil and the masquerade is the *semblance*, supported by truth, architected as fiction, and whose function is to maintain the fictionality of the agent of discourse. For Psychoanalysis, sustaining a semblance means inscribing oneself in a discourse, because “[...] there is only a discourse of semblance. If this were not self- confessed, I would have already denounced the thing and recalled its articulation. The semblance is only enunciated from the truth” (Lacan, 2009, p. 136). In the discourse of the master, for example, the subject occupies the place of truth; it can be

said from this that the truth of a subject is the semblance that the discourse has created. A possible approximation to this functioning is, notably, the idea of the subject-position, which does not exist *a priori*, but is fabricated by the discourse and sustained by the subject, so that the subject appears as a material instance super-identified with a certain position – there is a face, a specific semblance, which characterizes a man, for example.

Taking on the semblance of a given position in discourse means identifying with the network of meanings that supports that position, reproducing a specific series of behaviors, sayings and practices. Maintaining the fictionality of this subject is tantamount to reproduction: “behaving like”, acting like, speaking like, in short, understanding and replicating what is “[...] socio-historically constituted in the form of points of stabilization that produce the subject, *with*, simultaneously, what they are given to see, understand, do, fear, expect, etc.” (Pêcheux, 2014, p. 148, author’s emphasis). The semblance thus concerns a set of practices, images and statements put into circulation by the action of a discourse and sustained by the subject who is inscribed in the discourse (identifies with a subject-position). In these terms, between the veil that hides castration and structures a fetish, and the masquerade, who accepts castration but wants to discover a truth hidden by a mask, is the settlement of meanings that sustains the possibility of an agent of discourse, that is, the semblance that allows the position occupied by the subject to be recognized; the mask that they use to signify. The crucial point here is to understand that this game of illusion and desire reveals to us the functioning of a mechanism that is essential to the drag queen subject – *montage* creates a semblance for the subject based on a mask made of language and make-up. In other words, the subject-position that *montage* authorizes to exist occurs through the presentation of a semblance that sustains the truth of a performing subject, who acts in such a way as to mobilize an artistic bulkhead that protects him from the violent action of the real gaze – this gaze that unveils the performer, which sees the weakest point that the veil tries to hide. Hiding the fact that “not only does it look, but that *it shows* [...], even there, some form of slippage of the subject is demonstrated” (Lacan, 1985b, p. 76, author’s emphasis).

Hence the possibility of Amazone making someone else of herself. The ambivalence involved in this position is the contradiction inscribed in the body of a subject divided between being superimposed on an *enviada posi-*

tion and, at the same time, not being able to present a semblance to it other than through *montage*. And this is because the semblance to be sustained by the disassembled subject says something about the masculinist position, which needs to remain aligned with the imaginary formation whose background of meaning predicts a culturally and ideologically determined image of what it is to be and look like a man. Prevented from signifying and giving the body the image that would correspond to it, the subject operates, via performance, the disarrangement necessary to identify with the discursive position to which he is affiliated. It is in art that the semblance of drag emerges, and it is through discourse that the sayings against binarism and masculinism conform to the resistant face created, materialized in the new body manufactured by the performer.

In order to understand this process of bodily production, we must remember that the body, although given through language, is “never completely given in this way, and to say that it is partially given can only be understood if we also admit that it is given, when it is given, in parts”, as Judith Butler (2021, p. 43) says in *Os sentidos do sujeito*. We recognize the production of the body by discourse as a precondition for the existence of the subject, but we fail to examine that the language that enables this operation is the same that restricts it. The body does not come about homogeneously or completely, because the subject that is at its genesis is heteroclitic and split. In this sense, the body exceeds the linguistic effort of capturing it, of imposing a determined semblance to a position constituted in discourse and sedimented by culture. As Mariele Bressan (2017, p. 251) summarizes in *O Corpo que fal(h)a, nas tramas do discurso*, it is a body crossed with discursivity, a body “[...] in which ideological, unconscious and cultural interpellation is inscribed. Through the paradox, we can read the contradiction, from which the equivocation erupts which, in turn, materializes a form of resistance”.

The assertion that the body is made up of parts is a consequence of the realization that it escapes the logical-normative linguistic understanding of totality and unity. The drag subject’s body puts the contradiction into question by operating the paradox of being and not being me and her at the same time. The mask provided by the make-up contours her face, the body of the self is altered by the discursive process of *montage* that merges two images into the same figure; this body that is given by language “is not, for that reason,

reducible to language” (Butler, 2021, p. 43). As Amazone put it, “there are stages in the make-up that make the leap that Amazone is coming [...] leaps to personification”. This figure that appears personified little by little, in pieces and leaps that leave signs of its emergence, is the index that reveals the material form of the equivocation to which Bressan refers; the center of a knot in a rope woven by culture, ideology, the unconscious and discourse, which ties together the pieces of the body of an ambiguous subject. She and he, his and hers, from one to the other in another turn.

The body given to the drag subject by the discourse that supports it appears as a trope, a figure formed by associations, connected to several points at once, elongated by parts that seem alien to it, despite being indelibly its own. This widening impetus, which results in the body in pieces, outlines a form and then breaks with it; it is a kind of geographical, spatial, cartographic distribution of the body. A connection is assumed that is not linearly guided by the organs, but by affections that are incorporated into the texture of the body, as Suely Rolnik (2010) states in an interview to *Revista Redobra*. For Rolnik, this is a *vibrating* capacity of the body, in which contact with oneself and with the other, human and non-human, expands bodily limits and, in the process, guides affections. It is understood as the functioning of a series of constant paradoxical movements of the body, of admitting that it needs a contour and that it is irreducible to the current contour. Above all, the body of the drag subject is, before being an object, a *question* thrown in the direction of the other, an interrogation that leads to the re-creation of the body and the space around it. These movements, “[...] depending on the threshold of this paradox, generate sensations, the sensation of this paradox has to be faced, it generates a void of meaning, it makes us fragile; and it is the experience of this sensation that pushes us and forces us to create” (Rolnik, 2010, s. p.).

Conclusion

The main contribution of this work to the discussion on the drag queen subject in Discursive Analyses comes from the fact that *montage* functions as a mechanism for recognizing oneself in a body-other, a process that involves gradual transformation of the image of oneself and, concomitantly, by the subject’s affiliation to a dissident discursive position, supported, in the case of drag, by a semblance. This arrangement also includes a

material bulkhead, a *mirror*, a reflection that makes the image of the new body in view tangible. I use the term bulkhead because I believe that the *gaze* is from the realm of the real, and that the artist needs to create bulkheads to guard and protect it from the traumatic because of the violent action of this gaze; in this sense, art acts to tame the gaze and the mirror gives shape to the figure that will function as a shield in front of the beholder. It is towards the mirror that the subject casts a gaze and, in return, is gazed at by this other body in production, the materialization of a position that speaks of an artistic exercise, but also, and above all, of a desire, of an affiliation to a network of meanings. Faced with this other contour, the performer then begins to signify within another subject position embodied in the modified, assembled body. The make-up contours the countenance of the *enviada position*, an image assembled by a subject affiliated to a dissident position. This performer subject is unable to access the meanings coming from the discursive formation via the *enviada position* without resistance, due to the cultural and ideological restriction that affects the embodiment of certain feminine signs, which represent a different direction from the masculinist one.

It is through drag that the subject manages to resist the coercion of the norm imposed by the ideological formation and disseminated by the cultural formation, breaking with the masculine image sustained by a specific imaginary formation. The subject creates a semblance for the *enviada position*, counter-identified with the masculinist position. This position is authorized to say and represent signs linked to the imaginary formation that conveys the imaginary prototype of the *feminine*, without, however, affiliating to the feminist Discursive Formation. It is a position of *tension*, in between, inscribed between the gaps of the masculinist and feminist Discursive Formations. Assembling means resisting, disobeying the determination of a culturally imposed standard and thus acting according to the principles of a position that does not agree with the reproduction of masculinist meanings, which convey the idea of violence and disrespect against women and any other being that is empathetic to them. Drag provokes, criticizes and proposes reflections on the reproduction of these patterns, it is an act of *placing oneself in another place, as a strategic position in the defense of the struggle for one's own subjectivation and existence*.

Notes

- ¹ The video also includes excerpts from performances conducted by Amazone, and is available at: <https://youtu.be/d24dfwkaM9o>.
- ² Except in cases where, through drag art, the subjects understand themselves as transsexuals.
- ³ The reference is to the song *Enviadescer* by Linn da Quebrada, from her 2017 album *Pajubá*.
- ⁴ The term *punctum* was mobilized by Barthes (1984) in *A câmara clara*, from 1980, and can be understood, roughly speaking, as the point (in Barthes' case, in photography) that imposes itself on the viewer, that demands their interest.
- ⁵ It is an art form that centralizes forms of representation of the male figure. It is usually done by people who identify as female.
- ⁶ The term was given to me by Evandra Grigoletto, and it fits perfectly with the interval definition I am trying to adjectivize, starting with its formal definition: it is a *masculine noun*, which designates the outside of something; a margin, edge, border. A margin that is drawn around itself in order to be able to signify from another place, and also a border that traces the limits of the masculinist and the feminist Discursive Formation. In a possible sense, limbo is the state of what is forgotten, neglected, undefined, overlooked – a reference to what is feminine that has been culturally and ideologically repressed in the development of the masculinist position. Still on the definition of this noun, we are faced with a condition of doubt, indecision and uncertainty – of non-formatting, of affiliation operationalized by a non-affiliation, rebellion, denial.

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