



Underground Investigations: wandering perspectives and modes of expression

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ABSTRACT – Underground Investigations: wandering perspectives and modes of expression

– This paper aims to investigate the creative process for the interdisciplinary project *The shadow of others*. The project was produced by the theater company *Grupo Desvio* and based on a wandering immersion in New York City's underground universe. This process was developed through aesthetic and philosophical procedures to destabilize and decentralize notions such as body, individual and representation. The research presents procedures that enable a reconfiguration of the modes of expression and the establishment of a plan to allow for new perceptions and new modes of existence.

Keywords: **Creative Process. Underground. Wandering. Modes of Expression. Modes of Existence.**

RÉSUMÉ – Enquêtes Souterraines: perspectives errantes et modes d'expression

– L'article vise à enquêter sur le processus de création du projet interdisciplinaire *L'ombre des autres* réalisé par le *Grupo Desvio*, à New York, à partir d'une immersion errante dans l'univers souterrain de la ville. Ce processus a été mené à travers des procédures esthétiques et philosophiques qui visaient à déstabiliser et décentraliser des notions telles que le corps, l'individu et la représentation. Cet essai présente donc, les procédures qui permettent de reconfigurer des modes d'expression et d'établir un plan qui rend possible des nouvelles perceptions et des nouveaux modes d'existence.

Mots-clés: **Processus Créatif. Souterrain. Errance. Modes d'Expression. Modes d'existence.**

RESUMO – Investigações Subterrâneas: perspectivas errantes e modos de expressão

– O artigo objetiva investigar o processo de criação do projeto interdisciplinar *A sombra dos outros*, realizado pelo Grupo Desvio, na cidade de Nova Iorque, a partir de uma imersão errante no universo subterrâneo da cidade. Esse processo foi realizado por meio de procedimentos estéticos e filosóficos que buscavam desestabilizar e descentralizar noções como corpo, indivíduo e representação. Este ensaio apresenta então procedimentos que permitem a reconfiguração de modos de expressão e a instauração de um plano que permita novas percepções e novos modos de existência.

Palavras-chave: **Processo criativo. Subterrâneo. Errância. Modos de Expressão. Modos de Existência.**

Resist or *re-exist*: an underground invisibility and its mode of existence

We could say that a creative process in the performing arts usually takes place from a specific world perception up until its aesthetic expression, which then evidences said perception. This world notion may originate in reality, imagination, sensation, memory, experience, dreams or even from a perception traversed by it all. Aesthetic expression, however, can transit between the representation of this world and its performativity, making that notion appear in the scenic space: the world notion being the very materiality of bodies and objects in the scenic space. Contemporary theater, as so many authors have shown, moves between these two spheres, with an emphasis on the performative sphere, particularly since the 1990s. This reflection, which starts with a creative process, aims to discuss the aesthetic sphere of this process by questioning, among other aspects, the notion of representation and, similarly, attempts to reflect on how this sphere needs to be aligned with an urgency to reconfigure a notion of the world.

Urgency is understood here as something especially necessary within a political context that aspires to control our bodies, our subjectivity and our modes of existence. Art, commonly – on the other side, that is, confronting this control, needs to think of urgent means to resist or to *re-exist*. The creative process that will be discussed here interprets resistance based on the idea of *re-existence*, or rather, as the possibility for thinking of new ways of existing and new affective circuits.

The focus of this study is the creative process for the interdisciplinary project *A sombra dos outros* [The shadow of others], a creation by *Grupo Desvio*¹. The work was conducted by one of the authors of this article, Rodrigo Fischer, during his post-doctoral field research² undertaken in the Department of Performance Studies, New York University, between June 2017 and August 2018, in the city of New York. While the post-doctoral research, in general, was delimited by the concept of polyphony in the composition of a theatrical ground and its possible correlations with images and new technologies, the field research in New York was configured from an interdisciplinary mode of expression and included the idea of *agencement* – a French word usually translated as assemblage or theory of assemblage –

or agency with objects. It is based on this approach that the present reflection is configured.

Considering that the research is of a theoretical-political nature, apart from the creation of the abovementioned work, it aims to reflect on possible agencies between body, object, image, sound and new technologies for scenic creation, with the supervision of Professor André Lepecki, in the New York process. The creation thus emerges from two simultaneous instances, the former being the novel *Notes from Underground*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1983), and the latter in the opportunity to research possible decentralizations and deconstructions of the organic body from its agency with other inorganic bodies, all inserted in the same category of *things*, as will be contextualized in the course of the text. This perspective helps to understand that the aim of decentralizing the hierarchy between subject and object is also about finding new modes of subjectivation and existence.

The book *Notes from Underground*, also translated in English as *Letters from the Underworld*, was originally published in 1864. It is a text that tells of the conflicting anger and frustration of a character regarding his relationships, himself and society. It is the narrative of someone who lives marginalized in his underground, a figure who does not fit into the system, whether from a personal, social or political perspective. This is also the motto of the project *A sombra dos outros*, which seeks a dialogue with the city, to affect and be affected by it, in order to understand what could be characterized as underground-underworld, who the people of this space are and how they act in the political context in which they are inserted. The proposal of this creation is therefore to reconfigure possible correlations between bodies, objects, images, sounds and architectures from a perspective that sheds light on the political tension inherent in the right to the city and to mobility as opposed to our social prisons and the control of subjectivity. The idea is to understand potential forms of visualizing bodies, objects, images, sounds and architectures that are discarded, made invisible, oppressed, rendered useless, crooked and have lost their social, utilitarian or aesthetic value.

The perspective of seeking the potency of things made invisible is discussed in the book *Les Existences moindres* (2017) by David Lapoujade who, reflecting on a text by Étienne Souriau, in his book *Les Différents*

modes d'existence (2017), believes that minimum existences are those that have not materialized their potentiality within a reality and therefore remain only as virtual forces. These are organic and inorganic existences which have the capacity to become effective or to insert themselves within a possible reality, but which continue to be invisible, remaining in the condition of potency, that is, as *virtualities*. For Lapoujade, and also for Deleuze (2006), the virtual is perceived as the potency present in things (materials, objects, bodies, spaces and beings), which only cease to be solely virtual when they are materialized or updated. According to Lapoujade (2017, p. 36), “The virtuals are everywhere, they surround us, they show up and disappear as the reality in itself changes; they have no solidity, no determined place, they haven’t any consistency”. From Lapoujade's perspective (2017, p. 41), minimum existences would need to go through a process of establishment to increase their degree of reality.

How can a being, at the limit of non-existence, achieve a more 'real', more consistent existence? Through what gesture? What is the 'art' that allows existences to increase their reality? It is probably the most fragile existences, those close to nothing, which forcefully demand to become more real. One must be able to perceive them, to learn their value and their importance. Therefore, before posing the question of the creative act that allows them to be established, it is necessary to ask oneself what allows one to perceive them.

As per Lapoujade and Souriau, it is therefore necessary to look and learn to perceive the *virtualities*, which can become established on attempting to modify the point of view itself and have a more participative perspective. In other words, “our perspective fits into another perspective”, since each mode of existence possesses its own logic and point of view. Lapoujade (2017, p. 47) adds that “we don’t have a perspective of the world; on the contrary, it is the world that makes us enter into one of its perspectives”.

Wandering as Process

The creative process of *A sombra dos outros* thus begins with the idea of wandering around and looting at the city of New York in order to discern people, architecture, images and objects from different perspectives, seeking to thereby establish its potentialities, which still remain in a virtual sphere.

This work, of participating in other modes of existence during what we define as wandering, was aimed at reconfiguring our own existence and our relationship with the city, as well as seeking means to enhance the *virtualities* of these minimal and invisible existences. Alternatively, as Lapoujade (2017, p. 84) prefers, the means of affirming the rights to these existences, of trying to make “a new world, breaking the old structures in favor of a new cosmicity”. Lapoujade (2017, p. 103) proposes a means of enhancing modes of existence both through the process of anaphora, which “is the process by which an existence tries to gain more reality”, and through the process of establishment, “a gesture by which existence intends to affirm its right to exist” and to legitimize a way of occupying a space-time.

The task of wandering around the city required “[...] either remaining on the same plane of existence, or bringing together two planes whose modes of being are radically different” (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 76). How can we reconfigure our point of view of things, and the world? How can we assume the perspective of another mode of existence? In his text, Lapoujade (2017) suggests that the processes of establishment are materialized mainly from a perspective of *reduction*. For him “[...] it is necessary to purify the field of experience from all that impedes seeing. In this sense, reducing is to release a plane of pure experience” (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 48). The challenge of this wandering journey in New York was therefore to reconfigure our perspective of looking at things and the city, trying to place ourselves in other modes of existence by means of a less contaminated experience, thus attempting to deconstruct or dispossess pre-set and cast thoughts.

What is the affective potency of these socially discarded or distained *things*, these other modes of existence? What are the narratives that they construct? During this wandering, the creator, director and performer of the project, Rodrigo Fischer, accompanied by visual artist Yasmin Santana and filmmaker Peter Azen, began to capture and collect things in the streets: trash, objects, stories, and, especially, the audiovisual register of this wandering walk that sought to look into the city's underground. The challenge of this meandering was to instill a state of vulnerability and to be adrift, allowing oneself to be affected by the things that traversed the path. From that moment on, the process prioritized a constant porous and

rhizomatic state, open to interference and change, in which encounters, hazards, discoveries, deviations and anything that traversed the path, through affectivity, would enable the poetics, the manner of expression and the discourse of creation to be configured during the process itself.

If one of the objectives of this cartographic investigation, within this underground universe search to enhance the *virtuality* of the merest existences, was to reconfigure our point of view in relation to things, the plunge into this geography of affecting and letting oneself be affected by the city was fundamental to the creative process. It was precisely during this meandering through the streets of New York that the comprehension of this body, which seeks to dispossess its previous casts and vibrate with the notes that each space emits, was established. To put it another way, the search for this state of listening, of experience and traversal of affections, enabled the organic and inorganic *virtualities* within the underground universe to become, in some way, visible and current. The perception of these minimal existences vibrated in our body as artist-observers who desire the reinvention of themselves. We were interested, first of all, in reconfiguring our sensitivity, our point of view and an understanding of the world, in an incessant search to make virtual potentialities vibrate, in order to be able to imagine new existential landscapes or new modes of existence.

During the wandering immersion in the streets of New York, the purpose was also to capture and collect possible materials for creation. In a more practical manner, the aforementioned artists Yasmin, Peter and Rodrigo chose, each day of immersion, distinct neighborhoods³ of New York and drifted around in a constant search to look at the city from different perspectives and try to understand how and what the underground of each visited space was, employing the exercise of glimpsing its invisibilities. An important reflection during the immersion was to understand that inorganic things (objects) become trash when they lose their utilitarian value, and the same happens in relation to organic things (people), that is, when people lose their social value, they are also *discarded* by society because they are no longer *useful* to it. Such a perspective, namely, that organic and inorganic things reach a new configuration when they are disconnected from their function or utility within this marketing logic, also implies the fact that they “[...] reveal their liberating capacity,

their capacity to totally escape capturing devices” (Lepecki, 2012, p. 96). Comprehending the *useless* things embedded in this context was important to delimiting the research by considering possible decentralizations and dispossessions of the organic body based on their agency with other inorganic bodies.

What were the things, people, architectures and narratives that did not establish their *virtualities*, and were not updated because they were minimal existences, marginalized, abandoned and invisible within New York City? Abandoned architectures, destroyed landscapes, dark places, trash, useless objects, debris, bricklayers, peddlers, waste collectors, street artists, beggars, passers-by, homeless people, solitary wanderers; all these things were predominantly in an invisible sphere. All these things were interested in being perceived by us. It is from this material that the work was composed.

The immersion took place mainly on the streets of different areas of Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. Certain things began to grab our attention more, such as the discarded trash (Figure 1) in front of doorways, quite common in almost all the streets of New York.



Figure 1 – Discarded trash. Source: Screenshots from videos recorded by the project videographer Peter Azen and director Rodrigo Fischer between September 2017 and May 2018 in the city of New York.

This trash abandoned in front of houses not only served as the audio-visual register that would comprise the video installation and as collected materials that would compose the visual and interactive works of the project, as we will see below, but also led to various reflections that provoked us to think about the work: although the trash is quite homogeneous in its packaging, what are the particularities of each one? How and why were these objects disposed of? Could it be that they simply lost their usefulness? Could they not be useful in other contexts? What is the story behind each discarded object? What was the person who discarded a yogurt pot thinking while eating it? What about the brand of lipstick on

the beer can? What narratives traversed those objects and trash? All of these questions reverberated in our reflections throughout this process. As we observed the trash in the city, we also began to see that some accumulations of garbage were, as images, not merely waste, but possessed a poetic potency of composition, as shown in the following images (Figure 2):



Figure 2 – Trash installations. Source: Screenshots from videos recorded by the project videographer Peter Azen and director Rodrigo Fischer between September 2017 and May 2018 in the city of New York.

Looking at the accumulation of trash as a poetic composition of image prompts us to consider the possibility of other modes of expression that are not subordinated to a hegemonic thought of aesthetic experience. If the underground is inhabited and permeated by things that are not adapted to a system and have their own logic of organization, shouldn't our sensitivity for creation also question our form subordinated to aesthetic standardizations?

During this work, beyond wandering the streets, we found certain landscapes that were certainly not in the itinerary of any tourist but which had in their composition something quite peculiar and spectacular. Two of these places were quite impactful, *Dead Horse Bay*, a beach with an accumulation of bottles and disposable objects, and an abandoned area of *Red Hook* with mounds of trash and a view of the Statue of Liberty, both in Brooklyn, as can be seen below (Figure 3):

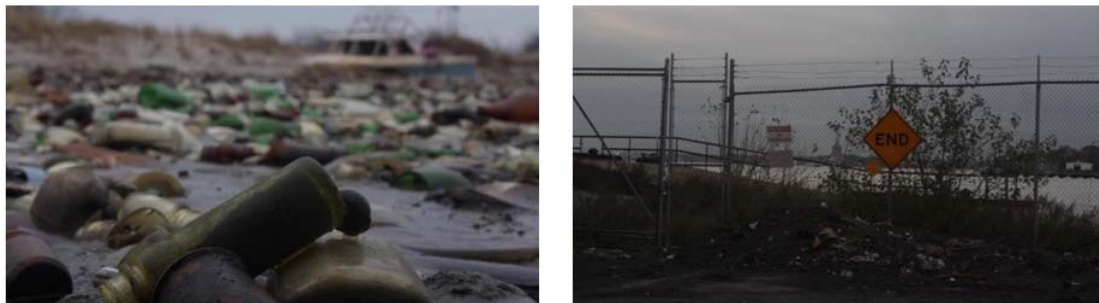


Figure 3 –Landscapes and debris. Source: Screenshots from videos recorded by the project videographer Peter Azen and director Rodrigo Fischer between September 2017 and May 2018 in the city of New York.

These landscapes summed up the abandonment and disproportionate invisibility present in major cities. How is it possible to have a beach full of bottles next to a bridge in Brooklyn? How is it possible to have so much waste and rubble surrounded by a fence in a city that has the Statue of Liberty as a symbol? How is it possible to walk the streets of New York and not realize how many people are abandoned there? All of these concerns interfered with our creation process.

Returning to our wandering around with the aim of resignifying our outlook to an underground perspective, it was important to literally go under the ground to one of the city's busiest places: the subway.

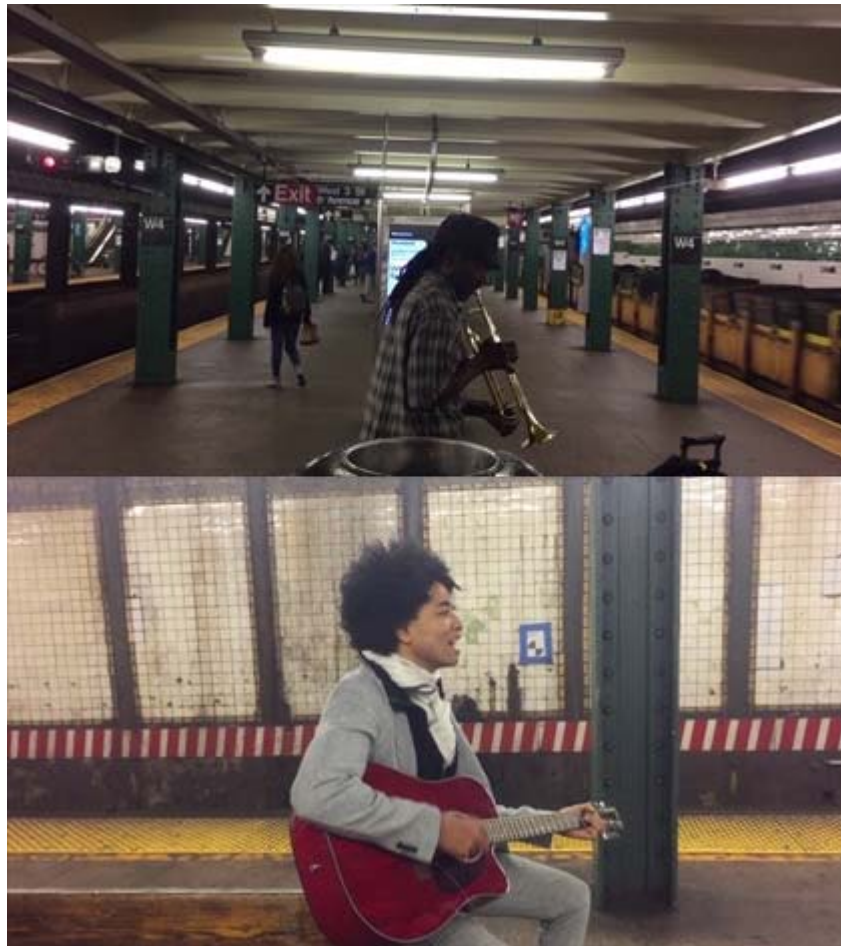


Figure 4 – Subway station in New York and the artists. Source: Screenshots from videos recorded by the project videographer Peter Azen and director Rodrigo Fischer between September 2017 and May 2018 in the city of New York.

The New York City subway is known worldwide for its diversity, its logistics and the peculiar figures that pass through it, as well as for its dirt, rats, and artists who certainly relieve the boredom that passengers face in

their daily lives (Figure 4). These reasons would be enough for our immersion, but we also wanted to understand the dynamics of that space from other perspectives. For the research, the most relevant perception we had, in this underground space of subway stations and carriages, was that the invisibilities scream and beg to be seen there. In New York, especially in the subways, an impression of invisibility is highlighted. If on the one hand this is positive, allowing for a greater feeling of freedom, since people can feel more comfortable to show themselves the way they want, then on the other, the invisibilities are even more hidden. Not only by those who sleep every night in the same train carriage, by the beggars, or by the artists who, if they are not really virtuosos, go unnoticed, but also by those who are or feel, in some degree, displaced in the world. What are these peoples' stories? How do they feel in the midst of so many people who do not see their bodies and their potentialities?

One of the most impressive factors during the immersion was the realization that despite the apparent invisibility of the *things* that traversed our wanderings, whether organic or inorganic, it was possible to imagine that many narratives trespassed upon those spaces, those landscapes, those people and objects. Through the audio-visual register, the collection of objects, the interviews and, above all, the experience of this immersion, the next step in creation was to find ways to agency this material. It was at this stage that the scope of the research, when considering possible decentralizations and dispossessions of the organic body from its agency with other inorganic bodies, began to lead to the probable forms of agency with the collected material. *Agencement* is understood here from a Deleuzian perspective, in which all this collected material would not be worked on due to its potential for representation and meaning, but rather because of the multiple tensions generated in the correlation between its materiality.

When we think about the composition of material through the idea of agency, we primarily consider an organization that prioritizes the multiplicity of the relationship between each material, without nullifying its singularities. It entails understanding the potentiality of each element in order to allow for possible overlaps, juxtapositions and fusions. While the project's discourse was based on Dostoyevsky's text, which unfolded in an

urban immersion to understand the potentiality of virtual things, the following stage was shaped by the desire to think about how to agency and express the collected material: 150 hours of audiovisual recordings; ten boxes of the objects, trash and disposable materials encountered; fifteen interviews with people who crossed our path during our meandering; hundreds of folded cardboard boxes that served as a support for projection; and the experience of looking at New York City from other perspectives.

It is important to emphasize that during the immersion we sought out an experience of horizontality with all the things that traversed our wanderings, with the intention both of conceiving possible relationships between bodies and objects and of suspending the relationship of possession and power between subject and object. This perception provoked a great uneasiness, discussed in this study: wouldn't decentralizing the notion of body and dispossessing it of its social constructions and casts be a procedure for reconfiguring subjectivity, consequently allowing us to envisage new ways of existence?

This search for a horizontal relationship between subject and object led us to the research of Professor André Lepecki, through which we began to perceive all things, human and inhuman, organic or inorganic, simply as *things*, in order to suspend any form of hierarchy or possession, placing body and objects side by side. For Lepecki (2012, p. 98):

This simple act of just placing things in their quiet, still, and concrete *thingliness* alongside bodies, not necessarily together with the dancers, but just alongside, effects a substantial event: to underline the thin line simultaneously separating and joining bodies and things, to delineate a zone of indiscernibility between the corporeal, the subjectile and the thingly.

This understanding of horizontality between *things*, according to Lepecki, leads us to consider new forms of subjectivation between subject and object, challenging a political order of possession and power. He claims that “[...] objects, when freed from utility, from use-value, from exchange-value, and from signification, reveal their liberating capacity” (Lepecki, 2012, p. 98). During the immersion, as we came across countless objects discarded and thrown in the streets, we sought to subvert the logic of finding and possessing the objects, letting them find us. Our exercise was to look at things not from the perspective of what they represented, signified

or were worth, but to look at the thing itself, its materiality, its potency as form and vibration. It is an outlook that approximates that of Marcel Duchamp's *ready-mades*, that is, depriving them of their original and usable function, reducing the object to the matter itself.

Reconfigurations from Processes of *Reduction, Helplessness and Exhaustion*

The procedure for reducing or emptying the significance and representation of objects was something that accompanied the whole creative process of *A sombra dos outros*. By *reduction* we mean the first stage of a process to establish *virtualities*, as previously mentioned through the perspective of David Lapoujade, and also as a manner of enhancing the material, reducing its possible forms of representation. For Lapoujade (2017, p. 48):

In general, the importance of reduction is to establish a plane that enables the perception of new entities. It is about making visible, about making new classes of beings perceptible, even those that are invisible. Reduction is, first and foremost, a cleaning operation. It is necessary to purify the field of experience of everything that impedes seeing.

It entails reduction as a procedure for cleaning our preconceptions and seeking new understandings of things and the world, thus facilitating new modes of existence. If the process of establishing new modes of existence occurs through a process of *reduction*, as Lapoujade suggests, or rather, to establish what he calls pure experience, it would involve the need to deprive or dispossess the notion of individual that we construct, whether as social, political or identity construction. This process of de-individuation, of detachment from the notion of the individual and its self-representation, is apprehended here both through *reduction* bias and by what Vladimir Safatle (2016) sees as a politics of *helplessness*.

Safatle, in his book *O circuito dos afetos: corpos políticos, desamparo e o fim do indivíduo* [The circuit of affects: political bodies, helplessness and the end of the individual] proposes that the process of de-individuation, through dispossession of the notion of individual based on *helplessness*, is a means of driving the subject to open up to a process of transformation. Obviously, he redefines that which we understand as *helplessness*, particularly in reference to Sigmund Freud's ideas on psychoanalysis. Safatle

asserts that it is essential not to confuse *helplessness* with fear. The latter is shaped by an affective policy of power and control, based on a mode of subjection, while *helplessness* is recognized within an affective politics in which the helpless, due to the possibilities of dispossession, deals with affects that can establish modes of liberation. In this manner, *helplessness* enables another affective circuit and, consequently, new forms of existing. He continues by saying that unlike fear, “helplessness is not something you struggle with, but something you affirm” (Safatle, 2016, p. 18). Fear is anchored in a prior system of representation, which leads to something determined and established, while *helplessness* destabilizes any notion of representation and guides towards a state of potency that implies liberating the subject from the very category of individual. According to Safatle (2016, p. 21-22):

A political body produced by helplessness is a body in continuous dispossession and des-identification of its determinations. A body without common *I* and uniqueness, traversed by antagonisms and marked by contingencies that disorganize normativities impelling forms towards unpredictable situations. Therefore, helplessness produces errant bodies, bodies devoid of the capacity to stabilize the movement proper to the subjects through a process of inscribing parts in a totality.

From this perspective, being helpless is to allow oneself to be affected by something that dispossesses one, as subject, of what was historically constituted as individual, and affection thereby acts as political material in this helpless body. In the face of *helplessness*, subjects are dispossessed of their established mode of existence, permitting the affects to circulate in another manner and produce new modes of existence. The politics of *helplessness*, just as the procedure of *reduction*, strive towards a dynamic within a circuit of affects that idealizes a non-automated body, in which the impulses of gestures are not conditioned. The idea is more of an errant body or a body in *state of becoming*^A. These concerns are not only philosophical, but also intensely studied in the field of scenic research, especially if we interpret art from a Nietzschean perspective, namely that it exists in order for us not to be destroyed by reality. Let us remember, for example, Antonin Artaud's *body without organs* and Jerzy Grotowski's obsession with deconditioning the gesture; by extension, an intense desire to reconfigure the various powers over a standardized, mechanized,

imprisoned and controlled body. This is also an aim of this research, which primarily investigates procedures of *reduction* based on the agency between the *things* that compose the scene.

While during the immersion process of the project, the idea of dispossessing mainly involved the deconstruction of our viewpoint of *things*, during the composition process, this idea was established through the emptying of the signified and possible representations of the assembled *things*, reducing them to what they are as matter and vibration. It is a procedure very similar to the principles of *Teatro Zero*, by Tadeusz Kantor, 1964, through which he sought new modes of scenic expression, moving away from the paradigms of representative theater. His own relationship with the objects on stage, as well as his general understanding of staging, was to neutralize pre-established significations and symbologies in order to seek new forms of expression. With a very performative proposal, his scenic conceptions dialogue directly with what we have called *reduction*. We can identify this from his writings, such as *Teatro Zero's* manifesto:

The theater that I call Zero does not represent an already determined zero situation. Its essence is the process geared towards the void and the zero zones. [...] Disassembled from any organization that forms. General decomposition of all types. [...] Automatic repetition. Disinformation. Deformation of information. Decomposition of the action. The object is disentangled from its naively superimposed signification and from the symbolism that camouflages it, revealing the autonomy of its empty existence (Kantor, 2008, p. 87-90).

Already in the 1960s, Kantor understood that the modes of expression on the stage urgently needed to be dissociated from their representative ties, as theater had become hostage to a worldview tied to a controlled type of subjectivity and sensitivity. What we propose here, like Kantor, Grotowski, Artaud and Samuel Beckett, is to investigate modes of expression that reconfigure our subjectivity, thus providing new modes of existence. Besides the philosophical approach through Safatle's politics of *helplessness*, or processes of *reduction* within modes of existence as per Lapoujade, we also endeavor to understand how this can be recognized within a creative process and its possible ramifications.

In a Deleuzian interpretation, Lapoujade cites examples of artistic creations that achieved their formal limit of reduction, including John Cage

with his 4'33" of silence, *White on White* by Malevitch or *White Paintings* by Rauschenberg, and proposes that procedures of *exhaustion* in the mode of expression, in its multiple instances, enabled the reconfiguration of bodies, subjectivity and perception (Lapoujade, 2017). The *exhaustion* discussed here is a term addressed by Gilles Deleuze (2010b) and revisited by both David Lapoujade and Peter Pál Pelbart (2016). Despite these authors reflecting on *exhaustion* from a philosophical perspective in particular, they also address the contexts of aesthetics and creation, putting forward the work of Samuel Beckett as a reference on this theme.

Firstly, it is important to differentiate between the idea of *exhaustion* and the idea of tiredness, whereby the latter is part of a “dialectic of work and production: rest in order to resume activity” (Pelbart, 2016, p. 42). In this manner, tiredness prevents the body from being affected. On the other hand, the idea of *exhaustion* presupposes a disconnection from the notion of individual, destabilizing its sensitivity to discover new modes of affecting and being affected, or rather, allowing for new modes of existence. According to Pelbart (2016, p. 43), the exhausted is the one who had the strength “[...] to produce the void or make holes, loosen the tourniquet of words, dry up the oozing of voices to detach them from memory and reason”. This involves a procedure similar to Safatle’s treatment of *helplessness* where the goal is to dispossess of preconceptions regarding the world and the individual, thus opening oneself up to a transformative action. Pelbart continues (2016, p. 413):

Exhaustion untangles that which ‘connects’ us to the world, which ‘ties us’ to it and to the others, which ‘grips’ us with its words and images, which ‘comforts’ us inside the illusion of wholeness (self, us, sense, freedom, and future) something we have long discredited, even while remaining attached to them.

By proposing *exhaustion* as a concept and as a creative procedure for the project *A sombra dos outros* we adopted a philosophical engagement both through the transformative movement in modes of existence, and the possible reconfigurations of the very modes of expression. The notion of *exhaustion*, as mode of expression, was firstly considered based on the emptying of meaning and representation of *things*, in addition to its multiple forms of *agencement* possible. Therefore, the composition begins

with the idea of organizing and assembling *things*: images, sounds, texts, objects and the lived experience from that universe of immersion.

The Agencement of *Things* and their Multiplicities

The images recorded on video served as the centralizing elements of the composition, not only due to the quantity of material captured, but above all because one of the objectives of the immersion was the displacement of our viewpoint in relation to the city, recognizing other modes of existence. Indeed, looking at things from another perspective is also a mode of dispossessing our own understanding of the world. This change in perspective was further reinforced by using the camera device. The mode of cinematographic expression works on the understanding that changing the point of view or angle of the frame can alter the discourse of the filmed object. Cinema is constituted as image composition and any interference in the image can consequently intervene in its discourse. This assumption was integrated during the recording of the project, in which we sought to register things from different and multiple perspectives. We believed that the captured images would centralize our composition and, therefore, we also chose to work with three different projection supports, making it possible to assemble three distinct images simultaneously on the stage. The following is an illustration of how these three images were in agency with each other (Figure 5) and also how they were set up onstage (Figure 6):



Figure 5 – Illustration of three images in agency with each other. Source: Screenshots from videos recorded by the project videographer Peter Azen and director Rodrigo Fischer between September 2017 and May 2018 in the city of New York.



Figure 6 – Illustration of images assembled on the stage. Source: Image by Peter Azen in Dixon Place Theater, New York city (2018).

Besides reflecting on the possible tensions generated between the three screens, the composition of the images was created by means of a montage that prioritized the duration of each image rather than a spatial-temporal construction of its sequencing. The proposal was to focus on the materiality and uniqueness of each image and to consider their potential to evoke and intensify multiple semantic layers. Deleuze adds (2010a, p. 81-83):

The image is not defined by the sublimity of its content, but by its form, that is, its ‘internal tension’, or by the force that it mobilizes in order to create the void or bore holes, loosen the grip of words, dry up the oozing of voices, disengage from memory and reason: a small alogical image, amnesic, almost aphasic, now standing in the void, now shuddering in the open. The image is not an object, but a ‘process’ [...] What matters in the image is not the poor content, but the mad, ready-to-burst energy captured, which means that images never last long.

The insistence in reducing the image to its materiality and form meant that our discourse was not geared towards the representation of an idea, but rather to the actual performativity of the image in its space-time variation, and its vibration of light, color and composition. Our interest was not in representing the universe we deemed to be underground, but in presenting the potency of that mode of existence, and showing the material of those apparently invisible *things*. To this end, it was necessary that the objects collected during the immersion were present and alive on the stage, going

from a *virtuality* in the context of the city to a potential updating as an artistic object on the stage.

The objects and trash, dispossessed of their value and usefulness, were arranged on the stage in a reconfiguration, both from their agency with other elements, such as the images, and their potential interactions with the spectator. A fundamental device of the project was to create a stage space the spectator could visit and with which he/she could interact via the works or trash-works, as they were called. The spectator entered through a door that led directly on to the stage where the works were displayed in the manner of a visiting space, as if the spectator were in fact visiting an art gallery. There were a total of 12 works that would allow for spectator interaction at a certain point.



Figures 7 – Two works from the project. Source: Photos by Rodrigo Fischer of the works on show in Dixon Place Theater in New York (2018).

The work shown in Figure 7, to the left, was called⁵ *Time passes* and included some magnifying glasses for spectators to look at the trash-work from different perspectives and thus construct their own narrative. The image on the right of Figure 7 was entitled *Don't touch me*. In this work, which was sealed off with a tape containing the word *caution*, there was an unidentifiable plaster object which piqued curiosity during visits due to its mystery and possible value, given that it was protected. However, during the course of the event⁶, the same work was knocked over by a police car remotely controlled by the performer. When it fell to the ground, the object broke and a red liquid flowed from its pieces, whereby something apparently inorganic took on the appearance of something organic and alive. In reality, all of the works underwent reconfiguration during the

presentation, whether in agency with the images, sounds and texts, or through interaction with the performer's body⁷.

To facilitate a structural understanding of the work presented⁸, we would like to divide it into three stages: 1) Visitation: configured from the *agencement* of the trash-works, video-installation, sound and bodies of the spectators; 2) Film montage: configured from the audio-visual *agencement* of images projected onto three screens, voice-overs and trash-works; 3) Performance: configured from the *agencement* of the performer's body, trash-works, images composed in real-time by live cameras, previously recorded images, sounds, texts and narrations. The first part started with the visitation device, in which the audience could interact with the works displayed onstage, in addition to being surrounded by three large screens, two of which were made of cardboard boxes while the other made use of the theater wall itself for the video installation. At this moment of the visit, the video showed abstract images pre-recorded on a Super-8 camera, placing greater emphasis on the images' vibration, contrast, and brightness. At the same time, the director and performer of the work remained away from the audience, controlling the lighting and sound in real-time. It was a form of invisible interaction with the spectators, since they may not have noticed that a certain light or sound was activated according to something they did onstage. The idea of invisibility permeated all the *agencement* of the work in a constant search to emphasize the vibrational materiality of the *things*, also as a form of reducing its sphere of representation.

The second part was characterized by an audio-visual montage using the recordings made during the immersion. The images were simultaneous and alternated between the three screens. In addition to the projected images, two trash-works were illuminated while a voice-over dialogue was played. The text of these voices was freely inspired in the characters of Hamm and Clov from *Endgame*, by Samuel Beckett (2010). The second part ended with the image of a police car appearing on the three screens simultaneously. That was when the third part began, with the continuity of the police car leaving the screen and a police car remotely controlled by the performer entering the stage. The police car weaved between the works and activated the sounds of a horn or siren as a form of threatening the works, until at a given moment the car intentionally collided with one of the trash-

works. It repeatedly crashed into the work causing it to break, before finally exiting the stage. It was then that the performer, covered in a black bin liner, entered the stage and began to compose images in real-time with a camera. While still to the side of the stage, his first act was to take the police car, the only object that was not found on the streets, turn it off and throw it in a trash bag.

The presence of the performer onstage was important for us to understand the interaction of this organic *thing* with the other inorganic *things*. The decision to cover the face and body of the performer with a bin liner was necessary to literally dispossess him of his notion of identity, approximating him to the material of all the other *things* onstage, rendering the idea of the body's invisibility and suggesting the notion of *emballage* inspired by the reflections of Tadeusz Kantor (2008). The intention was not to represent the body-object onstage, but rather to claim its vibration through the *emballage* that protects it and sets it aside from common use, thereby neutralizing its original significance and possible symbology. It is from this point on, when the *body-object-emballage* is between presence and absence onstage, that various compositions were executed through the *agencement* of its matter with the materiality of the works, images, sounds, interviews and texts, which aimed at updating the underground universe. To put it another way, to establish *virtualities* of that mode of existence we identified during the wandering immersion through the city of New York.

It is also worth highlighting that the use of the word emphasized its materiality. During the creation process, many texts were gathered and worked on: Dostoevsky's text, interviews with people we met in the underground universe, and texts that became part of the process, such as certain poems by Gertrude Stein and excerpts from Samuel Beckett's texts. Inspired by Stein's style of writing, the starting point for the creation of the texts was in a more performative sphere. The proposal was that "[...] instead of a linguistic representation of facts, there is a 'position' of tones, words, sentences, sounds that are hardly controlled by a scenic composition or by a visual, not text orientated, dramaturgy" (Lehmann, 2007, p. 249). The composition of Gertrude Stein's texts (1997) prioritizes the use of words based on their sonority, rhythm, repetition, and the multiple sensorial layers that the words and their sequencing provide; the beauty of the words,

smells and images that they evoke. As set out in the project, the words of Stein's texts become more autonomous than symbolic objects. It was from this perspective that the word was crafted on stage in the project. The proposal of the text was to explore the sonority of the words rather than their meaning, as can be seen below:

She is afraid of her consciousness. She believes that being too much aware of things is an illness. Information. Subordination. She is sick. Why is suffering the sole origin of consciousness. Among beans, kings, queens, signs, rice, cries. Why? Rice. Rise. Up. Pause. Silence. It's a lie. Time dies. This time, this woman does not believe in anything. She just needs to be accepted, to be loved among beans, kings, queens, signs, rice, cries. Why? Time passes. Time grows. Time flies. Time goes. Time dies. To fly is necessary to have courage to face the terror of the void. I can't hear anything. My vision is blurred. Silence. Dark. Empty among beans, kings, queens, signs, rice, cries. Why? The void is the space of freedom. The hole. The spite. The cave. They fight. Who? What? Which is better, cheap happiness or exalted sufferings? She had tears coming in him when she was remembering, when she was not remembering being such a one. She is such a one, she is completely filled being such a one, she is entirely meaning to be such a one⁹.

This text, based on one of the interviews we carried out and inspired in the texts of Gertrude Stein, was incorporated in the project as a voice-over. It was narrated by the performer with a greater emphasis on the rhythm, sound and vibration of the words, thus reducing their power of meaning to enable other affective spheres. The composition of the work in all its aspects and *agencement* was determined by an attempt to empty it of its possible meanings and representations.

Exhaustion of Representation as Invention of Worlds

As mentioned at the start of the text, representation is taken to mean an attempt to make present a specific world notion. In general, Western theater has always been tied to the idea of representation throughout its history, with a few exceptions. From the 1970s onwards, and intensifying in the 1980s and 1990s, many creations began to stress the performative sphere more than the representative sphere of their works. In the view of Deleuze (2010b), Lapoujade (2017) and Pelbert (2016), Samuel Beckett is a central figure in considering possible annulments of the representation idea, in particularly through his later works, such as *The Unnamable* (2009)

and *The Lost One* (2008), in which the subject is reduced to something almost pre-discursive. The notion of the individual and identity are not preserved in his work. Words are generally exhausted through a catastrophe with silence, immobility, and the void all that remain, or rather, language and its possible *exhaustion*. Catastrophe is a premiss for the emptying of reason and a manner of reconfiguring perception for a new world.

The hypothesis of the project's creation process, primarily anchored in the thinking of Lapoujade, Deleuze, Safatle and Pelbert, was to reflect on procedures of *reduction, helplessness and exhaustion* for modes of expression to establish new modes of existence and, in consequence, invent new worlds. In their multiple approaches, such as subtraction, deceleration, emptying, dispossession and de-individuation, these procedures are perspectives that oscillate between the practical and poetic, but never as Manichaeistic formulas. Lapoujade said that within these spheres, which prioritize *reduction*, perception changes and “[...] where certain people merely see the abstraction of a pure quality, others will see the reflecting surface of movements, tiny displacements, induced by a change in the scale of perception” (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 110). *Reduction, helplessness and exhaustion* are understood here as procedures to establish a plane to enable new perceptions, new affections and new modes of existence.

The investigation of what we called the underground universe, with its minimal existences and invisibilities, provided clues to compose a work that dealt with the decentralization of the subject, permitting new manners of subjectivation. New beings are born when *helplessness* allows them to dispossess the controlled and standardized form of individual. Dispossessed of their preconceptions of the world, they open up to new forms of perception and another worldview. From this perspective, the theater pushes for new modes of expression that are not hostage to representation, since the latter is guided by an established worldview, a world in which “conflicts are already normalized, codified and institutionalized” (Deleuze, 2010b, p. 54).

In the face of the many excesses we are bombarded with and how we are searching for processes to reconfigure notions of the world, the procedures of *reduction, helplessness and exhaustion* seem urgent within the creation process. We would like to conclude with a reflection by Deleuze

which condenses this sometimes real, sometimes utopian yearning for new modes of expression and the invention of new worlds:

Theatre surges forward as something representing nothing but what presents and creates a minority consciousness as a universal-becoming. It forges alliances here and there according to the circumstances, following the lines of transformation that exceed theatre and take on another form, or else that transform themselves back into theatre for another leap (Deleuze, 2010b, p. 64).

Notes

- ¹ *Grupo Desvio* was created in 2001 by director Rodrigo Fischer, in the city of Brasília, with the goal of investigating, experimenting and presenting theatrical projects with a focus on the actor's creative process. From 2008 onwards, the group began to avail of new technologies and audiovisual poetics to enhance the actor's discourse. In 2016, the interdisciplinary approach started to traverse the group's research, which went on to create works for galleries, museums, urban spaces and movie theaters. The group is currently made up of César Lignelli, Fernando Gutiérrez, Gil Roberto, Márcio Minervino and Rodrigo Fischer.
- ² The graduate degree was part of the Performing Arts Graduate Program in Universidade de Brasília under the supervision of the professor and also co-author of this article, Roberta Kumasaka Matsumoto. With the support of a PNPd/CAPES grant, the post-doctoral degree was undertaken between 2015 and 2019.
- ³ The city of New York is divided into five major neighborhoods: the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island, which are subdivided into smaller areas such as: East Village, Chelsea, Bushwick, Astoria, Bayridge, among many others. The project covered the five neighborhoods and the immersion areas were mainly determined by the particularities of each region. For example, Bedford-Stuyvesant, characterized by its Afro-American community; Sunset Park and its Chinese community; East Williamsburg and its Jewish community; Bayridge's Arab community; Astoria with a population of Brazilians and Greeks; among many other immersion areas of the project.
- ⁴ The concept was developed during the thesis *Poéticas entre o cinema e o teatro: reflexões sobre presença e atuação cênica a partir da obra de John Cassavetes*, defended by Rodrigo Fischer in 2015. The concept synthesizes the instant the actor places him/herself in the moment, hearing and reacting, seeking new

perceptions of his/her impulses. The starting point is to prioritize the ambiguous materiality of the body and its gestures to the detriment of its possible representations. It is an idea traversed by concepts such as Antonin Artaud's *body without organs* and Gilles Deleuze's *becoming*.

- ⁵ All works had a title that suggested a certain interaction, such as the piece *Don't touch me; Leave something valuable* or *Dance with me*.
- ⁶ We called it an event because even though the project was presented on a stage, it was not characterized as merely a mode of theatrical expression since other modes of expression were integrated, such as an audiovisual installation, visual works to visit and the cinema itself.
- ⁷ The performer Rodrigo Fischer was also responsible for handling all the technological aspects, such as sound, camera, lighting and projection. For example, during the first part of the presentation, involving the interaction of the public with the installation-works, the performer remained in the booth controlling light and sound. The spectators thought it was just part of the installation, but they were already invisibly part of the work, in which sound and lights were activated according to specific actions onstage, as when one of the spectators tried on one of the works, a garment inspired by the works of Bispo do Rosário, and the performer shone a light on this spectator and played specific music to accompany him.
- ⁸ The project *A sombra dos outros* opened on June 15, 2018 in the Dixon Place Theater in New York. To watch the full video of the presentation, visit: <<https://vimeo.com/279953987>>. Accessed on: June 02, 2019.
- ⁹ Original text by Rodrigo Fischer.

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