



# Performance, Staging and Parodies: queer knowledges and the ways of drag use in Márcia Pantera's narratives

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**ABSTRACT – Performance, Staging and Parodies: queer knowledges and the ways of drag use in Márcia Pantera's narratives** – The article aims to discuss Márcia Pantera's narratives, exploring the performance, staging and parodies of gender present in the use of queer knowledge and drag. Using narrative encounters as a methodological *ethos*, it embraces poetics as a creative possibility for weaving performative research. In its analytical action, the text enunciates the effects of the poetic encounter with Márcia Pantera, who, in narrating her performative experiments, engendered the making of powerful mobilizations and fabulations for thinking about the body surface and its anarchic-performative action. The article concludes its poetic journey by glimpsing the creative action of Márcia Pantera's performance in the constitution of dissident modes of proliferation of educational affectations.

Keywords: **Gender. Performance. Drag Queen.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Performance, Mise en Scène et Parodie: savoir queer et utilisation du drag dans les récits de Márcia Pantera** – L'article vise à discuter des récits de Márcia Pantera, en explorant la performance, la mise en scène et les parodies de genre présentes dans l'utilisation de la connaissance queer et les façons dont le drag est utilisé. Utilisant les rencontres narratives comme éthos méthodologique, il embrasse la poétique comme une possibilité créative de tisser une recherche performative. Dans son action analytique, le texte énonce les effets de la rencontre poétique avec Márcia Pantera, qui, en racontant ses expériences performatives, a engendré de puissantes mobilisations et fabrications pour penser la surface du corps et son action performative anarchique. L'article conclut son voyage poétique en entrevoyant l'action créative de la performance de Márcia Pantera dans la constitution de modes dissidents de prolifération des affectations éducatives.

Mots-clés: **Genre. Performance. Drag Queen.**

**RESUMO – Performance, Encenação e Paródias: os saberes *queer* e os modos de uso *drag* nas narrativas de Márcia Pantera** – O artigo almeja discutir as narrativas de Márcia Pantera explorando a performance, a encenação e as paródias de gênero presentes na utilização dos saberes *queer* e nos modos de uso *drag*. Utilizando-se de encontros narrativos como *ethos* metodológico, abraça a poética como possibilidade criativa de tecer uma pesquisa performativa. Em sua ação analítica, o texto enuncia os efeitos do encontro poético junto a Márcia Pantera, que, ao narrar suas experimentações performativas, engendrou a feitura de mobilizações e fabulações potentes para pensar a superfície corporal e sua ação anárquica-performativa. Em sua partida, o artigo conclui seu percurso poético entrevendo a ação criativa da performance de Márcia Pantera na constituição de modos dissidentes de proliferação de afetações educativas.

Palavras-chave: **Gênero. Performance. Drag Queen.**

### Introductory notes

Body-movement. Body in movement. Spin. Whirl. Tracing in the body's movements the marks of what has been made of it, as a diffuse arrangement of texts, touches, affectations. The possible displacement, as a critical possibility, comes together in the swing, in the dancing gesture of provisionality, in the contingency of the body's surface.

Through sayings and rites, orifices are fabricated and interdicted in the body. Through practices of power and in their productive fissures, counter-conducts proliferate that rise up against totalizing and naturalizing captures. In this endless clash, other visible and speakable perspectives emerge about the body in its becoming.

Bodily enactments in rites that naturalized and denaturalized ways of being in the world, imbued with meaning, affection, storm and mourning. Provocative words that emerged on the bare earth: neither rain nor sultry. Just body staging. In the sway of the body there is a perennial movement that needs to be dynamited and reinvented: an act, a gesture, a touch. Inventing motives to provoke what was decidedly a displacement: the dancing body, in invitation, invited our gaze, our touch, our affectation.

The body, aware of its manifestation, can parody what conforms and deforms it. In this problem, some questions emerge as possible formulations: in what ways do the contours of the body surface, as forms of counter-conduct, cohere visible acts that denounce the facticity of a naturalized body materiality? What practices emerge as a critical possibility? What can our bodies do in movement?

The production and conformity of body contours seeks to write and rewrite the boundaries of the body and its intelligibility. The rites that have governed and invested it since modern times not only bind a naturalized understanding of what the body can do, but also presuppose its appearance, linked to attributes that must make identity a heterosexual and binary ideation.

This political regime of bodies, through a decidedly heterogeneous set of performative interpellations, that is, words, acts, gestures and desires, which in articulated ways "create the illusion of an internal and organizing

core of gender, an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of regulating sexuality” (Butler, 2015, p. 235).

This internal truth of gender, produced and naturalized on the body’s surface, inculcates identity as a cause, forming a network of intelligibility that circumscribes a possible appearance for the body, the gender it will express, the ways in which the heterosexualization of desire takes place and the normative matrix that legitimizes its visible coherence.

This fantasy inscribed and instituted on bodies highlights the true gender as a fictitious production, just like its internal condition. The fabrication of a gendered body becomes, in the contingencies of a discursive iterability, a dispute crease. The generified subject is the effect of a normative framework that establishes the abject body as a certain constitutive contrast.

It should be pointed out that “this coherence is desired, longed for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of bodily signification” (Butler, 2015, p. 235) or, to put it another way, that the acts, gestures and performances that take place in everyday social practices “are performative, in the sense that the essence or identity they purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained by bodily signs and other discursive means” (Butler, 2015, p. 235).

The symbolic and discursive production of identity is permeated by countless power relations. In the clashes with power, some bodies attack the incorporations put into action and, through this abject posture, “the regulatory ideal is then denounced as a norm and fiction that disguises itself as a law of development to regulate the sexual field it purports to describe” (Butler, 2015, p. 234).

A certain sense that there is a primary and original identity in the embodied gender can be subverted and provoked by the presence of some bodies that dynamite the naturalized effect of the fictitious sex and denounce how the codes of masculinity and femininity are reverberations of social practices and techniques of subjection.

The drag bodies in their performances and their provocations of a significant corporeality parody the naturalization of gender on the body’s surface, making contingent the regimes of appearance that circumscribe their

effects of truth. Their performance subverts a certain visibility of the body: its identity, expression and anatomy.

Drag “plays with the distinction between the performer’s anatomy and the gender being performed” (Butler, 2015, p. 237), stirring up the discourses that distinguish her body, her gender and her performance, suggesting “a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but between sex and gender, and between gender and performance” (Butler, 2015, p. 237). Embracing the body as a text, imitating gender expressions and other regimes of appearance, drag performance subverts the binary distinction of the body surface, producing a pirated identity that denounces the precarious and fictitious nature of the sex/gender regime through its presence.

What mobilizes their parodistic expression doesn’t necessarily lead to a decisive political action, that is, one that is critically produced by the body that assembles itself in drag. Nor is it just an uncritical appropriation of appearance and gender expression as a possibility for performance and artistic work.

Through their performances, drag queens and kings dismantle a primary identification, since “our gender performances can only take place within a discursive scene full of constraints that limit what counts as intelligible” (Borba, 2014, p. 449). In a provocative way, by imitating gender, “drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency” (Butler, 2015, p. 237), and even lies in its artistic gesture, its manifestation, the “recognition of the radical contingency of the relationship between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of casual units that are normally assumed to be natural and necessary” (Butler, 2015, p. 238).

Shaking up the naturalized normative discourses that seek to capture the deviations that we can engender in/through the body, drag performances reformulate another field of the visible on the body’s surface, displacing the sense of the body as a single unit that is fated to an unavoidable gender binarism. In this way, in the drag body in movement, we can see that “instead of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized through a performance that confesses their distinction and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity” (Butler, 2015, p. 238),

engendering other, more fluid ways of conceiving the body and its relationship to the present.

It is also worth pointing out that these artistic-performative acts and gestures mobilize the production of productive fissures in ways of conceiving the body. This critical shift disrupts an entire intelligibility about the body and art, about the arts of the body, and about art in its bodily expressions.

Another critical issue that runs through drag performances is the notion of gender parody<sup>1</sup>. Parody, decidedly as a creative act, is produced as a critique of “the very idea of an original [...] gender parody reveals that the original identity on which gender is modeled is an unoriginal imitation” (Butler, 2015, p. 238).

The parodistic act of gender in certain drag performances should not be confused with a ‘natural-drag-politics’, even when it presumes a constructivism of gender, or in another perspective, a certain innate militancy. The parody of gender in drag bodies is both the fissure in binary intelligibility – gender expressions and roles producing a drag identity – and its abject-productive example that “provides ritual relief for a heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own borders against the encroachment of the queer” (Butler, 2019, p. 217).

While not subversive, parody must articulate other creative acts, making “certain types of parodistic repetition effectively disruptive, truly disturbing” (Butler, 2015, p. 239). In the discursive relations that arbitrarily traverse the materiality of the body, there can be gender transformations in the link with parody “in the possibility of the inability to repeat, in a deformity, or in a parodistic repetition” (Butler, 2015, p. 243) which, in its reverberations, “denounces the fantastical effect of permanent identity as a politically tenuous construction” (Butler, 2015, p. 243).

Some drag narratives about their experiences with performance emerge as a critical possibility. They could provoke us to think even more about gender parodies, bodies as instruments of performance and the practices of counter-conduct that can emerge as a productive fissure in this relationship with performance. Perhaps such investigative viability will provide vivid debates on poetic power, aquendation<sup>2</sup> and political-performative methodologies.

What do drag bodies say about their experiences with performance? We will soon hear, as a reverberation of our questions, the roar of a panther, who urgently needs to narrate her experiments and her memories, which are strongly nourished by feelings, knowledge and affections. Márcia Pantera, a drag queen from São Paulo, through her performative roar, invites us to weave together with her a fruitful encounter nourished by narratives, movements and hair banging. Excited by this invitation, we intend to investigate, through these narratives, how some bodies establish relationships with performance, perceiving them as formative possibilities. Our intention here is both to understand the knowledge that emerges from Márcia Pantera's narratives in her experiences with performance, and also to produce poetic writing as a creative effect of the encounter with her body in a powerful experimentation with performance.

### **Narrative encounters as a methodological possibility**

To think about performance in academia is to foster productive contradictions that create other ways of thinking about scientific knowledge, the relationship that science establishes with aesthetics and the viabilities it establishes regarding its constructed knowledge. The gesture that emerges in this text is to think of performance as an investigative path that produces around itself educational practices that corroborate thinking about the present and how the body is articulated and functions in this contingent process of production of becoming.

Research, from this perspective, must “incorporate and better investigate the theory by taking advantage of performance means and methods (in the broadest sense)” (Lagaay; Seitz, 2020, p. 06). Through its theoretical and political interventions, an “exchange between disciplines is established, the basic premise of which must be the dismantling of hierarchies of knowledge cultures and their formats” (Lagaay; Seitz, 2020, p. 06).

It is a provocative creative action, aiming at other processes of knowledge production in which the “creation of a thing and the generation associated with the understanding of a correct idea of that thing are often parts of a single and indivisible process, parts that cannot be separated, otherwise the process will be interrupted” (Feyerabend, 1977, p. 32). The latter, however, is not guided “by a well-defined program and, moreover, is

not likely to be guided by such a program, since it contains the conditions for the realization of all possible programs” (Feyerabend, 1977, p. 32).

Through poetic writing, we will try to experience performance as a liminal stage – understanding liminality<sup>3</sup> as a potentially dangerous moment, marked by the absence of well-defined rules, something on the margins – in an intermediate space that escapes normative understanding, being both this and that, being there and here. This action is necessary in order to perceive how this experience of performance produces processes of affectation that emerge in reactions such as joy, excitement, crying, fear, revolt, etc., both in the researcher and in his research subjects.

Articulated to a gaze nourished by cultural pedagogies, performative research in “its plurivocal potential” (Haseman, 2015, p. 49), seeks to expand the possibilities of constituting performative intelligibilities that break with the methodological binomial that is always placed before us. In this sense, practice is emphasized as the “main research activity – and not just performance practice” (Haseman, 2015, p. 48) seeing the results of practice as the archive/effect evidence of this creative action.

Bearing in mind that the “methodological process is that of alchemy itself, resulting in a differentiated, strategic and subverting bricolage of the homogeneous mixtures typical of modernity” (Corazza, 2007, p. 118), what we resolutely aim to do is to break “with the methodological guidelines formalized in and by academia [...] whose direction is usually that of classificatory approaches” (Corazza, 2007, p. 118) much to the taste of education research.

What we are embracing as a theoretical-analytical assumption is perhaps the notion that “the arts of thought are not separate from thought itself with (and about) the various arts; or that, hypothetically, our research would be more lively and full of movement” (Fischer, 2021, p. 11) if we sought a certain “aesthetic and also political concern on the horizon of our investigations, which would lead us to look at the so-called real with imagination and, at the same time, with a lucidity that distances us from ourselves” (Fischer, 2021, p. 11).

In this dismantling – and no less (in)disciplinary – attempt, as a gesture that demarcates the crossing between researcher subject and researched subject, we asked the bodies that make up the body of this text what poetic

plots they would like the presentation of their narratives to embrace. The search here is for a poetic motto that could mobilize fruitful encounters between bodies, narratives and performance, permeated by powerful educational possibilities.

The reverberation of the provocation put into contact with the research subjects led to the weaving of a narrative text not only steeped in experiments with performance, but also guided by a poetic desire aroused by bodies in narratives. Perhaps this strategy is one way in which we stress the need for this diffuse performative knowledge to be urgently present in ways of thinking about and producing education.

Márcia Pantera suggests that the plot of the meeting is “*either at sunrise or sunset, I also like the beach*”. The making of a poetic that displaces certain frameworks, giving rise to other ways in which we feel, express and affect ourselves. Another poetic articulation that we will try to weave is that of interweaving the images present in each scene in the making of the performative allegories, in a juxtaposition that, nourished by a multiple archive, fosters other investigative processes with the bodies in performances. For the text, we bring a texture that embraces the images as instigating fragments that attest to the crease between the bodies that narrate, the image-text and the manifest text, constituting powerful poetic resonances.

Márcia Pantera, posing in her movement-images, do her hair-banging and performs her body in text. Each gesture of her body reveals a face, a manner, a panther announcing her being in the present. Like a presentation marked by montage and daring, it announces a bodily movement woven by the claws of life in the panther and the claws of the panther in life.

Therefore, it is in the possibilities of affectation that this research is constituted, trying to build other ways of producing knowledge in education and seeing in performative poetics and science the same manifestations of knowledge. The interweaving of narratives with poetic reverberations emerges in this text as a keen investigative desire, articulating knowledge, writings, sayings, feelings and intensities in varied experiments with performance.



**Between the rising and the setting: Márcia Pantera and the ways of using drag**

Between the coming and going of the cars, the city, the buildings, the gray. There were our bodies, once again yearning for encounters, narratives and knowledge. As dusk fell around us, we were left with the sea – in its immensity in movement – as a possibility for plotting, for crossing, for the sea air.

Running wild at night, we saw, as if in a daydream, a panther swirling around her head, in a movement so fast, enveloping her body, her hair, her desire, her flash. Like the flame of a lamp wick, necessary to give birth to a light, a ray of day around her. Her mobilization was a powerful gesture of connection between her panther body and her being in the present.

Letting go of a humanist status and arousing animal-like behavior and identities as a performance constituted by the body was the news that provoked us. We sat on the sands by the sea, as a posture assumed in a journey of listening and questioning. Without trace or end.

The body-panther, having finished her hair-banging, sat down next to us, told us her name, looked out to sea, and let a silence embrace the scene that was being woven. Márcia Pantera, as she introduced us, was a drag queen. She had long hair, sharp nails, black clothes and an expression populated by an amalgam of marks, from life and art.

Noticing each wave, like a show that begins and ends with each act. We let ourselves be filled by the different visibilities that the place gave us. There was an encounter there: us, Márcia and the sea. Provoked, while already surrendered to the contact of such convergence, we interrupted the silence, aiming to build a narrative sharing with Márcia Pantera. As an initial move in the conversation that could take place there, affected by the presence of a drag queen body, we then tried to ask: how did your story with drag performance begin? She replied:

Good. My story began when I got to know the nightclub, right? When I got to know the nightclub in 1986, around 1987. I was actually a volleyball player, and I played in Suzano-SP, I played volleyball for many years. Then I went to Suzano and a friend of mine invited me to visit a nightclub. So, when I went to a nightclub for the first time, I hadn't seen any shows yet, I went to enjoy it, to dance, to flirt, to kiss... that whole thing. And even, in fact, I went to get to know them, because when I saw two men kissing, I was amazed. I was from the world of athletes, I

didn't know the gay scene. Well, the first show I saw, I saw a few shows, but the first show I identified with and looked at and said: my God, that's what I want to do! It was Marcinha do Corinto's show at the NostroMundo nightclub. That was in 1987, because in 1988 I had already started this Drag Queen life (Márcia Pantera).

Even as we sat next to Márcia watching the sea flow, the nightclub emerged as a decidedly curious space of provocation. It emerged in the narrative and moved us to think about the diffuse ways of joy, desire, movement, sexual practices and other forms of counter-conduct, or from the perspective of the norm, of what was increasingly framed as certain cultural detritus, which was produced in its various environments. Nightclubs have crossed many queer subjectivities, often presenting themselves as possible spaces of a certain freedom.

It should be noted that “freedom is something we create ourselves – it is our own creation, or rather, it is not the discovery of a secret aspect of our desire” (Foucault, 2004, 260). In nightclubs, through the freedom-desire link, various non-normative practices and behaviors emerged as a fissured effect of opposition to the norm. “With our desires, through them, new forms of relationships, new forms of love and new forms of creation are established” (Butler, 2008, p. 260). Therefore, “sex is not a fatality; it is a possibility of accessing a creative life” (Butler, 2008, p. 260).

Nightclubs were – and to some extent still are – seen as spaces for the *inverted*, who receive “this name because the goal of their desire has gone off the rails of heterosexuality” (Butler, 2008, p. 103). He is the one whose view of compulsory heterosexuality presumes him to be an inverted body, precisely “when he fails to achieve his goal and object and mistakenly turns to its opposite or when he takes himself as the object of his desire” (Butler, 2008, p. 102), projecting and recovering this idea of himself in a decidedly homosexual object.

These nocturnal spaces articulated the emergence of a set of inverted, polluted, dissident and queer practices. From a genealogical point of view, we can see the proliferation of drag bodies from the effects of the 1960s onwards, when increasingly “a real process of liberation took place. This process has been very beneficial as far as mentalities are concerned, even if the situation has not been definitively stabilized” (Foucault, 2004, p. 262).

These reverberations are productive in that they mobilize the use of bodies to pollute certain regimes of truth, giving rise to the creation of new bodily possibilities, other ways of conceiving their strengths and limits. Under this gaze, “the possibility of using our bodies as a possible source of a multiplicity of pleasures is very important” (Foucault, 2004, p. 264).

And so creative and parodistic forms emerged in nightclubs, threshold spaces that established multiple viabilities for the body, challenging heterosexualizing normative frameworks, as well as identity politics. There, through drag’s performative acts, identities emerged as politics, disputing the blurring of naturalized and binary codes imposed on bodies through their appearance.

Crossed by the movements that Márcia traced with her body – creating vivid images of her drag performances with her wildness –, we noticed – almost entering what we were seeing – a whirl in a pose: a hand supporting a ring that she held between her claws/hands, hair in motion, and a body posture slightly tilted to the side, like someone preparing for the start of a performance.



Figure 1 – Márcia Pantera. Source: Photo by Ivan Erick Menezes (2020).

With an eye on the horizon, perhaps attentive to her history, eager for new experimentation and open to what comes next, Pantera is the legacy and heir of a whole queer discourse, of educational – and therefore constitutive – echoes of artistic practices built by a range of dissident subjects who embraced drag art as a possible performative action. One scene stands out in Márcia's narrative, as her body boils in the nightclub – among the gays, sissies, dykes, transvestites, bisexuals and liberated people who pass through and dance at NostroMundo – and she affects herself in the middle of a performative act and produces around herself: *I identified myself and looked and said: my god, this is what I want to do!*

For Márcia, still an athlete from Suzano, the nightclub allowed her to find or build herself as a panther, in addition to sexual freedom, between dancing, kissing and having fun. Among the many other shows she attended in nightclubs, it was Marcinha do Corinto's that moved, marked and mobilized her to want to perform drag queens.

The binary production of bodies, inherited from the Cartesian cogito, is constantly unstable. Bodies are always being “[...] affected by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in the assumption of each identification, the loss of some other set of identifications” (Butler, 2019, p. 217), a normative production that is also contingent in that it “[...] chooses us, but which we occupy, invert and resignify insofar as it fails to determine us completely” (Butler, 2019, p. 217).

As a question, we were provoked by the idea that performing a gender that does not constitute the regime of appearance of the body that wants to perform could break certain patterns in the politics of the visible. Mobilized by this concern, we looked at Márcia Pantera and asked her: is your relationship with drag performance in any way questioning? Márcia, looking out to sea in the darkness of the night, replied:

Questioning? I don't think I ever realized that. I'd never asked myself that question. [Thoughtful pause] Maybe yes, I think so, if I look at it, yes. Because it's different and it's not different. Back then there were already people like me doing this kind of drag queen work, right? There were already Black people, gay people, tall people... doing it. There was Matiba, there were some artists, right? But I don't really know how to answer that. I need to learn that. Do I question anything in my work? I don't know, for real, I don't know (Márcia Pantera).

The panther narrative had captured us. Neither assuming nor denying: opening to learning. Márcia tells us about other bodies that have built a meaningful relationship with the performance. She also ponders how our question had never been formulated for her.

In the middle of the night and the waves of the sea, wanting day to break, Márcia points out that “*maybe yes, I think so, if I look at it, yes*”, when thinking about the questioning of certain patterns that her relationship with performance could produce. “*Because it’s different and it’s not different*”, in this ambivalence that runs through her narrative, we can see the presence of certain points of equivalence in what she calls ‘*drag work*’.

It is worth considering – along with Butler – that saying that “montage is performative does not mean that all performativity must be understood as drag” (Butler, 2019, p. 282). It would be appropriate to add to this statement another of equal importance, that of the absence of a certain claiming action inherent in any artist who embraces drag experimentation.

This is because, in the field of queer theory, when we think about drag art, we must understand that there are drag performances that are clearly committed to a certain drag-politics, just as there are bodies that only use drag performance as a means of survival and work. From this perspective, in making her performativity theory explicit, by articulating the notion of gender parody, Butler ends up giving up an obvious analytical repertoire, by dodging – perhaps unintentionally – a debate on the biopolitical implications of drag subjectivities and their relationship to neoliberal labor.

Other theorists will weave a set of tensions with the conceptual processes woven by Butler when constructing her theory of gender. Preciado, for example, will “question certain ‘figures’, especially that of the drag queen”, which in his view “point to the limits of certain performative notions” (Preciado, 2014, p. 91).

The first criticism leveled at Butler by Paul Preciado is the denunciation of the disappearance of the presence of transvestites of Latin and Caribbean origin<sup>4</sup> in her analysis of gender. A debate that – as Preciado points out – was close to his heart, given his knowledge of anthropological studies on drag performances and transvestitism/transsexuality in America<sup>5</sup>, developed by Esther Newton in the mid-1970s.

Preciado's pondering is necessary here, since Butler even mentions Newton in her 'gender problems', using it as a starting point to affirm that trans/travesty identity will subvert the distinction between internal and external psychic spaces, strongly mocking a normative matrix of an expressive model of gender and a conception of a true gender identity (Butler, 2015). However, she does not go into greater depth, tracing another argumentative path in her theoretical construction<sup>6</sup>.

Butler's theorizing lacked what Preciado (2014, p. 94) calls "precise technologies of transincorporation", that is, "[...] clitorises that will grow into external sex organs, bodies that will change to the rhythm of hormonal doses, uteruses that will not procreate", as well as "prostates that will not produce semen, voices that will change tone, beards, moustaches and hair that will cover unexpected faces and breasts, dildos that will have orgasms, reconstructed vaginas [...]".

Another criticism launched by Preciado (2014, p. 93-94) against Butler's theory of performativity is that the philosopher forgets a certain bodily materiality, having ignored "both the bodily processes and, in particular, the transformations that take place in transgender and transsexual bodies, as well as the techniques for stabilizing gender and sex that operate in heterosexual bodies". For the philosopher, "the hypotheses of so-called 'gender constructivism' have been accepted without producing significant political transformations", prematurely blurring body and sexuality, "making it impossible to critically analyze the technological processes of inscription that allow performances to 'pass' as natural or not".

Here we strongly disagree with Preciado's statement, since the body does not disappear in Butler's theorizing; on the contrary, it is in evidence as the effect of a whole discursive materiality. The body is inscribed by discourse and does not exist pre-discursively. It is made and remade through performative tensions. To say that the body's surface is a discursive reverberation is not to urge it to antagonize its possible materiality and experimentations with the world.

On the criticism of a certain *constructionism* present in her theory of gender, Butler responds very powerfully in *Bodies That Matter*, pointing out that there is no voluntarist aspect of gender in her conceptual discussion of performativity. On the contrary, she ponders that "performativity should

not be understood as a singular or deliberate act, but as a reiterative and citational practice through which discourse produces the effects of what it names” (Butler, 2019, p. 16).

What crosses us as a new possibility to provoke the debates built up by Judith Butler in her theory of performativity is the disappearance of an investigative look at the biopolitical implications of drag subjectivities and their relationship with neoliberal work. Certainly, because the archives mobilized by the philosopher in *Bodies That Matter* – such as the documentary *Paris is Burning*<sup>7</sup> – certainly attest to the neoliberal rationality that governmentalizes the practices of drag dances. This issue is not evident to her in the investigation she outlined.

Although they are active in nightclubs and feel strongly about the specificities of dealing with an artistic profession, drag work was born out of American neoliberal rationality. Butler even points out that “there are forms of drag that heterosexual culture produces for itself” (Butler, 2019, p. 216), being exploited as caricatured entertainment for gender deviance and the politics of recognition.

However, she does not list the important operators at work in Harlem dances, such as the reiteration of competitiveness as the *ethos* of the relationship with art, the way of life desired by the queer people at the dance, the governmental management of their lives in everyday American life, engendered by heterocapitalism<sup>8</sup>. Drag work, made precarious precisely because of the identity that constitutes its exercise, is the effect of the “boundary between work time and the workplace” (Bourcier, 2020, p. 144) that has become blurred with the emergence of neoliberalism. The relationship between drag, work and performance becomes an important provocation, especially when we think about the neoliberal discourse in its production of *self-entrepreneurial drag*.

In this performative action, we see the functioning of drag practices having “[...] the function of providing ritual relief for a heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own borders against the invasion of the queer” (Bourcier, 2020, p. 217), strengthening the heterosexual regime in its reiterative and self-perpetuating task. This is the case when these expressions – operating alongside the heterosexual matrix – are allocated visibility within normative artistic spaces, given that even when certain drag perfor-

mance actions are in line with the codes of heteronormative entertainment, they are still – by the same normative intelligibility that is entertained – in a razor edge. These expressions are disowned at the first opportunity, in the first possible comparison between any other artistic expression that emerges in the heterosexual sphere.

This drag practice is devoid of a certain militancy that is considered innate to queer performances and is much more concerned with the terms and strategies for surviving life through performances in bars, nightclubs, saunas and LGBT parades, than with drag politics or activism<sup>9</sup>, or to put it another way, the decisive proliferation of polluting practices and counter-conduct in drag practices. If there is a multiplicity in drag art, neoliberal technologies to produce subjectivity are also at work. In this way, we see not only drags bringing together political and contesting repertoires, but also the use of drag as entertainment and amusement for hetero-homosexual audiences, competing for success, profitability and efficiency.

It is worth noting here that in this crease that is established in drag practices, we can see how “there are other ways of looking at the relationship between gender, work and performance” (Bourcier, 2020, p. 151). In other words, in both drag practices “there is no antinomy between work and production, on the one hand, and performance, on the other” (Bourcier, 2020, p. 151). Drag performance and spectacle “underline the fact that work is also a performance and thus denaturalize it” (Bourcier, 2020, p. 151).

In the process of denaturalizing the heteronormative and binary performances that have shaped capitalist work since the emergence of modernity, drag bodies, whether they are imbued with a body-political decision of counter-conduct or not, trigger provocative creative actions, mobilizing constitutive effects.

As a reverberation of drag identity, a reformulation of the politics of appearance over the body, engenders through spectacle-work and performance-instrument-tool, diffuse practices that in their realizations make heterocapitalism and the generified production of neoliberal work visible. Full nightclub, pocket and body: “[...] at work, in the neoliberal context, the notion of gender performance recovers its entrepreneurial, alienating, het-



eronormative meaning” (Bourcier, 2020, p. 170) and biopolitical meaning, articulating the pacification of drag body pollution.

From this perspective, when we consider the exercise of power over the relationship between body and work, we must understand that if the Marxist debate around work “[...] takes as its references the worker’s relationship with the object produced (which is alienation), intervention at the level of production and consumption as value” (Bourcier, 2020, p. 167). Discussions in the queer field displace this object – the effect of the body-work relationship – precisely when they “[...] focus on the question of the subjectivity produced by work, and the search for productive and reproductive modes of different values, altered modes of production and consumption” (Bourcier, 2020, p. 167).

What emerges as an affirmation of drag as self-entrepreneurs is that the work regime they have been working under is one of the new precarious forms of neoliberal work. These modalities are marked by the emptying of collective organization around work (union struggle, career, political-professional identity, etc.), flexibility, adaptability and competitiveness.

When RuPaul points out that “we are all born naked. The rest is drag” (RuPaul, 2014), in a way, this converges with the idea that the genderification of bodies is always exercised by a decidedly heterogeneous set of discursive practices, producing regimes of appearance for the feminine and masculine on bodies.

There are some shifts in the regime of gender appearance in the drag performance, acting precisely on female and male body visibilities. RuPaul even says: “I don’t think I could ever look like a woman. They don’t dress like that. Only drag queens dress like that” (Baker, 1994, p. 258).

From this perspective, female or male drag production is unique and different, as it parodies the naturalization of identity through the codes of femininity and masculinity. This effect elucidated in RuPaul’s statement, however, does not preclude “a real plunge into the abyss of the logic of selection, casting and job interviews”, a rationality that is increasingly present in drag performances and events, especially in the US, such as RuPaul’s Drag Race<sup>10</sup>.

Márcia Pantera, in telling us about her openness to learn to question, denotes her assertive sense of *drag queen work*, or to put it another way,

drag queen as work. Asking how one can question something by doing a job, she reports on the passability of work, which is increasingly common in the artifacts produced by queer bodies, and which disconnects work as a significant gender operator.

Raising her claws in the middle of the spectacle, a new panther-image emerged: hands raised; pose; hair to the floor; hair-tail. Curves of a body in performance. Márcia, modeling her action, articulates around herself a performative gesture in the visibility she brings together in her perennial experimentation with art.

Her body posture resonates performance, her open hands on the bows extrapolate a mere pose, her gaze towards what is coming attests to a diffuse bellicosity: no shouting, no flames, no war. Her revolution is to survive, hair-banging against a world that devours panthers and silences drag queens.



Figure 2 – Márcia Pantera. Source: Photo by Ivan Erick Menezes (2020).

Stimulated by her narrative, we did not even realize that the day was already rising from the immensity of the sea. The sun rose over our conversation like another body involved in the encounter. Affected by the exchange that was taking place there, wanting to hear even more about the experiences with drag performance, kind of driven by the narratives, we began to think about the knowledge engendered through experimentation with art. Márcia, noticing our gesture, gets up and walks a little closer to the sea. She notices every movement of the waves and tells us:

Through the school of life, I've learned a lot, and I'm still learning a lot today. I don't think I know everything. I don't think I'm the number one drag queen. I don't think I'm the most wonderful drag queen. I don't think that at all. I think I'm always learning a lot. Because I had to learn from the others, because when I started younger, there were older drag queens... I had to learn from them. I had to look at them and be humble enough to say: 'Look, that's nice! Is it like that?' And today, perhaps, everything changes. I understand that everything changes all the time. The 90s changed, the 2000s changed, all that changed, the year 2010, now it's 2020. It's a long time for us to understand, look back and allow ourselves to learn. There's nothing better than being able to learn, you know (Márcia Pantera).

It is possible in drag to use the knowledge built up through performance as a possibility of subjectivation, of becoming-other. Pantera's narrative makes it possible to point out the objectives of drag transformation, in other words, the perennial mutations that take place on the body, in an attitude of openness to the educational processes that her trajectory has brought together.

In the disquieting gesture that wove together the possibility of our meeting, Márcia not only associates her uncertainties with the answer that our question mobilized. She highlights this expertise of the drag body and ponders the ways in which she uses drag queen performance. "Looking back and allowing yourself to learn" are, in Pantera's narrative, her potent attributes.



Figure 3 – Márcia Pantera. Source: Photo by Ivan Erick Menezes (2020).

“I had to learn from them. I had to look at them and be humble enough to say: look, that’s cool!” It is precisely in the field of the sensible that we glimpse “a mode of articulation between ways of doing things, the forms of visibility of these ways of doing things and the modes of thinking about their relationships” (Rancière, 2005, p. 13). Affections, emotions. Fun, joy. Sensitive productions that grow as a reverberation of our relationship with others and with the world. Amid these crossings, we will realize that “politics and art, as much as knowledge, construct ‘fictions’, that is, material rearrangements of signs and images, of the relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done” (Rancière, 2005, p. 59). Making it clear that “*today, perhaps, everything changes*”.

As a visible reminder of her performative strength, Márcia, mobilizing her *vogue* image, armed with her body roar and her hair-banging, rewrites around herself her own way of circulating among drag queens. She is a

princess. Queen. Plebeian. Drag. She is marked by a dissident texture and her pose echoes a beautiful text that defies its time.

Her statement that “*the 90s changed, the 2000s changed, all of that changed, the year 2010, now we’re in 2020*” is clearly marked by the clash over temporalities and their effect on the body. The relationship between body-performance and body in performance is contingent in Márcia’s narrative, as if an expropriation of the relationship between her body and her drag produced discontinuous time regimes.

Time, this discursive regime that produces “our time, the present, is not, in fact, only the most distant: it can never reach us” (Agamben, 2009, p. 65). It cannot because “its back is fractured, and we stand exactly at the point of the fracture. That is why we are, despite everything, contemporaries of that time” (Agamben, 2009, p. 65).

In the game of transformations that have taken place in our time, various conceptions of the body and subjectivity have emerged, especially due to the repeated generified cultural intelligibility. The naturalized knowledge about the body, the unavoidable captures of subjectivity and the fissures that can denaturalize sexual differences, are presented in time as urgent diffuse practices.

It is from this perspective that “in chronological time, something that is urgent within it and transforms it” (Agamben, 2009, p. 66), rearranges multiple meanings about practices that are considered to be decidedly political, even if they are not visualized by the body that follows it. “And this urgency is untimeliness, an anachronism that allows us to grasp our time in the form of a ‘very early’ that is also a ‘very late’: of an ‘already’ that is also a ‘not yet’” (Agamben, 2009, p. 66).

It could be that it is joy and fun, the fissured apparatuses produced by the panther body that rise up against the heterosexualization of laughter, joy and fun. Such apparatuses are necessary for an effective mobilization of thought, which is far from rejoicing and having fun over the object, strange, drag body. This mobilization produces new openings, new dynamics, new paradoxical possibilities – it does not propose a culmination, an escape valve – insofar as it nimbly annihilates its own pretensions.

In this contingent wandering, curious about what we have not yet heard, open to a panther's report, we then sought, as a posture of encounter, to throw ourselves into the sea, learning other ways of feeling and listening, displaced by the performative force of Márcia's presence with us. We entered the sea. The water embraced our bodies like a warm hug. The salt shook our bodies, like a purification, expelling the most dangerous whims of the norm from us. Márcia did not accompany us, remaining at the edge of the sea, staring at the movement of the waves.

We were led to think – in the context of her body's relationship with drag performance – about the knowledge she had built up along the way, and whether school – not the school of life, but the institutionalized school – could in some way mark, affect or shift her relationship with art. So, we asked her: did your schooling have any contribution or brought you closer to art, to performance? Márcia replies:

I think that maybe at school I already had traces of this art in my veins. Because I really liked the quadrille, I liked sport, I liked watching the theater at school. Whenever there was something on, I liked to take part. I liked everything about art at school. But I never imagined that this would transform my life later. But I think that that's it, school did help me to see some things. And then everything changes. Everything changes. It's another universe, you know. In fact, it's perhaps a parallel universe. Because at school there were all the prejudices that exist in the world. I couldn't be a princess, I had to be a prince. Maybe I wanted to play a role that I could identify with. But maybe that didn't fit at the time, and the teacher wouldn't let me either. Maybe if I took the paper I'd have people's eyes on me. So, all this influenced me back then, and could influence me later. But I always tried to be inside art, inside the messiness of art, the greatness of art. The mess I'm talking about is being in the middle of it (Márcia Pantera).

Searching for traces in the past through the power of narrative, Márcia takes us on a journey through her memories, loading them with present-day meanings. She throws herself into it, playing quadrilles, practicing sports and watching theatrical performances. She weaves a taste – making it vivid – of what was close to art in her daily life at school.

The school, as a discursive scene, produces and regulates its normative intelligibility. It shapes schooling in the body, and the body is opposed to/in school. "*It's another universe, you know. In fact, it's perhaps a parallel universe*" The school institution in Márcia's narrative is another universe,

precisely “because at school there were all the prejudices that exist in the world”.

When we examine the functioning and production of gender materiality, operating through rituals specific to everyday school life, we notice a discursive coexistence<sup>11</sup> between narrative and pedagogical discourse, as Márcia Pantera ponders: “*I couldn’t be, for example, in theater, I couldn’t be a princess, I had to be a prince. Maybe I wanted to take a role that I could identify with, right?*”.

It should be noted that rituals are associated with “a set of individual or collective behaviors, relatively codified, with bodily support (verbal, gestural or postural), with a repetitive character and symbolic charge” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 1048). Creative in their performative reverberations, rituals “should be seen as a complex of words and actions, and in this sense it is interesting to know how the interconnection between words and actions takes place” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 1048).

In the school institution and its artifacts, rituals “can constitute elements of the scene” (Carvalho, 2021, p. 09), and when we talk about rituals involving the lesson, we realize how “[...] the institutionality of those who teach and the authority to say what is true about children and reaffirm what was said about the sex of the child at the time of birth occur” (Carvalho, 2021, p. 11).

Narrating how a discursive interdiction works through the rituals of schooling in her processes of subjectivation, Márcia elucidates another naturalized effect of the pedagogical discourse, when she says: “*But back then maybe it didn’t fit, the teacher wouldn’t let it either. Maybe if I took the paper I’d have people’s eyes on me*”.

Pedagogical discourse, that is, the one which “formulates the rationalization of training processes relating to the subject to be educated, the objectives of education and the educational modalities” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 1049) articulates the manufacture of various gender rituals. They engender practices of subjection that conform a binary status to the body, as well as a politics of appearance regarding femininity and masculinity. In this way, the theatrical, sporting and recreational exercises at school are marked by discursive rules that regulate and interdict everything that might pollute the matrix of intelligibility that the school-form constitutes.

The fear of the gazes pointed out in Márcia's narrative shows how, in everyday school life, various normative crossings produce diffuse frameworks in the body. Our bodies are orthopedically modified, targeted by interpellations, the effect of sophisticated power relations, naturalizing a binary and compulsory functioning as the consolidation and continuity of a broader political regime.

Allowing practices in everyday school life that could upset the generifed normative matrix would certainly disrupt “[...] conventional knowledge about what the male and/or female gender should look like” (Spargo, 2017, p. 47), as well as mobilizing claims for “[...] other ways of living that are not bound by a status of recognition. Unexpected results, forms of life that challenge normative schemes and tactics” (Silva, 2020, p. 09).

Márcia proliferates in her narration, even in an undecided way, dissident parodies of gender that claim other possible knowledges in the fabric of drag performances. Queer knowledge that is nourished by perceptions of the self in performative action and survival practices as an act of confrontation against the intense vulnerability of drag bodies.

Highlighted in this narrative encounter, the queer knowledge present in Márcia Pantera's performance highlights the creative multitude woven into drag experimentation, which is not bound by gestures of totalization, but which challenges the terms of naturalized identity, spreading “an identity that problematizes the manageable limits of identity” (Bash Back, 2020, p. 24), through multiple parodies of gender.

Legs to the air, hair to the floor. Nails, teeth, claws. Licks and swings. Tail in the wind exuding an animalized will and a taste of bodily piracy, stealing a capricious viability that decrees its obvious abnormality a crime. The panther – in this reverie-encounter – doesn't need biting to devour.

Without organs or humanity, hair-banging against the government of the body, Márcia Pantera, wanting to work and live a life that can be lived, recounts her experiments with drag performance. From a nightclub to another, she proliferates queer performative knowledge, engendering multiple constitutive effects through her panther-body, through the parody it constitutes, articulating the proliferation of strongly queerized anarchic knowledge about performance.



## Departure?!

Looking at Márcia Pantera by the sea, we let ourselves be submerged, diving into the salty blue that wove the plot of our encounter. Dawn, the promise of every day, crystallizes the oxygen bubbles that we were returning from our lungs to the heavens, as a simple offering to the sun.

She has affected us with her presence, echoing her body-text, sharing with us what it was like to become what she is. Drag-panther. Panther-drag. Smiling, noticing our plunge, she bids farewell to what had prompted our meeting since dawn: the possibility of narrating about herself.

When she left, Márcia Pantera, through her narratives, elucidated for us the ways in which the contours of her body surface engendered forms of counter-conduct, thereby denouncing the facticity of a naturalized body materiality, parodied in her drag action. Articulating around herself practices that emerge as critical viability, by narrating about herself and the possibilities of what the body in movement can do, the panther Márcia inscribes a singular performative action, the fruit of her experiences with performance.

In concluding this narrative-poetic journey, affected by her presence, we glimpse the creative action of Márcia Pantera's performance as a powerful queer experimentation, acting strongly in the constitution of dissident modes of educational affectations, giving rise to other ways of experiencing performance in its contingent and plurivocal action.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It was mainly in *Gender Trouble* (2015) that Judith Butler formulated her theory of gender performativity. In *Bodies That Matter* (2019), the theorist seeks to deepen her discussions on performativity, responding to criticisms about the limits between performance and performativity, pointing to the materiality of gender as a reiterated, broad and embodied discursive process.
- <sup>2</sup> Translation note: this term comes from the Portuguese “aquendação” and refers to the aesthetic-corporeal gesture of hiding the genitals between the buttocks, a common practice among certain queers groups, such as drag queens and some trans people.

- <sup>3</sup> The concept of liminality will be nourished by the contribution of anthropologist Victor Turner, who when researching the rites of passage of the Lunda-Andembus people on the African continent, noticed that during the rites, what he conceptualizes as liminal moments are presented through the performance undertaken, understanding that they “are neither here nor there; they are in the middle and between the positions assigned and ordered by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. Their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in those various societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions” (Turner, 1974, p. 117). He sees performance as a place in between, a moment of transition, full of possibilities, undefined and in constant re-signification.
- <sup>4</sup> Of course, the very emergence of transvestite identities – in geographical terms – is located in Latin America and the Caribbean but given the growing migration of this population in search of employment and life opportunities, European countries such as Spain and Italy, for example, not only were/are places of transit for them, but were culturally marked by the performative force they mobilized to resist in the present and try to build a life that can be lived.
- <sup>5</sup> Presented as a doctoral thesis at the University of Chicago, the ethnography *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* investigated the universe of ‘female impersonators’, or ‘drag queens’, in two North American cities in the first half of the 1960s. In his text, “drag queens” and “female impersonators” could be translated – into Brazilian Portuguese – as the term we once called *transformistas*, however, there is a certain ambivalence in Newton’s study – regarding gender identities – in that it provides a tenuous look between drags, their artistic experimentation and the emergence of some trans/travesty identities that also acted as ‘female impersonators’, or ‘drag queens’, of Latin and Caribbean origin. We have therefore chosen to use ‘transvestility/transsexuality’ as a term, in view of the historical context in which Newton’s study developed – and which ended up nurturing terms that we should no longer use to refer to trans/transvestite communities.
- <sup>6</sup> Another issue that is important to point out is the translations of the books ‘Gender Trouble’ (2015) and ‘Bodies That Matter’ (2019), which are strongly marked by terms that we no longer use to refer to the trans/transvestite population, and even more mistakenly, are presented at conceptual moments when Butler was pondering drag performances and not trans/transvestite identities. In the first book, this happens when translator Renato Aguiar shifts the term

'Drag' from Butler's English original to 'the transvestite' in Portuguese. In the second translation – by Veronica Daminelli and Daniel Yago Françoli – published in 2019, the error is repeated when referring to drag performances in Butler's original book, to 'the transvestite' in Portuguese, and erroneously pointing out drag practices as 'ambivalent transvestism'. In the originals – in English – Butler is extremely objective in the terms she uses: drag, drag queen; to articulate her understanding of drag. When the philosopher refers to the trans population in these books, she uses terms such as 'transsexual', 'male to female', 'female to male'. These misunderstandings produce complex theoretical implications in the field of queer theory in Brazil, associating a conceptual reflection on drag as a certain Brazilian translation of transvestite identities, or to put it another way, they produce transphobic reverberations.

- <sup>7</sup> 1991 documentary directed by Jennie Livingston about dances in Harlem, New York, full of various drag performances. At the dances there are competitions in various categories such as military dress, elite white woman, most masculine queen, royal dress, etc. The participants in the film are members of various 'Houses' that competed in the dances. Each house built relationships of affection and collectivity with its participants, serving as a refuge and shelter for Harlem's queer population, which is heavily black and of Latin and Caribbean origin.
- <sup>8</sup> Of course, when we consider these limits in Butler's conceptual production, we emphasize that the philosopher's work is situated in a specific historical context. Each of Butler's books and conceptual movements is inscribed in the urgencies that have crossed her time.
- <sup>9</sup> The notion of *artivism* elucidates, albeit contingently, a whole range of dissident art practices which, mobilized individually or collectively, seek to articulate concrete modes of political action. These new forms of militancy include, for example: "guerrilla art practices, activist occupations of State spaces, boycotts of art and education institutions, factory occupations, square occupation movements, hacktivism, emerging community economies and assemblies, self-managed spaces, publications and artistic collectives, relational participatory structures and critical experimental performances" (Raposo, 2015, p. 9).
- <sup>10</sup> Reality drag competition show led by RuPaul. It consists of drag queens from various US states competing in a series of tests that require them to show off their sewing, fashion and make-up skills. As well as the competitiveness be-

tween the contestants through their performances, dueling for the podium of best American drag.

- <sup>11</sup> The notion of coexistence, for Foucault (2012, p. 68), refers to “all the statements that have already been formulated elsewhere and that are taken up in a discourse as admitted truth, exact description, well-founded reasoning or necessary presupposition”. Such statements are also “criticized, discussed and judged, as are those that are rejected or excluded”. Discursive coexistence delineates a field of presence.

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