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ANALU FRETТА BARROS

**BLA BLA
DANCE-POETRY**



**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**



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BLA BLA DANCE-POETRY

ANALU FRETТА BARROS
MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

A Thesis presented by Analu Fretta Barros to Master Performance Practices,
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PRACTICES



2022

SYNOPSIS

This dissertation discusses an autobiographical practice through dance and poetry improvisation as a way to escape normative and colonial universal meanings. Narratives are part of our identity, and my artistic practice proposes an understanding of identity that is fluid. Therefore, this practice fails rigid, and crystallised narratives proposed by patriarchal discourses. Acknowledging the entanglement of body and words in our daily life experience, in the way we understand or life and our-selves, this research engages dance and poetry as ways to articulate the meanings we produce through language (literary and bodily). Through the improvisational tools of repetition, transformation, and postponing in writing, dancing, and speaking, my research proposes an autobiographical space that is nonlinear, and non-fixed. The improvisational tools engage failure as a utopic act of prompting possibilities of living beyond the norms, as failing grammar, failing the heteronormative body, failing the colonial Christian words.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is a homage to my little sister (not so little anymore). Time showed me that failing her expectations, that showing my failures, would be the foundation of our unbreakable friendship. She is the love of my life, and I hope to keep on writing to her for a long time.

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DECLARATION

I, Analu Fretta Barros, hereby certify that I had personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, 'BLA BLA DANCE-POETRY'.

No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma prior to this date.

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INTRODUCTION

We live narrating ourselves: the way we walk, our cv, the way we speak about our childhood when chatting with friends, the family recipes, the job interview, the way we laugh and project our voice, the amount of tension we have on our shoulders. All these narrations are part of living. Life experience is as complex and fluid as it can be. We are never the same, and always the same, because body is the material that holds all our thoughts and selves together. And the body itself is constantly changing while remaining the same.

Our body is what bounds our existence. Our body constantly shapes, and it is constantly shaped by our life experience. Bodies are named, disciplined, subjugated. Bodies are meanings, social roles, social locations. Bodies are cultural, biological, rational, emotional. Bodies are put into boxes; they do not fit. Because bodies are uncapturable by discourse. The Philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler says,

"A body is shaped and endowed with significance by virtue of the historical discourses through which it is formed. It's true that we name the body differently depending on what discourse we use, depending on what language we speak, what purpose we want that body to serve or what social significance it may have. Perhaps what we call the body's materiality is what constantly escapes, whatever name we might give it. There is no one name for the body. So, whatever the body is, it is never captured by any name. 'Uncapturable by discourse' is a way of saying that no matter how adamant we are in our claims to know, size, verify, and produce the material body, we are bound up in a discourse that cannot claim to be the only way to understand what a body is, what a sexed body is, and how it means [...]" (Butler, 2015).

There is an in between the word and the body that constantly fails the normative boxes, the social roles, and the oppressor with-in us. Bodies have habits, and our habits are an ensemble of learned social rules and individuality. Habits are a secured system to regulate life and maintain a certain order, security, comfort, automaticity, productivity. Habits are there for a matter of protection and energy economy. But they are also part of a regulatory system that often give us no time and space (physical and mental) to question it. Therefore, we automatically perform actions, discourses, and narrations without questioning their connection with social roles, and identity.

To question is to postpone the end of a conversation; it is to postpone the end of a narration. Through questions, the ends become ands. And we open ourselves to the unknown. We open ourselves to what we do not fully understand. But we feel deep in our guts.

This thesis is a proposal to create ownership when narrating ourselves. Ownership with responsibility and attention. This thesis proposes a methodological fluid path to find the words in our bodies, and to find the bodies in our words. It is a proposition to question our bodies, and our words. It is a space that invites failing grammar, failing the names were given to us, so we can start to fashion ourselves and our community into less fixed, but rather fluid narrations.

INGREDIENTS

"I believe in the reality of work. Period. I do not distinguish between creative and critical writing because all writing is creative.... Whatever the product – poem, story, essay, letter to lover, technical report—the problem is the same: the page is empty and will have to be filled." (Nancy Mairs, undated, cited in hooks et al. 2013, 71). Throughout these lines, the reader can find a theoretical, personal, and poetical reflection about an autobiographical creative process. This thesis practically demonstrates the work in progress of an autobiographic methodological path in the theoretical frame of a dissertation. Therefore, the way I write entangles creative writing (mainly through poetry), journaling, and academic writing. As the feminist writer bell hooks argues,

"[...] feminist emphasis on excavating the personal as a way to understand our political locations enabled many of us to break with traditional academic training, which had taught many of us to believe that work was objective and neutral if we did not overtly refer to the personal or even use the word I. We learned to critically interrogate the notion of objectivity. We learned to see that every work conveyed a political standpoint even if it was covertly embedded in the text. We learned to understand the ways language that was taught to us as "neutral" usually reflected the prevailing hierarchies of race and gender." (hooks, 2013, 68).

This is a poetic and personal thesis relying on poetic and personal references. This is a political thesis relying on political references. This is an artistic thesis relying on artistic references. [Point.](#)

Pause.

As you can see above, I am using different colours and creating spaces through blank pages. This is to propose a reading rhythm that matches my thinking process. The colours are there to make it visible, to highlight how I produce (academic) knowledge. In the next chapters, you will see some parts of my work written in green. Those parts are cited from the text I've written and read-out-loud in my performance "between us, uncapturable". Presented on May 17th of 2022, this performance is a danced-recited-written demonstration of the tools I use to ongoingly dis-cover, uncover, and re-cover my-self. The pink colour is used to cite myself. They correspond to journaling excerpts of the last two years. The purple colour is used to highlight the personal and poetic writings happening during the process of writing this thesis. I believe these parts are how I try to make sense of what I have read. They are a proposal of how to understand the theories I am engaging with.

For me, all the colours are part of my academic writing. Hence, the idea is not to separate them, but rather to make their differences visible. I am connecting the different writings (in style and time) in a thesis that attempts to escape linearity, neutrality, normativity. For me, the different writings have blur boundaries, crossovers, and intersections. They are all creative writings.

As a body that needs space and time to breathe and digest

As a body that develops patterns and perform them automatically

As a body that is emotionally rational and rationally emotional

This thesis has space and time to breathe and digest

This thesis has patterns, conscious and unconscious

This thesis is emotionally rational and rationally emotional

In the next chapters you will also find:

The words *never* and *always*.

My narrations are marked by a Christian notion of time because I was born in a Christian family. I use these two words to bring a sense of wholeness, completeness. *Never* and *always* are universalising statements; I am aware of it. Through these two adverbs, you can already witness my contradictions; my attempt to escape habits and the insistent presence of them. While I universalise my-self saying, "I always did this; I have never done that", I am constantly proposing non crystallised identities, theories, and statements. In my practice, if I do not escape habits, I try to pay attention to them. I try un-cover and under-stand them. I try to make them visible and locate their roots. Habits are part of my research.

Translations between English and Portuguese,
English and English, Portuguese and Portuguese.

Sometimes you will find a game between meaning, phonetics, and the form of the words. I will use this to betray grammar and essential meanings. The purpose of my translations is to engage in a constant transform-action of my words, and meanings. The mode I operate translation here is more a recreation and re-organisation of the words because translation is already an impossible transaction, given that it is impossible to be totally transparent between cultures.

Because of my play-ful-ness with words, the flow of your reading sometimes will be interrupted. Sometimes you will not understand what I am writing. However, bear in mind, (1) we never fully understand each other, and (2) this research wants to dive into the uncapturable and unknown. Your reading will have some interruptions because my writing does not follow the habits of academic writing. Therefore, while reading, you will find your reading habits being challenged. Embrace it!

The use of *us* and *we*, but sometimes they do not include you or even me.

As you will see in chapter one, language sometimes underlines and silence bodies. We are silencing agents and silenced bodies. Sometimes I read a phrase that says, “men are this”, but what about women? Or I read, “Women are this”, but I feel that it universalises the experience of white women. Sometimes I feel included, sometimes I feel excluded. I always write and read we reflecting if this we includes my experience or not. I want to invite you, especially if you are a white man, to reflect when you are included in the we and when you are not. I could be very specific in my text. I could name as much as possible to avoid neutrality, and universality. However, I feel the urge to play with the universal rules, transgressing them. In my text, there is an exercise of universalisation that paradoxically invites the reader to all the time question who us is.

I use *italic* in the text to emphasize words.

When I want you to pay attention to some word, like never, always, we, us, you will see it in *italic*. When I want you to pay attention to the shifts between Portuguese and English, I will use the *italic* to emphasize the difference or the sameness of the words. In the latter case, the *italic* is not there to separate what is Portuguese from what is English, because sometimes it is both, or neither. The *italic* is there as an attempt to make more visible the way I transform the words.

Now that I presented the ingredients of my writing process, you can taste the thesis knowing what flavours to expect. It is like you read a menu before ordering food. You know what is in the dish, but there is always the surprise of how the chef mixed everything together to create a certain texture and flavour balance. I invite you to read this dissertation as a degustation. Taste it and take time to see what flavours you like, what you do not like and why, and think about how you would make the dish yourself.

NARRATIVE IDENTITY

BETWEEN LIVING AND NAMING

no me falta air when I remember to breath
when I re-member my nome

meu name

no-me, no-meu, no(m)eu, (m)eu nomeio, no-meio, eu nomeio
no meio

no me, no-my, in(my)l, no me in my eye

I name in the middle

name in, naming

re-naming

miss-naming

nomear

nome-ar

no-me-air

no-m(or)e-a(i)r

more air no me

more air in me

more ar no nome

mor(e) ar no nome

morar no nome

live in the name

living the name

living leaving the name

naming: living leaving the name

We live autobiographically. The English teacher Paul John Eakin argues in his book "Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative, "[...] narrative is an essential part of our sense of who we are". (2008, ix). We are constantly both living and narrating ourselves at the same time. As the literary study's author Leonora Arfuch argues,

"[...] the daily experience of subjectivity is built precisely in the narrative diversity, given that we do not report the same thing in the different registers in which our biography becomes significant in the eyes of others: the conversation among friends, the clinical history, the job interview, the resume, the psychoanalytic session, etc. [...]" (2010, 186).¹

We live autobiographically because we are constantly narrating ourselves; trying to make sense of and express who we are; building our identity though a process of self-narration in relation to the world around us.

This self-narration is a compositional process, because "[...] narrative is not only a literary form but part of the fabric of our lived experience" (Eakin, 2008, 2). There is a composition between language (with its cultural and social contexts) and the somatic, which means that there is a composition between literary and bodily narratives that co-creates our identity though time.

¹ Free translation from Portuguese.

When speaking about *identity* and *self*, we cannot exclude the body and its materiality. The materiality of the body and our narratives (that are not only literary but part of our lived experiences) are intertwined in such a way that Butler writes,

"I tried to discipline myself to stay on the subject [materiality of the body] but found that I could not fix bodies as simple objects of thought. Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies "are". I kept losing track of the subject. I proved resistant to discipline. Inevitably, I began to consider that perhaps this resistance to fixing the subject was essential to the matter at hand." (2011, viii).

If there is the resistance to fixing bodies in subjects, it means that narratives, as discourses of identity, are never completely materialised. Our narrative identity is never completely materialised. Therefore, discourses are never capable of completely capturing the living body.

Self and *identity* are used as umbrella terms to speak about the awareness we have of our-selves. They are umbrellas because they encapsulate our awareness of the here and now, the interpersonal exchanges, the past experiences, the private feelings, and the conceptual information, such as social roles. They are terms to speak about our physical, social, and mental contexts. That said, identity is a composition that takes into consideration time, place, and interactions. It is a composition between physical, social, and mental contexts. They are acting (composing) together, but we often separate identity in disciplines to understand it better.

Composition is a position *com*, a position *with*. Composition is positioning with; being in position with. I see identity as a composition exactly because there is an *acting together* of several dimensions of our lives. These dimensions of us are *acted together* in the *now*. Now denotes a time-action, a when where the action is possible. The now is this instant moment of narration, that contains in it layers of memory, and life experience interacting with the circumstances of the now, including where we are positioned, with and to whom we are narrating, and the context in which our text is located.

The Portuguese choreographer João Fiadeiro is going to call this now of real time. For him, "real time composition" is a tension (and an attention) between actively projecting the future through existent previous knowledge (composition) in a real time. Whatever is happening, is happening here and now - now here; nowhere - but it projects the future and engages knowledges from past experiences. His method is a game between habits and counter-intuitive skills. It is a process of attentively composing now by looking "at ourselves looking at (ourselves looking at) things" (Fiadeiro, undated). It is understanding that our action is one among many possibilities of what could happened at that very present (unknown unfolding in front of us) moment.

I propose a life lived autobiographically, narrated through compositions in real time. A constant action of naming and

expressing who we are in a now positioned with habits and the attempts to escape them. This process is autobiographical because "Autobiography is a discourse of identity [that is not only literary but part of our lived experiences, therefore a composition] we deliver bit by bit in the stories we tell every day [in the nows]" (Eakin, 2008, 4). If autobiography is a discourse of identity, one must pay attention to such discourses and how they interact with the organisation of our social roles. When we produce a discourse of identity, we narrate ourselves, we tell and express who we are.

Naming things, putting things into words is a movement of crystallisation that does not allow fluidity. Butler says that those trained in philosophy have a vocational difficulty of always having some distance from corporeal matters, because they often "try in that disembodied way to demarcate bodily terrains: they invariably miss the body or, worse, write against it." (2011, viii). Language is a confinement, sometimes very much distant from the material body, sometimes disembodied, sometimes even working against it.

Be aware of the things you wear: clothes and concepts.

Be aware of the narratives you build and how they use language.

language you've learned
from your mother's womb. language that maybe is
not yours. language that maybe
makes you invisible. that maybe fits
you like normative clothes.

Language is powerful exactly because it is this technology of naming things. And we live in a world named by white men. There is a moment in the comedy show “Douglas” (Parry, 2020) that the Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby speaks about her dog Douglas. She explains that Douglas is also the name of a male doctor that “discovered” a gap between the anus and the vaginal opening in the female body reproductive part. The doctor had his name attributed to his “discovery”. Gadsby says, “he found a nothing and called dibs”. On a show constantly needling the patriarchal system ([more like a cis-tem](#)), the comedian makes visible the men behind the names; she exposes how our knowledge of the world, and our daily lives are extremely framed and named through a white male gaze. This is one “silly” example of how language often works against women, against queer, against people of colour, disabled bodies, fat bodies, [and on and on and on...](#)

Language works against bodies exactly because it establishes “regulatory rules”.

“The category of “sex” [that] is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal.” In this sense, then, “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce - demarcate, circulate, differentiate - the bodies it controls. Thus, “sex” is a regulatory ideal whose materialisation is compelled, and this materialisation takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices” (Butler, 2011, xi-xii)

These regulated practices are materialisations, repetitions through time that reconcile (or fail to reconcile) with normative imposition. By looking at this example, it seems

that the construction of identity is, then, not a composition, but an imposition socially organised through power structures. However, the fact that reiterations are necessary means that the materialisation is never quite complete, exactly because bodies do not comply, or do not fit in the named normativism. They escape the confinement of normative discursive boundaries.

This is how identity becomes a composition. In the reiteration, in the re-phrasing, re-wording, and re-naming, a “regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law” (Butler, 2011, xii). In the compositional game of identity, that happens through literary and somatic narratives, we generate a discourse that complies with and challenges the norms at the same time. A game between habits, and the attempts to escape them. In the confined space of language, we are constantly fixing and unfixing patterns, habits, shifting the words to try to capture our bodies in discourses.

The acts of this composition in real time are a composition because they are not isolated but, rather, collective. Acts performed in the now compose identity narratives connected to a “reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.” (Butler, 2011, xii). These effects are acts of materialisation of a discourse, such as “sex”, which means that the normative discourses of sex difference

materialise a heteronormative regulatory rule. "Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, it is part of what one is. "Sex" will be one of the norms by which one becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility. (Butler, 2011, xii). A body, then, is only a body if sexed, in the sense that we not only have a sex, but we are sexed bodies performing cultural regulations of gender. When we speak as an "I", as a body, we speak already "assuming" sex. This produces a system of "identification" by the effects of reiterative acts of a heteronormative discourse enabling silences. and making inviable those sexed identifications that are not cohesive with the heterosexual norm. This zone of unviability is a zone of discourse marked by exclusion and silence. One in which I will argue is exactly the place where discursive autonomy of some sort can be drawn.

Let us forget for a second this complex philosophical analysis of Judith Butler and focus on the matter of the bodies silenced and excluded by identificatory discourses. For example, the identity category of "women" has often been historically universalised in the experience of white women, excluding black women and women of colour in the identity discourse. Moreover,

"Contemporary black women could not join together to fight for women's rights because we did not see "womanhood" as an important aspect of our identity. Racist, sexist socialisation had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification." (hooks, 2015, 14).

The silences relate to what the feminist theologian Musa W. Dube names "social location", which involves gender, race, class, health status, and institutions such as family, church, and university.

"Each of these social factors and institutions define me - they either give me power or disempower me; they allow me to speak or to be silenced, depending on where I am and who I am with. Sometimes I can silence others." (2007, 348).

Social location is part of the identity composition because it maps where one is socially positioned, interfering in how one experiences and narrates life.

For me, social location can explain two important factors of identity composition: **(a)** The personal is also political; the singular is also collective. Self-narratives are never isolated because they are part of a social reiterative practice of citation. However, these narratives are not essentially denominated by social regulations because bodies tend to escape the boundaries of discourse. **(b)** Difference play an important role on the effects of our identity narratives. Making differences visible is a political act of building community.

Through the acknowledgement of (a) the composition between personal and political, singular and collective, and (b) difference, I will argue that we can un-silence those words that normative language works against. Thus, we can break silences that language imposed on us.

A + B = BETWEEN ME AND US

Clock, calendar, money: some of the fictions we follow in a capitalistic system. They are, to some extent, inventions that organise our lives and synchronise our activities. Due to their use in our daily lives, - from the moment we wake up to the moment we go to sleep (even populating our dreams) - they are a technology, a regulation, a fiction repeated so much that it becomes real. Our life is surrounded by fictions that are realities, and realities that are fictional. In the fine line between reality and fiction, could I *fiction* my words, or even distort the reality presented to me to invent different ways of being in this world? Could I allow myself to invent myself as a way to transform fictions into realities, or to claim realities as fictions?

The fictions I am referring to, relate to the regulatory rules. Regulatory rules are those language inventions and definitions that “must be appropriated by individuals ‘on a vital way.’” (Butler, 2011, 10). On a vital way as habits, as part of our life experience, materialised on our daily lives. For Fiadeiro, habits are part of a “belief system [that] produces a perception (which we rarely question) that life unfolds in a sequential flow of events organised one after another”. In this belief system, habits are those “ready-made solutions to preserve personal fictions such as moral integrity or a sense of identity.” (Fiadeiro, undated). The choreographer goes further and says that habits are like fingerprints because they

are part of our individuality and bind us collectively. This is how (a) the singular and collective boundaries are blurred.

They blur because life experience is part of a set of practices performed individually that are a product and produce social regulations. Through this ready-made synchronised and organised individuality, it is easy, by the force of habit, to universalise and homogenise things. For example, the notion of sisterhood in feminist theories sometimes “forget” (perhaps ignore is a better word) to consider race, class, and sexual orientation differences, among others (look at me, “forgetting”). The extent of what is seen as normal, as human reality, as natural, happens in a way that differences are handled by being ignored. It is by ignoring the differences, which are the effect of the regulatory rules made into habits, that groups are defined as inferior, other, deviant, wrong. Narrating humanity through homogeneity is an act of dehumanisation.

Butler argues that this homogeneity is violent because it is indifferent to the social conditions under which a vital appropriation could become possible (Butler, 2011, 11). Through this indifference, differences are silenced. And silence does not make differences disappear, it just makes them invisible in favour of a universal violent binding.

in-difference makes differences in-visible
with-difference brings the silences out-loud
with-in the narratives

“What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you sicken and die of them, still in silence?” (Lorde, 2007, 49). We must stop mistaking unity and collectivity as homogeneity and universality, otherwise, we will continue to misplace ourselves. Mis-place in the sense of not acknowledging our social locations and how they can silence us or make us silence others. Silence and homogeneity cause separation rather than community.

to separate is separar

separar is se-parar

se parar is to stop yourself

The professor of Women's Studies Anh Hua argues that (b) differences are forces of change (I would argue they are forces of movement). To build community is not to shed differences and pretend they do not exist. Rather, it is to recognise them to combat racism, class discrimination, and homophobia in our lives and psyche. (2015, 129). Difference is a frame that contextualises instead of universalising. Instead of separation through silence(ing), difference is a way of building a diverse community, because it is through acknowledging difference and taking responsibility towards our actions (especially those automatic habits that have the power to silence others) that we build the bridges over the gaps that separate us. Difference is a force of movement, therefore, an unfixed, fluid frame for identity. *Difference is where pause is not a stop separated from movement, but a suspension of movement.* Through movement we narrate ourselves and live autobiographically.

Living autobiographically through movement (therefore, through difference) is a political act because much of our personal and daily life experience is intertwined by social, cultural and political realities. Difference is how we break silences, as oppressed and oppressors. As oppressors, because it is not the responsibility of the oppressed to educate the oppressor about his violent mistakes. Responsibility is the ability to respond and acknowledge your own acts, to evaluate them, to put them in to words. Responsibility is to move our knowledge and habits in a way to escape silencing, and silent habits.

BETWEEN SILENCE AND CONFESSION, THE JOY OF A KILLJOY

Feminist insistence that the personal is political transformed autobiographical work because feminist writings acknowledge the personal, the autobiographical as a way to understand our social and political locations, to avoid neutrality. The English and Women's Studies Professor Sidonie Smith (1993) traces the western notion of individual as one that universalises and centralises white men as the genesis of a linear historicity. From Renaissance (between 14th and 16th centuries) to Enlightenment and Romanticism (17th and 19th centuries), passing by the Kantian notion of the transcendental universal subject, the author points out the construction of the idea of the subject. A subject that uses "unity-through-domination or unity-through-incorporation", which not only justifies "patriarchy, colonialism, humanism, positivism, essentialism, scientism, and other unlamented-isms", but also "claims for an organic or natural standpoint." (Haraway, 2016, 20). A standpoint that silences difference; it misses the diversity of life experience.

For the English author Jeanette Winterson, the missing part is an opening, and not a void (2011, 12). If the universal notion of subject misses our experience, silences it, it becomes necessary - I would say even a matter of survival - to voice out our life experience, to narrate them, even if they are intelligible to the normative narrative regulations. When we

For the French Philosopher Michael Foucault,

“confession is a ritual of discourse [...] that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession [...]; a ritual [that] produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation.” (1978, 18-19)

He continues, arguing that confession had its effects widely spread in our society, playing a part in many areas of our lives, such as justice, education, family, relationships, love relations, among others. We perform acts of confession to parents, educators, judges, friends, partners, revealing something hidden. To confess can be a spontaneous act moved by an internal imperative, or it can be extracted from the person by violence and torture (1978, 61). In Foucault’s definition of confession, there is a relation of power established, as much as there is a notion of norms, and regulatory rules that are right or wrong. If there is a right doing or wrongdoing bounded by moral integrity fictions and preserved through habits, confessing is a danger. It is giving power away and admitting being wrong.

I was born in Christian Protestant family in Brazil. Differently from the Catholic ritual of confession, in the Protestant one you confess to what Foucault calls a “virtual presence”. The interlocutor, and authority of morality is God. We confess, praying in our most intimate moments. I remember myself kneeling on my bed and putting the forehead on the pillow in

front of me (kind of like a child’s pose in yoga) to pray before going to sleep, or after waking up. And part of that silenced prayer, in that conversation between my mind and heaven, I knew what was wrong and bad, what the laws of God were. The laws of God were invented by men that had the same silenced conversation with God years and years ago. What if my God is not the same God of those men? What if it is the same God but I listen to God differently? What if those men translated the silent conversation, they had with God, without thinking about language difference? By the way, what is God’s language? What if God of the Bible is how a specific people sees God, and not actually God? What if the way I see God poses different wrongdoings and men are the ones that must confess? What if Jesus died because he had a different relationship with God, and this was against the norm? What if those questions are my confession?

My confession, the way I want to conceptualise it, is not an exposure of wrongdoing to reconcile with the norm, to be redeemed by men, white men and their laws and norms.

March 18th of 2022, Lisbon

When I was a child, I used to buy journals. But I rarely wrote on them, not because I did not like to write. On the opposite, reading and writing were always part of my will to live. Part of my desires. I learned how to read and write considerably early. Books were always on my surroundings, even if they were often not read by me. Letters were always gifts I have given and received. Why this irregularity on reading and writing in journals despite my aptitude? Let's begin with the fact that Brazil is a country that does not read much. Wonderful authors are not lacking, but the public policies that encourage readings are sinful. Also, I feel that writing about myself is an act of self-discovery. I did not know before but dis-covering myself was a danger at my house.

My father recently burned at least half of my books. Not by mistake, profane books. Books about women making poems about their bodies, books about the mystic universe of dreams. Some of them I haven't even read yet. Words burned into smoke. When I was a child, I somehow already knew about this danger, so I kept my words to myself. I kept them so deep in myself that it took years to find them again. Perhaps, if I have written my words down, even if they turned into smoke, I would remember better my childhood. Because what I remember are frames photographed and filmed by my father. The rest is a kind of blackout. Perhaps, if I have written my words down, the smoke would be me, not only my memories and my books. Would I be burned like a witch? Is this a contemporary story or a character reincarnated from Middle Ages? How many women fit into my story?

The way I confess is dangerous. "The danger is that when you break that bounded secrecy [the difference ignored and silenced], you feel the dread, the burden for causing unhappiness." (bell hooks, 2013, 85). For example, when you are queer in a fundamentalist Christian house, to confess who you are (unapologetically or not) is to break a family bond of sameness, of homogeneity. You kill the narrative in which you reconcile with the expectations of the laws of a normative God. You kill part of you, part of the narratives you are habituated to perform, sometimes as a way to protect yourself, as a fiction you tell the world, silencing your own body, a tyranny "you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you sicken and die of them, still in silence" (Lorde, 2007, 49). There is a grief in this kind of confession. A grief of being, by existing, the cause of the unhappiness of a normative cis-tem.

The British-Australian feminist writer Sarah Ahmed says that feminists are "Affect Aliens", because they kill joy by refusing to share an orientation of happiness toward certain things. They do not find the objects that promise happiness quite that promising. (2010, 39). For example, a heterosexual marriage with kids. In our cis-tem, marriage is a universalised promise of happiness. According to Ahmed's concept, being unhappy with this promise, not desiring it, makes one an "affect-alien", a "kill-joy". To not reconcile with the stickiness of conventional happy objects is to confess our own narratives.

It is to articulate difference in our own stories. Silenced differences. Our unhappiness is in the silences we make to reconcile with universalisation, so our happiness causes unhappiness for a cis-tem. Therefore, to be an affective alien is to break silences, and never be forgiven for it. Affect aliens are the trouble in the perfect meaning and materialisation of heteronormative regulatory rules. To be unhappy with the fixed social happiness is to constantly allow oneself to refuse universal norms; it is to be trouble in a system of domination, and constantly forgive oneself for it to experience joy with no fear.

In the end of the movie “Bixa Travesty” (Priscilla, Goifman, 2019), Linn da Quebrada, or *Lina Pereira*, or *linda quebrada*, or *linda que brada says*

“We are the hysterical and crazy ones, right? Of course! If we are not given, or only given the minimum to keep alive. We are given little or almost no affection. And you say we have a gender identity disorder. But we are not going to let you get away with this. Because I am not crazy, I may be crazy right now, but I own my own derangement. I’ll keep deranging, moving myself, and becoming so many others, so that I will turn into an inconvenience to your theses. I will be the disorder to the names you have created. Because sorry, we are still working on myself, I’ll keep working on my being for a long time. And the disorder will be all yours.”²

Confession can be, as Foucault conceptualises and I re-quote, “a ritual of discourse [... that] produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it.” (1978, 18). On the other hand, not necessarily an act of reconciliation with a normative

² Free translation from Portuguese.

authority as an interlocutor. It can be a ritual of discourse to reclaim oneself through the exposure of unhappiness fruit of a silenced difference caused by regulatory rules. It can be an act of ongoing self-definition to escape or be a disorder to a language that works against us. The exposure of unhappiness aligns with Audre Lorde’s ideas of what erotic is. For her, erotic is about “the open and fearless underlining of [our] capacity for joy. The erotic empowers women and women of colour willing us to refuse to accept our powerlessness, despair, self-effacement, depression, and self-denial.” (2007, 56-58). Confession, then, becomes a tool of autobiographical discourse that confronts and tries to escape habits; a composition that moves silence into language.

For bell hooks, confessions challenge forms of domination (2014, 227) exactly because they publicly expose the silenced matters within us. Through confession, one can find one’s voice, and the interlocutor is not necessarily an authority that holds power. If there is an authority that holds power (given the heteronormative regulations), to confess becomes to take ownership of our being, exposing our unhappiness toward an authoritative discourse (instead of reconciling with it).

Furthermore, I found my voice by listening and reading other women’s confessions: Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Jeanette Winterson, Clarice Lispector, Linn da Quebrada, Carolina Maria de Jesus, Rupi Kaur, Hannah Gadsby, and Ana Rita Teodoro

are some of them. "To find a writing voice many women had to hear themselves through the act and art of confession." (hooks, 2013, 69). The interlocutor can be someone needing to find those words to find their own voice. "All of us, when in deep trauma, find we hesitate, we stammer; there are long pauses in our speech. The thing is stuck. We get our language back through the language of others." (Winterson, 2011, 15). Through the confessional interlocution, we can process our traumas. Instead of silencing them, we voice our unhappiness as an attempt to kill them. In the process, we kill normative joy as affect aliens, but the pleasure is all ours and the disorder would be theirs.

When we move into the direction of responsible self-invention, we transform our silences into language, and this can transform our unhappiness into joy. We start to say who we are not, but we do not stop there. We keep moving to find the unknowns hidden with-in us, materialised in our guts, in our bodies, but not translated into language yet. We try to capture this between body and discourse, to capture the words that escape and fail normativity. We keep moving, keep narrating ourselves in a compositional way.

In a now and here that is a game between habits and the attempts to escape from them. A game between reiteration and transformation, a game between movement and social location. An unfixed frame, always in movement. A narrative identity between living and naming, between me and us, between silence and confession.

BETWEEN POETRY AND DANCE

Naming is part of our process of understanding. It is also technology of *fiction-ing* realities. "Men, [...] love pointing their finger and say: women, garbage, house. They love to name things, give meaning to them. So, I thought, why can't I do it too?" (Priscilla, Goifman, 2019). We know and acknowledge identity *through-with-because* of narratives (literary and not). Therefore, the Professor of Philosophy Jorge Bondia Larrosa says,

"activities such as consider words, criticise words, elect words, take care of words, invent words, play with words, impose words, prohibit words, transform words, etc. are not empty or hollow activities [...]" (2002, 21)³.

But how can we find the words? How can we find the silences we are; the silences we are put into? Audre Lorde says that "[...]it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are - until the poem - nameless and formless, about to be birthed but already felt." (2007, 44). Poetry is how we invent ourselves escaping normative words because poetry is the word that escapes.

To Lorde, poetry is a necessity to existence, survival and change because "we can give name to the nameless so it can be thought" (2007, 45); names (that are words) that are we.

³ Free translation from Portuguese.

"[wo]Man is a living with word. And this does not mean that [hu]man has the word or language as a thing, or a faculty, or a tool, but that [who]man is word [...]" (Larrosa, 2002, 21)⁴. Nevertheless, words cannot fully comply to the body. Sometimes discourses work as a body regulator, against it, and disciplining it. Thus, poetry can be "a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language has been made to work against us." (Lorde, 2007, 51). It is through poetry that we can betray, fail, and escape the oppressor's body with-in us. It is failing the normative body, the normative names, words, regulatory rules, and habits that we have the possibility to exist beyond silences, beyond the apocalyptic ends of the central myths of origin of Western culture. Through poetry we keep existing and postponing the ends normative language imposed upon us. It is through poetry that we name to who we are.

⁴ Free translation from Portuguese.

Over the years I've been accumulating names: Ana Luíza, Aninha, Ana at school, analu in ballet, nalu, nalulu, analulu, 01, Ana with a different intonation, anu, anushka, Anna, Ana Luiza, Lu, Luna... Each name defines me in a different way. Some names are from dance, from art, others from church, others from homes, others because I moved to another country and there is no í. Others were a nickname of a nickname. 01 because I lived with another analu... I have several names. I don't fit into just one because I am all the time changing. But I recognise myself at each name. I am the same in each name because this body (that, I more than inhabit, I am) is what binds all those names together; all of them.

My body is words, but it does not perfectly fit into words. At the same time, my body complies to and escapes discourses.

The therapist Staley Kelemen says, life makes shapes that are part of an organising process that embodies thoughts, emotions, and experiences into a structure (1989, xi). In this sense, words and bodies are entangled in such a way that the boundaries between them, in the diverse narratives we deliver bit by bit every day, is blurred. In this blurriness, bodies are words at the same time they do not perfectly comply to discursive iterations. Therefore, our bodies produce and are produced by discourses. Bodies embody words while transforming them.

Bodies are names and meanings. Bodies are sized, verified, and understood through words. Bodies shape and are shaped by words. By naming, we can understand our-selves; our bodies. Names *in-form*, *de-form* and *trans-form* our bodies. Concomitantly, bodies *in-form*, *de-form* and *trans-form* the meaning of words. Considering this relation between words and bodies, bodily and literally discourses are entangled in such a way that if we narrate our bodies *with-in* words through poetry, we might as well do poetry *with-in* our bodies through dance.

“Dance is where [...] I try to practice what I preach” (Albright and Gere, 2003, 254): my body. Dance is where my discourse *of-about* my body is moved, tested, challenged. Dance is a place of feeling. Feeling is also a way of knowing and understanding. A way of knowing without dominant minds. *We are born, and our body grows transforming itself. And we learn to have dominant minds, while our body is forgotten.* Dance happens *with-in* the body; a body that inscribes and is inscribed by life experience. Life experience is part of a set of practices performed individually that are a product and produce social regulations. So,

*when we dance with-in our bodies,
we move with-in them,
we move with-in identity narratives,
we move with-in words, and
with-in the uncapturable by discourse.*

Dance, thus, is a narrative discourse that uses bodies (the materiality of them, their physical and somatic structures, their possibilities of movement) as much as literary narratives use words. If I have a lot of names and my body is what bounds all of them together, dance is a way through which I articulate myself, my words, through body movement. Moreover, dance can *in-form*, *de-form* and *trans-form* literary discourses as much as the contrary is true.

For example, when describing a dance with words, I can be very precise by giving as much details as possible. I can use different notation systems, different adjectives, I can demonstrate the rhythm, specify the relation of the body to the space (low level, close to the ground, expansive movement). However, no matter how precise I try to be in my description, you would always dance differently from what I envisioned; you would always imagine a different dance. Moreover, if I give to two different people the same written dance score, they will dance it differently, perhaps similarly, but even so, differently. As much as poetry escapes normative grammars and languages, dance challenges the universal meaning of words and bodies. Moreover, dance enhances our attention to the body beyond the habits and dominant minds. Though dance we can dis-cover habits and play to transform them.

IMPROVISING NARRATIVES

According to Arfuch, when personal narratives happen here and now, in the moment of the enunciation as in an interview, the anchor to temporality is profoundly related with existence (2010, 63). Which means, the anchor of the narration is not on documents, but in an ensemble of re-membered and articulated memories (or body members) in the now. This narrative happening in the now is an improvisational act.

“Improvisation springs from an ensemble of learned, embodied knowledges about the social world in which the improvisers operate, the techniques and skills to deploy them, and imagination.” (Albright and Gere, 2003, 120). Improvisation articulates whatever is available in the real time. Through improvising, we dance-write-speak with-in our habits

and with-out them
 in-habit
 and out-habit
 with a-tension (attention)
 with in-tension (intention)
 with ex-tension
 com-tension (contention)

Through improvisation we fluidly and attentively compose ourselves in a real time - a now that is a time where action is possible. Improvisation engages habits and the attempt to escape and fail them. Improvisation re-members the body. Improvisation is a tool to constantly escape discursive regulations; a tool to question habits. To question is to transform final dots into question marks, postponing the end of a narrative. Through questions, the end becomes and, opening ourselves to the unknown, to what we do not fully understand with our dominant minds; we open ourselves to feel.

When actively improvising, we engage choice, habit, surprise, unexpectedness, expectations, frustrations, and we look at ourselves (looking at ourselves) re-acting to our body movements, sentences, words, rationalisations, and feelings. Thus, improvisation becomes a conversation with-in our bodies-words in relation to time, to space, to other bodies, to wind, to plants, to animals. Furthermore, if improvisation is based upon embodied knowledge and its deployment, failure becomes part of escaping the embodied habits and creating other possibilities of body movement, of grammar, and meaning. *Perhaps we cannot escape the cis-tem, but we can engage into improvised dance-poetries that repeatedly fail it, not in silence.*

fail the cis-tem
 fail the cis-term
 fail the cis-team
 fail the cis-theme
 fail the cis-scheme

IMPROVISING THROUGH REPEATING, TRANSFORMING AND POSTPONING

Imagine a dancer (me) ongoingly repeating the same gesture. The gesture is the same, but it is constantly changing because the repetition is a translation from the movement before. The dancer is intuitively transforming a gesture into another because the movement is the same, but the density, the velocity, or the intention are different. Now, imagine the same operation, but with voice. Repeating a word so much that it loses its meaning, and it becomes something else. Silly example:

ice cream
I scream
a screen...

Now, imagine the layers the repetition gains because I am Brazilian, and I have an accent that phonetically transforms the word (social location is part of my poetic voice). Imagine the same operations again, but instead of vocalising, I am writing, and thinking about the format of the words, the shapes, the juxtaposition of them.

Now imagine me writing without putting dots and exclamation points but instead using and to connect the phrases and then the phrase does not have an end and the end is actually dictated by your reading because perhaps you are reading out loud and then the breathing is actually what put the end in a phrase and begins the other phrase and like this also the subjects get mixed like dreams and remembering the dream and we never count in a linear way and I am writing like this so you can understand practically what I am trying to say and I will probably go back and correct the grammar errors because after all this is an academic text, but in my performance I would not stop but it is not non-stop writing and I used a comma in some line upstairs and you probably stopped and went back to look and I added the last phrase after because I stop to read and went to look for the comma and this was a habit of putting a comma happening and I think I decided to keep the grammar errors on this paragraph because the autocorrector is also on and sometimes it corrected it and sometimes I involuntarily deleted the word and re-wrote it, stop I stopped for a second and thought and this is cheating and I cheated and subverted or was not capable to follow my own game and this is between the habits and the attempts to escape them. And I wish you could see me writing and putting commas and seeing the autocorrect correct my words and the pauses I make and in which words I come back to correct myself and which words I don't and I let it slide and do not even see that the autocorrector corrected and I

hope this example is enough. Now, imagine me doing the same operation with movement. The beginnings and ends of a movement phrase become blurry. And it is harder to trace where the phrase started and where it finishes (perhaps not where but when).

FIND-(WITH-)IN-GS

HOPE IS FAILURE WITH NO FEAR

on and on and on and on an on an on an onion.

Repeat and repeat and repeat and fail to comply to an exact repetition, and the failed repetition becomes the possibility to another word, to another movement. The failure happens because my tongue rolls up and I speak differently and it is another word, or because my arm becomes tired of doing the same gesture and then it is slightly different. And then I have realised that repetition is already something else, like memory is already something else. A revised material produced now by our bodies. *An improvisation if you will.* If we pay attention to our actions in the now, we can grasp the failures to create other possibilities of movement, of words, of existence. Creating possibilities of existence that fail and escape the body-words that work against us is postponing our existence.

creations are criações

cria-ações means to create actions

creative is criativa

cria-ativa means active creations

we are active creations creating actions

through words

words that are we

words that are our bodies

bodies that are movement

bodies that are never and always the same

My practice inevitably fails and escapes norms because repetition is a re-creation that fails habits. Failure is hope because hope can be disappointed. Hope is to project possibilities with no fear of failing. And when you are already a failure to regulatory rules and norms, hope is narrating yourself with no fear. *It seems a bit utopic.*

“Utopian thought allows us to see different worlds and realities. [...] Those of us who attempt to dream utopia within the sphere of our quotidian life must constantly overcome disabling inertia generated by such agents of antiutopianism. [...] Utopia can never be prescriptive and is always destined to fail. Despite this seeming negativity, a generative politics can be potentially distilled from the aesthetics of queer failure. Within failure we can locate a kernel of potentiality. I align queer failure with a certain mode of virtuosity that helps the spectator exit from the stale and static lifeworld dominated by the alienation, exploitation, and drudgery associated with capitalism and landlordism. [...] Queer failure is often deemed or understood as failure because it rejects normative ideas of value.” (Muñoz, 2019, 212-217).

This research started when I decided to embrace myself as a deviant Christian, a queer Christian. It started with me talking about Christian traumas, confessing my unhappiness with the myths of eternal happiness promised by a structure of rules and actions secured by heteronormativity, colonialism, and patriarchy. I had the words to say who I did not wanted to be, what I did not wanted to reproduce. I had those words because they were taught to me since I was in my mother’s womb. I did not know how to describe who I am and who I want to be. So, I repeated the words I knew, and translated them, changed their meaning, failed them. And people started to call me a poet because of that. Poet was a name someone gave to me and that I embraced with all my soul. And I embraced the task of failing to build hope, instead of

masochistically repeating (without re-creating) a fiction that does not fit my body.

AND...

If repetition and transformation through failure leads me to hope, I feel the urge to constantly postpone the end. Cis-white-male-language silences our existence in diverse manners. It constrains even their own possibilities of existence. Normative language erases and kill possibilities of living. Failure is how we reject normative ideas of value. Failure is how we kill what is killing us. *Let us keep on failing, keep on narrating, and keep on transforming ourselves, never being fixed, but never un-named. Let us postpone our end through failure!*

Repeating to myself that I wanted to postpone the end made me repeat the word *end* so much that it became *and*. I started to improvise trying to not end, but to and. For instance, the end of a phrase of movement was the beginning of another phrase of movement and what seemed to be the end became a non-linear narrative of emerging movements taking my body into surprising journeys in the space. Journeys that had a mix of habits and the attempt to escape from them. *Postponing the end became a strategy to exhaust-never-exhausting the possibilities of ending and beginning. The purpose of my practice became the practice itself and I could not separate anymore where-when was the beginning of my research and where-when was the end.*

I WILL CONTINUE TO FAIL MY OWN PRACTICE TO NOT END IT

This thesis and the performance “between us, uncapturable” are not the end. There are so many subjects, I did not dive into (further developments if you will): the politics of translation, the participatory aspect of improvisation, the fact that our memories are also built by others and not just a composition happening inside our head, the fact that

there are a lot of eyes

therefore, a lot of I(s).

Besides, I want to test my methods collectively and see what ands they bring, what collective failures they enhance. I want to repeat my performance over and over again, always transforming it into something else. I want to use this methodology as a path to self-discovery and self-ownership. I want to in-habit worlds outside of me and create transformative conversations.

Today, if I was going to do my performance again, I would not do phrases of movement connected by ands. I would stretch the end of a movement, overcoming its end. If I was pointing to the sky, I would stretch my body until the point of my finger touched the clouds. The idea to postpone the end is the same, but there are so many possibilities of doing

it. This is the beauty of this methodology. It is repeatable and transformative by itself. And I am looking forward to witness what it becomes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

IT COULDN'T BE OTHER THAN POETRY

Between a body that is all the time named and constantly uncapturable by discourse, between the urge to name and to escape the names were given to us, between the joy of failing and the burden to be a failure, between you and me and the locations we in-habit socially, between the habits and the attempt to escape from them, between your eye and my I, between us, this artistic research aims to offer a methodological path to ongoingly and fluidly name ourselves.

This research is a proposal to build an autobiographical space that questions fixed, normative identities. Through improvisation with-in body and words, this research proposes poetic and danced self-narratives through feminist, decolonial, and queer lenses. The improvisational tools: repetition and transformation through failure, and the constant act of postponing the end. The artistic outcomes: a framing. A framing is a confinement. Bodies escape the confinements of discourse, and I am trying to escape these confinements of discourse by confining myself in other possibilities of naming. *Never forever.*

CONCLUSION

Even if this research tries to escape habits, it does not discard them. Even if this research understands the body as uncapturable by discourse, I am constantly trying to capture the uncapturable and the unknown.

For the past two years I have been grappling with the complexity of my existence. I kept trying to fit my thoughts into theories. I kept trying to translate my feelings into words. It seemed that with each new encounter with a book, researcher, theory, a new portal opened, and my research could fit somewhere else.

When speaking with friends, it seemed that we were dealing with the same subjects through different words, different concepts. Then, I found myself lost in the middle of all those possibilities that I had created in my head to escape the one and only universal possibility that was given to me. I felt paralysed because defining myself seemed so vast and limitless; so overwhelming. Often, everything ended up being nothing.

And I found out, confinements are necessary, as much as escaping them, deviating them, transgressing them. When I needed to create a performance, I was lost. It was as if someone was asking me to define who I am, my entire self, in 45 minutes of performance. However, confining myself to

a time, a space, a theme, an order, gave me the possibility to subvert myself, to understand the rules, to change and escape them. I understood that naming is important, and that the now is a space-time-action that delimits our experience. But the now is always be-coming and the names-bodies are always trans-forming.

My research is intrinsically linked with this idea of being always the same person and inevitably different at every instant. It is an in between because it is not just confinement, and it is not complete freedom. It is an eternal negotiation between naming oneself and subverting oneself. It is like skin: a permeable barrier. It is like bones: structures that move because they are connected by joints. We need to move because we need malleable structures, because our bodies are, per se, malleable structures.

In the process of writing this thesis, I have realised I could blab about my research for-ever. However, I have a frame of time to deliver it, a frame of 10000 words. This is a confinement that helps me to make choices and helps me to understand that everything that I am and everything that my research is will never be capturable in a frame, but framing is part of understanding.

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APPENDIX

Video of the performance "between us, uncapturable"

<https://vimeo.com/734333799>
password: ALFB1996

CHOREO
PERF
THEATRE PRACT
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