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MASTER'S THESIS

**HIGH
TWO OR THREE CHAPTERS ABOUT ECSTATIC MASCULINITY**

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DIVADELNÍ FAKULTA

DRAMATICKÉ UMĚNÍ
REŽIE SCÉNICKÉHO A OBJEKTIVÉHO DIVADLA

MAGISTERSKÁ DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

HIGH

DVĚ NEBO TŘI KAPITOLY O EXSTATICKÉ MUŽSKOSTI

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I declare that I have prepared my Master's Thesis, Dissertation independently on the following topic:

HIGH
TWO OR THREE CHAPTERS ABOUT ECSTATIC MASCULINITY

under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

Prague, date: 15/06/2023

Signature of the candidate

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Abstract

High. Two or three words about ecstatic masculinity is a body-based performance created during the spring of 2022, inside of the master's program in Directing of Devised and Object Theater. This text is the documentation of its process of research about masculinity and performance, the performance of masculinity, and theater as a territory of self-production.

In it, masculinity is presented as a composition of *molar* and *molecular* lines, terms formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and used here to conceive performance as a territory for the implementation of experiments with the masculine expression.

Ecstasy, on the other hand, is presented as a theatrical texture that has been present in artistic and nonartistic performativity from ancient times, which represents a space for biopolitical subversion. The theory emanated from rave culture is a tool that helps us to understand what are the cultural consequences of the group intensification of bodies on stage.

The descriptions included in the documentation are formulated from a radically subjective point of view, as much as the learnings that were formulated during the discussions of the creative process.

Abstrakt

Vysoký. Dvě tři slova o extatické mužnosti je fyzické představení vytvořené na jaře 2022 v rámci magisterského programu Režie imaginárního a objektového divadla. Tento text je dokumentací jejího procesu zkoumání maskulinity a performance, performance maskulinity a divadla jako teritoria vlastní tvorby.

Maskulinita je v ní prezentována jako skladba molárních a molekulárních linií, termínů formulovaných Gillesem Deleuzem a Felixem Guattarim, a sloužících zde k pojetí performance jako teritoria pro realizaci experimentů s maskulinním projevem.

Naproti tomu extáze je prezentována jako divadelní textura přítomná v umělecké i neumělecké performativitě od pradávna, představující prostor pro biopolitickou subverzi. Teorie založená na rave kultuře je nástrojem, který nám pomáhá pochopit kulturní důsledky skupinové intenzifikace těl na jevišti.

Popisy obsažené v dokumentaci jsou formulovány z radikálně subjektivního hlediska, stejně jako postřehy, které byly formulovány během diskusí o tvůrčím procesu.

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Life plan(e), music plan(e), writing plan(e), it's all the same: a plan(e) that cannot be given as such, that can only be inferred from the forms it develops and the subjects it forms, since it is for these forms and these subjects.

Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari

The temporary erasure of individuality furnished by trance, then, is the loss of self-control, or more accurately the pleasure of the body out of control. It is also a loss of social control, an "evasion of ideology"

John Fisk

Introduction

The moment before

Personally, the starting point of this work came as an unarticulated response to feminist movements all around the world.

Coming from Mexico, experiencing the specificities of the conditions that determine women's lives in Central Europe certainly changed my point of view on the problem. I could take a view of the many different aspects of the female fight depending on the different contexts. If, in Latin America, guaranteeing safety for women and girls either on the streets or indoors is still a massive problem, in Europe other issues like income inequality and unbalanced political representation are those which are disputed energetically.

As is well known, patriarchy displays a series of challenges for all individuals in different contexts, a reason why it's difficult to choose a way to be involved in a manner that does not leave open the possibility of leaving other issues unattended. In the meantime, the problems continue and the direct action never seems to be enough.

According to *Men, Masculinities and Changing Power*, the most urgent actions required from organized men to contribute to women's empowerment are the following:

Engaging men in the prevention of gender-based violence.

Promoting gender equitable socialization at all levels of education, from early childhood education to the tertiary level.

Engaging men as fathers and caregivers.

Engaging men in supporting women's economic empowerment.

Engaging men as supportive partners, clients, and positive agents of change in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and maternal, newborn, and child health.¹

¹ MenEngage Alliance, UN Women, UNFPA, *Men, Masculinities and Changing Power*. 2015, p. 10.

Motivated by a constant sensibilization towards the use of extreme violence against women in my country, the input that definitely triggered my creative process was the feminist demand of men work on themselves, and the resetting of the chain of abuse and violence that is expressed over themselves and others inside of patriarchy.

Latin American feminist authors like Rita Segato² have depicted how the systematic endurance of different layers of violence among men effectively produces individuals capable of performing abusive gestures when located in a position of power, even if this is temporary or imaginary. The lack of skill to deal with frustration and loss, in conjunction with the masculine demand to prevail even under negative socio-economic contexts (laboral abuse, discrimination) are the primary conditions that facilitate the propensity of men to exercise violence against other men and women.

At the same time, the outbreak of the Ukraine war took place on the 20th of February 2022. People from all European countries mobilized to defend and protect a country unfairly attacked and forced to fight back militarily.

This happened at the very time when we were attending classes and testifying about the social crisis produced by this confrontation. The feeling of hopelessness and the envision of how dark our political context is hitting human lives were not easy to confront and permeated the necessity for a strong reaction, a revolution inside of the values of culture.

These critical stimuli made a reaction in my body when deciding on what project would I choose to close my studies at DAMU's MADOT.

I can define this impulse as a personal association between man and war, and also as a manner to walk back from the assumption that male interaction was mediated

² *Contrapedagogy of cruelty* is a text written in 2018. On it, Segato tracks the series of socioeconomic conditions that originated *femicide*, and proposes a series of alternatives, in which, care and tenderness gain a political weight.

R. L.Segato, *Contrapedagogías de la crueldad*, Prometeo, 2018.

mainly by Segato's *pedagogy of cruelty*. Power and violence. Energy and the masculine order to prevail and dominate were some associations that made me feel uncomfortable in my own body, in a way I decided I wanted to work with them.

The team I conformed to face this endeavor was integrated by me, Michał Salwiński (Poland, 30 years old), and Aljoša Lovrić Krapež (Slovenia, 23 years old), and started as an invitation to collaborate and experiment with the body, movement, and... *nudity*.

This last element escaped from my mouth in a not-meditated way during our initial talk, almost as an unconscious vision of what, in further stages of the work, would turn into a key element of the research we would start: the consequences of a radically physical approach to others and ourselves, the exposition of our vulnerability and the proposition of new corners to observe male beauty.

The decision to invite these individuals was based on an atmosphere of trust and camaraderie that was already going on among us as classmates. It was based, as well, on the fact that we were men, and we had experienced radical exercises of transmission of energy and the generation of a communal spirit in workshops offered by Howard Lotker and Nela Kornešova, on them, the sparkle of inevitable complicity prepared the conditions to formulate a universe together.

This text is, in a certain manner, a continuation of the same impulse that guided us during the rehearsal process. And tries to articulate the thinking that was sparkling during the discussions we had internally and the references that we exchanged before, after, and during the series of improvisation that took place among us. In like manner, I mention the concepts formulated by the people that have given us feedback on its different stages. My considerations are that many fertile comments were made trying to put in relation the masculine body with the context that demands specific action facing a series of different crises, as much as, the postulation of theater and performance as territories to expand the limits of human expression.

Chapter One is entitled *A piece named High*, and it's a documented telling of the process of rehearsals, the constant shifting of the thinking inside of the project, and

the way this evolution was reflected by the show itself. In it, I try to emphasize its characteristics as an organized chaos, and an articulation of heterogenic systems that were overlapped and not always working on time. The constant tension of this project between its potential spectacularness and its rigorous exercise of research tries to marry theater direction and investigation as flows that run in parallel contaminating each other. As well, I try to expose devised theater as the appropriate ecosystem to try such a collective adventure.

High shows itself as a project where the luck of finding a collective shared goal, that extends its roots to the very founding of the identity, is an already obtained goal and an engine that hardly might stop once started.

In Chapter Two, *Theater(s) of Masculinity(ies)* I try to analyze, in retrospect, which were the causes and consequences of choosing my performance of genre as the motive of research for this project. In it, I am addressing some of the sharpest questions I received during the creative process to learn which were the goals obtained by this work.

In this part, I'm also trying to elaborate a relation between masculinity as a series of performative characteristics of some bodies, divided by a strong and binary division (hegemonic and experimental), with the *plane of immanence* theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as the visualization of the molecularization (softening, evasion, tricking) of the hard strata of human compositions, in search for novelties and as a challenge of the limits of expression. I defend that, in the realm of the *plane of immanence*, terms such as failure, error, hesitation, or blurriness are values that are present as a consequence of digging into the unknown, and because of that, with research interest in the arts of the body.

In *High or the Biopolitics of Trance*, Chapter Three, I'm postulating *ecstasy* and *highness* as performative textures with a long genealogy inside of theater and performance. I document the many references made quoting *extremely sensorial and out-of-mind experiences*, and their consequences in the body of performers and spectators. This dissertation is fed, also, by the flow and energy of the biopolitics of the body that has emerged as a parallel formulation of rave culture, where dance

and the communal intensification of the senses have become a force that has been able to construct new ways to organize power and delivers a new version of the self for the practitioners.

Chapter One

A piece named *High*

1. A spiritual pre-disposition

This project wouldn't have been possible without the certainty I felt in my body of being ready to experiment with my own boundaries³ and work with them, surpass them, or at least, show them/suffer them to enter a reign of excess and saturation. I was aiming for scenic effects like the use of loud music, palimpsest-like plastic compositions, and an ultra-modern atmosphere of madness. All of these qualities are present in some fundamental works of Rodrigo García⁴, Angelica Lidell, and the group Needcompany, which inspired me through the ten years I spent as a director of dramatic theater in México City.

Although this radicalness always admired me as a director, I was never prepared to consider experiencing such levels of exposition, those were too confronting for the constitution of my personality and demanded well-rooted grounds which would help me to question until the very foundations of who I am and what am I capable of. That was possible in 2022 after an intense process of recognition of my sensorial realm. The three years I spent in DAMU's MADOT pulled me into an intense dialogue with my body, via workshops about neutral manipulation of objects, movement, voice, and human presence training. The experimentation with my body in a *material* way activated a recognition of many forces that never were meaningful for my artistic purposes before, and that renovated my former language and approach to the stage.

The influence I had from the work of García and Jan Lawers was based on the identification inside of their works of a certain "spiritual disposition" to expose the body as a *document of barbarism*⁵ with radical gestures on scene that were only

³ Moral, physical, the same as artistic boundaries.

⁴ Here is the link for the entire recording of *Versus*, a piece by García created in 2008. The scenes that occur between the minute 39:40 and 54:56 are good example of the kind of aesthetic I was pursuing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbvZlcyFmAi>

⁵ "There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism", it's a statement proposed by Walter Benjamin on his text *Thesis on the Philosophy of History*. W.Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, 1969, p. 256.

possible (from my point of view) considering a dark impression of the human condition in the late 20th Century. A body that was subjected to a huge tension and that would explode as a collection of desperate misrelated gestures.

Formed in México's academies, where a dense theoretical layer is always putting performance in a tense relation with history, politics, and resistance, the access to a pure explosion of sensorial effects, absurd acts, and crazy ways was always a provocative way to connect context and body, urgency and manifestation, gloomy days and the constant devising of ways to perpetrate layers of desire with theater.

Hence, it represented a huge biographical leap in my existence to feel in my body the certainty of me being ready and even needy of physical experimentation with this kind of state. Even the decision to enroll in MADOT and the consequences it would have in my personal life are a part of this correlational way of linking existence inside and outside of the stage.

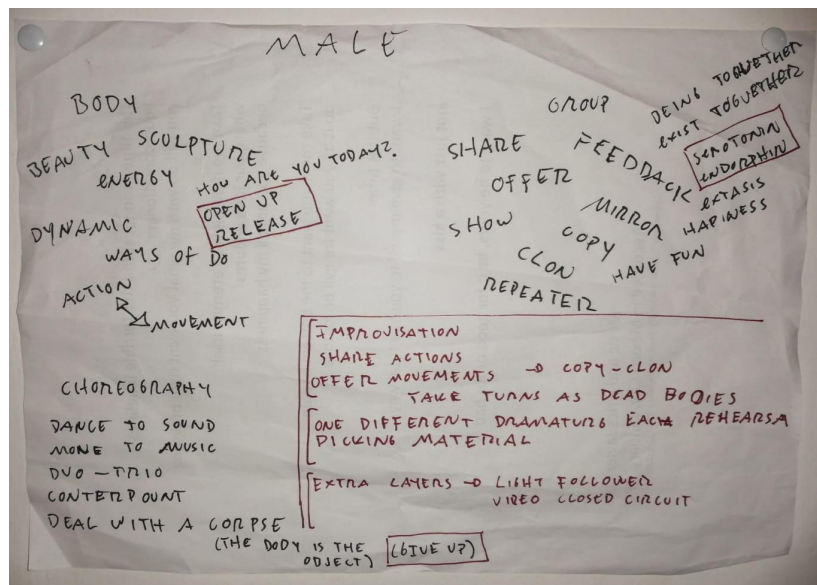
I name this factor as a manner to acknowledge the very deep way in which performance has been a part of my personal constitution, and, how much a human history can change when making artistic decisions. In this case, every single decision I was making through this show was a part of the composition of a plan of experimentation of ways to be, places to go, inner fibers to touch, or inner energies to discover. Real fear and excitement were the guidelines of the composition and became informers of the effectiveness of the show. Having these expectations on it, it was not difficult to evaluate, in the first instance, if the show was *feeling* as I expected it to do.

This, of course, occurred in parallel with the rational/aesthetic attention to contemporary ways to practice performance and what I would consider valuable, interesting, or contributing to the discussion in a matter as delicate as manhood, maleness, and masculinity.

2. Rehearse in research about the masculine body

The way I structured the exercises of the first series of rehearsals was by naming the keywords of what, in my imagination, this show could contain. I did this in order to repeat a process that made great results in a previous work⁶ to systematize the performative job⁷.

As the following image shows, at the very beginning of this process of self-revelation, I wrote down the big title *male*, which was divided into the sub-themes *body*, *group*, and *choreography*.



⁶ *Love, feathers, and Javier Solis* is previous work I made in the context of DAMU's MADOT. In it, Cristina Maldonado as my tutor introduced me to the use of keywords as a tool to transfer inner impulses into performative/scenic principles.

In this practice, the perpetrator writes on a piece of paper a series of words that correspond to the envision you have of the show, your starting emotional/creative necessities, or even your desires of what you like in performance in a very general way.

The words as abstract as they may come up, are re-elaborated, reformulated, or associated. The goal is to be as specific as possible with them and not be afraid to put in relation terms that apparently don't belong to the same reign.

Through the relations and association, some systems or groups start to appear or seem to affect each other with the potential of creating what will be potential layers of the show. This might be principles, the *vocabulary* of the show, the kinds of objects that it will contain, or the kind of atmospheres it might include.

⁷ All of this work that helps triggering the starting point was relevant for me considering the conditions that many artists face nowadays, in an atmosphere of broken rules and inside of an immense variety of theater procedures and techniques. Nowadays every show demands a technique, and this condition might produce anxiety and loss of meaning. Not all artists are used to research the tools that the shows need, and they struggle to put themselves in a *zone of creativity*. They find themselves lost in a bunch of ways to operate when classic rules of performance composition prove themselves useless. In this context, the tools I obtained in MADOT are crucial to face this uncertainty with calm and even humor, which are fundamental for research and curiosity.

These three terms would be the axis that would name and make explicit some preferences I had on the work on this show. From them, I was informing myself that I was attempting to research maleness particularly from the body, not in a *solo* show and with coordinated movement (choreography).

Each one of the terms became a subtitle that constituted a subgroup where some events are mentioned: *beauty*, *dynamic*, *feedback*. I name these *events* because they name not just terms or substantives, but *happenings* or *processes* which imply a temporary transition and transformation of elements, a certain change of the direction where the elements would go. On the other hand, they are more specific and material forms that I could set as a *horizon* for the materiality of the rehearsals.

Insisting on these events, a series or relations started to appear inside of each subgroup to make them more specific: *mirror*, *copy*, *clon*, or *dance to sound*, *move to music*- are good examples of me hunting the specificity of the impression that was taking shape, which I consider key to design the exercises of the rehearsals, and the feeling of satisfaction when collecting material for the composition.

These terms have strategic importance and offer a variety of ways to explore similar elements, for example, *mirror*, *copy*, and *clone* are different ways to establish a direct relationship between two elements, for example naming the coincidences in terms of basic movement (*mirror*) or physical similarities (*copy*), or the inclusion of a glimpse to a blurry individuality, a merge into another substance or the skepticism about one's originality (*clone*).

Specificity, in this case, was calling from the mere origins of the unknown desires, and delivering its characteristics as a way to express the potential of a new creation. *Dance to sound* or *move to the music is*, apparently, a quite simple way to invert positions and play with misplacement. If *dance to music* is the normal association, *sound* and *move* appear to alter this directness.

In red squares, I identified a series of rather mysterious elements of this delivery of impressions. The terms I put inside of these squares came at the end, automatically, without any premeditated reason. They were raw manifestation that was not so clear

to me, and that I should discover during the rehearsals via exercises. The fact that they were an unknown transformed them into the most magnetic and interesting for me to dig about. Something like the ultimate stage, or the “excess” of the processes formulated before.

In the end, all of them would become the fundamental effects pursued by the show:

Open up-release as the ultimate stage of the *body*
Serotonin-endorphin as the ultimate stage of the *group*
Give up as the ultimate stage of the *choreography*

The text written in red is the conclusion about *what to do* in the first rehearsals. I determined we would join to establish “an effective common ground or ‘zone of proximity’⁸, with the very simple principle of getting close via sharing gestures⁹, copying the other, doing what the other does, and, gradually, entering the intimate zones of each other, probably sharing a group emission of serotonin and endorphins.

The music and the choreography would stay as a possibility to frame the *vocabulary* of the movement, but improvisation would be the main reign for the formulation of gestures and performative ideas. Copying or mirroring our partners' gestures would be a resource to use in case of feeling a lack of ideas, and also a way to keep the choreographic input to the stage without composing an actual choreography.

The gestures of the show would be characterized by one basic principle, we would look for the conditions to feel well, to enjoy, or to experience happiness and pleasure. The possibility of not accessing this state would imply confronting what might be negative energies, sadness, frustration, loneliness, or tiredness. The

⁸ L. Cull, *Theaters of immanence. Deleuze and the ethics of performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 111.

⁹ I chose the term *gesture* to name a broader way to refer to actions or movements in contemporary performance. *Gesture* is a term that includes a wide variety of materialities, not only the expressivity of human face, to the extent that non-human scenes are able to produce “gestures” to audiences. They are considered gestures the activations of the space, light, sound, situation, or the way of interaction of the audience in a participative performance.

rehearsals would consist in trying a huge variety of possibilities to achieve this transformation, being systematic or random.

I anticipated the possible effect of feeling lost, sad, and frustrated by our incapability, experiencing harsh moments derived from the fact that, during the rehearsals, we would be mostly jamming, and starting continuously from zero.

These negative aspects, in addition to the fact that none of us is a *well-trained* dancer expert, and we don't have a handful of tools to *connect*, were the points of tension that should keep the dramaturgy of the show compact and grounded, and that would offer a dose of conflict for the experience not to be too linear from point a to b.

If my hypothesis was right, frustration and desperation would appear, and we would discover ourselves as lost as we are in life and would *need* dance and movement from our normal bodies as the connector and means to relate and survive together the hard conditions of looking for an uncertain something efficiently.

As a final element of the initial composition, the first ten rehearsals would be performed with a witness, a single woman that would be in charge of taking notes and giving us feedback. This was with the intention of always knowing that we would be observed and that this whole exploration was not a personal and intimate dealing with the self, but some kind of experiment that would have a spectacular shape, something that would always deal with the expectations of an observer.

In the previous work I made in MADOT, the effect of the constant dramaturgical advice was key for the extraction of material during sequences of improvisation. I found it very positive working with the permanent presence of the dramaturg. This would open space for not knowing the meaning of what I do, framing the limits of my language, and trusting another person to tell me what was the *look* of the actions. I considered that this element would be vital in a process where I was planning to lose myself a bit and react from inner unknown sources. I would allow myself, to say it in a word, to lose myself better and with a clear directional purpose.

The decision of inviting only women one by one was made to start playing with the binary polarization of sexes and genders. Being the social background of the show I felt it should influence the piece on its initial exercises.

3. Harvesting

In the first series of rehearsals we could taste the endorphins of free improvisation. The sense of freedom was palpable and it was not difficult to have fun mainly through a series of effective dynamics:

1.- Competing physically (jumping higher, running faster, doing more push-ups, or resisting through cardio sequences). Going directly to the high-intensity/cardio performance. Challenging each other, improvising/inventing races, or tests of resistance.

This input came directly because my first impulse in terms of practicing moves to enhance my inner state is related to exercising and producing the corresponding serotonin. This spread as a group dynamic of the show by the principle of *mirroring* the other.

Copying others' movements led to minimal micro differences which manifested as disparity, detail, and derivation. This seizing of the others transformed into competition and challenge with the intensification of the movement.

2.- Playing with boundaries of harm and consent (kicking, slapping, tiring the hair, pinching, biting, splitting substances, interrupting the normal rhythm of respiration).

These dynamics were the result of a non-improvised exercise I proposed in which one of us would stay moveless on the floor delivering the will and the muscular tone to the manipulation of the others.

Somehow, the knowledge of the absolute trust of the one that was lying down helpless was triggering in the mover a radical exploration of the static body. On it,

the discomfort was dosed with clear limits. We formulated a verbal keyword to name the limits of our resistance to pain (saying *stop*), which was not used regularly.

3.- The energy tended to grow, and this was facilitated by the inclusion of the objects that were around. These were mainly our clothes, but also the materials located in the rehearsal rooms: chairs, cushions, and tables. A trigger for this was addressing the architecture of the place, and manipulating the sources of light, with a huge intensification when the darkness was appearing. That simple change constituted every time a B moment of explosion of impulsiveness. After warming up in a very cold and enlightened atmosphere I was turning off the lights and playing music. This effect was helping to focus and surpass limits of shame and shyness that would be too difficult to surpass in plain daylight.

As a manner of expanding the energy, the actions were outgrowing pure movement and were prolonged to the operation of random objects that were there casually. This opened an interesting layer for us in terms of scenography and constituted a way to connect the inner process with a transformation of the space.

The constructions we elaborated left traces of our activity in the room and resembled a series of shapes that might be related to precarious architecture. The accumulation of things in the center and the magnification of its presence by the lights became a *scene* by itself that was named *the fire*. Dancing around the fire, jumping the structure, and merging with it, sometimes with a franc self-destructive impulse was a moment that became repeated from improvisation to improvisation.

4.- In terms of soundscape our interaction became particularly non-verbal, and very rich including all of the other sounds that the bodies would produce when interacting with each other (with the slaps and the hits) with the space (percussing the floor or throwing away noisy metal objects) and from our voice beyond words, by screaming, shouting, moaning, and the sound of the agitated respiration.

Bonus

In the middle of all of this extroverted/fierce full content, a tender interaction between Michał and Aljoša happened about three times. Lying on the floor with the whole

weight released on the other (horizontally on the floor) they were having a quiet chat while one was touching the other's hair.

The presence of the invited dramaturges was a point of controversy in many of the cases. We got an external point of view that was colliding with our intimate enjoyment and feeling of effectiveness. For the people that were helping us as female invited dramaturges the experience of watching us was overwhelming in many cases, not really clear or justified ("I'm not sure that I belong to this space"), quite sensorial ("My experience was absolutely dominated by the smell of your sweat) and ethically questionable ("I was in huge conflict when I saw the reminiscence of sexual abuse, or what I interpreted as the allusion to the sexual parts of the person that is lying down with no agency").

The experience of receiving feedback in every single rehearsal was a matter of discussion among us as performers. It was interpreted as a valuable experiment and it triggered a sensation of fatality on every attempt to rehearse. It was difficult to contain the sensation of *spectacularizing* too much the process, which led to the very stereotypically masculine tendency to *show up*.

The results of this initial stage delivered two or three temporary conclusions to my directing process. Two of them I can call *objective* or *material* and another I can call *subjective* or personal, and affected me as an individual subject.

1.- It was problematic for me that our enjoyment of physical exercise was interpreted as expressions usually attributed to stereotypical men *in action*. On the other hand, the textures of care and tenderness were present and shiny but scarce. We were investing big amounts of energy to enter a "zone of production"¹⁰ and were hardly making room for us to focus on details. Apparently, we were *doing* from an already known intense and defiant *masculine* energy. Precipitation and compulsion were menacing hearing and paying attention to the other.

¹⁰ I will develop in Chapter 2 how and why I consider this performance a research about self-production, renovation, transmutation, or, at least, temporary abandonment of strong tendencies of our bodies.

2.- The combination of movement, the inclusion of playlists of loud pop/rock/heavy metal, and the maniac manipulation of found random objects were working to produce a feeling of contagion of joy, extreme happiness, and productive energy. The *party* vibe was real and perceptible and the thrill of many possibilities was there¹¹. Apparently, a specific way of behaving was actually present and was material to show and follow.

3.- Surprisingly for myself, at this stage my access to the others' bodies was intermittent and distant. I took too long to actually be involved with the other's flesh. I built a series of isolated gestures that were distracting the dramaturgy. Among all of the possibilities of interpretation of my presence there, the sensation of me being *out and apart* was prevailing. This sensation was recognized by my body, along with the fear and uncertainty of what would happen if I would get closer to hug, caress, or kiss the bodies of my colleagues.

In this stage, we had a feedback session with the tutors and classmates, and the commentaries were placed in many directions. I was particularly enthusiastic by the identification of a layer of foley that was attractive and engaging.

The association of many of the gestures with stereotypical masculinity was a reason for a debate, in which we were advised to address in the proportion that we would find enriching for the process of the show. My personal impression was that it was true that I was not happy with composing a *negative* show that plays *cleverly* with aspects of society that might be morally questionable. In that way, some changes would be needed to search for.

¹¹ It's important to mention how the *party* has become a referential texture for many performances, and of course, a format itself for the performance shows. Among the ones I've seen, I can name *Jezebel* from Cherish Menzo, *Be water my friends* from Mara Oscar Cassiani, *Ultraficción # 1* from El Conde de Torrefiel, and *Transatlantic Disco Boat*, an academic exercise I was a participant in led by classmates of MADOT.

4. Incursions into the unknown

In the second part of the rehearsal process we abandoned the invitations to dramaturges to *witnesses*. We focused on our own intimate process. This helped in the way that we could explore what this experience was for us, other than composing a show with dramaturgical responsibilities.

We tried to explore lower and slower intentions. Among us, the goal of “staying more in the situations” and not “cut a development”, as well as explicitly practicing “incursions into the unknown”, replaced the previous improvisation strategies of “copying, mirroring and stealing gestures” when not knowing what to do, in order to access together the “productive zone”, the “highness”, or the “ecstasy”¹².

This twist would manifest as a definitive farewell to the notion of *choreography*, since. When I stated the possibility of trying mirroring I was envisioning combined movements and the creation of duos or trios. Indeed, I had in mind that some structured sequences of movements might appear with the rehearsals.

This farewell stands at the core of the nature of the investigation made through this piece. In our inner discussions about the rehearsals and the open sessions, we expressed the confusion we were experiencing when it was mentioned that our show might look like an “old fashion collection of stereotypes”, and even a show that “would not be able to be shown in the most progressive scenarios”. This, was particularly because all of the gestures we were making in the improvisations were coming from the desperate (most of the times) or ecstatic (when the chemistry was “right” and we were getting *high*) necessity of surviving on stage without major goals than getting closer.

We were not consciously or explicitly opening a therapeutic realm for the show, nor did we ever think that through this show we would make a definitive statement about masculinity with all the implications of this huge term. So, if we were not collecting movements to make a choreography, nor healing ourselves from the violence

¹² A development and interaction of these terms will be the matter Chapter 3.

suffered during our formative years as men, what were we looking for while doing this? What was the sense¹³ we were looking for? Where was the thrill coming from and what were the qualities of this desired and achieved emission of energy and joy that was happening?

One way to answer is staying a moment with one of the elements of the research that was more productive during the first part of the rehearsals:

We named “incursions into the unknown” the direct positioning of us on the stage, and experiencing the endurance of the stress, panic or rush of not knowing what to do. Trying to stay there and produce small gestures from this place was a manner to try a less “assertive” energy from us. To dig into other kinds of sensations like shame, fear, or loneliness.

The incursions were individual and most of the time without music, this nakedness of the presence was necessary to “frame” our acts. We used the direct indication of doing “as little as possible” or “waiting as much as possible without doing anything” to feel time and digest the gaze of the others who were waiting. Looking for something too simple or too personal to inhabit nothingness.

Practicing this made us find more specific gestures that worked in many directions, for example, in the sense of making us consider ourselves as more specific than men or as the representation of the *masculine genre*. The notion of singularity is helpful to understand the kind of minor¹⁴ gestures that appeared here and were taking space in the middle of rawer direct and “stereotypical” harm/care gestures.

Si je persévère dans le vouloir répéter, premièrement j'affirme une singularité face à (ou hors de) la généralité (le concept d'être humain) et face à l'identique (les agents interchangeables) ; deuxièmement, je découvre (...)d'infimes et infinies différences,

¹³ *Sense*, in this case, states a term that substitutes *meaning*, *purpose*, or *direction* as an aesthetic value. *Sense* would be more directly addressed to the sensorial experience of all of the participants (performers, audience), a level of the experience related to the taste of it, and its operations on the body.

¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari's term related to a certain operation over the expressions (particularly language and literature) by which something “major” or “majoritarian” this is, with a hegemonic exercise of the power, is affected and singularized when is pushed to “move” or “differ” from itself and become something else.

d'imperceptibles et multiples déplacements. J'en arrive même à me percevoir comme *autre*.¹⁵

If I persist in wanting to repeat, firstly I affirm a singularity in the face of (or outside of) the generality (the concept of human being') and in the face of the identical (interchangeable agents); secondly, I discover (...) tiny and infinite differences, imperceptible and multiple displacements. I even come to see myself as someone else.

To name two examples of this, in these moments of slow, intentionally post-spectacular¹⁶ searching for gestures, Michal started a series of movements that would produce the impression of a very complex relationship between his body and a chair. These movements, which would go from random curiosity till a point of a franc invocation to sexual movements, were long and went through many stages and variations, all of them proper of a very singular and specific identity, hard to describe and formulate by any other manner than performance.

In another sequence, I took the stage and made an incursion starting by sharing verbally my inner state and continued contemplating my skin¹⁷.

We all agreed that these gestures were profoundly engaging to watch, a fact that opened a whole new aspect of our presence in the show. Watching was enough of an action to be a part of it, and paying attention to the other's quest was key for us to *tune in* with him on his rhythms, his goals, and his journey. The rush of the showing from then had to always open space for the focus on the other as vivid diving into themselves.

¹⁵ J-F., Chevalier, *Deleuze et le théâtre. Rompre avec la représentation*, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2015, p. 42.

¹⁶ A term of highly conceptual value for this thesis, proposed by André Eiermann on his text from 2009.

A.Eiermann, *Postspektakulares Theater: Die Alterität der Aufführung und die Entgrenzung der Kunst*, Transkript, 2009.

¹⁷ Because of a series of conditions my skin takes too long to heal scars and shows them in a particular contrasted and colorful way. The many marks I normally have all around my body have been a reason for a personal issue and I spend many hours in my intimate scene analyzing the formations of these marks. The gesture I was doing in this exploration was based on this habitus of my everyday life.

5. Condensing

Until this part of the process where we were digging into separate ways to access the desired state, staying with some of them and dismissing things that didn't work out. Later we had to enter the phase of making the final decisions to shape the final version of the project as a show.

This project has many faces, and included controversy and clashing desires, a part of the team preferred it to stay as a research engine that only occasionally shows the results in a very controlled way. This, considering how highly delicate are the fibers that are touched there, our intimate and emotional realm.

Some characteristics like exploring longer in darkness, trying experimental sites or venues to practice it, and the avoidance of festivals and the constant showing are a part of this initiative.

The question that lays down this possibility is very important. How much of the intensity does this project lose the more spectacular and *showy* it becomes? Are we afraid of building a spectacle out of our struggle to get closer and interact physically not absolutely controlling the consequences? How are the dramaturgy and the selection of elements enhancing the spectacularity or the neutrality of the research? Is there, actually, any neutrality in research?

I decided to go the *showy* way by making a series of consistent decisions in that direction, but with some particular restrictions to keep it *real* and proximate to our personal process.

For the premiere, I chose a huge venue that had been non-used for some months, but that would require an extrapolation of the energy, the movement, the noisiness, and the capacity of the room for the audience.

This place named Savarin is a horseback riding hall from the 18th century that only occasionally is used to show performances, particularly because it is not equipped at all as a theater and every group has to deal with it as it is. I wanted to enlarge the scale, but I tried to contain the possible *spectacularness* of the show by not choosing

a theater building *per se*, but a particular place where the piece might be considered equally a show and an essay about something, ongoing research. The rawness of Savarin enhanced this in between.

The second critical point was deciding on what elements to keep for the show and how to order and display them during the event:

Three bodies of the performers.

The bodies of the audience.

Music¹⁸

Lights¹⁹

Objects²⁰

Text²¹

Safety measures and preparing the tech basics of the showing in Savarin consumed a high percentage of time since we were also in charge of the setup. The discussion on *how to order the elements* stayed stuck because of the impossibility of controlling the ascent to highness in an absolutely efficient way. Apparently, a contradiction existed between the “extroverted part” (dancing, running, manipulating lights and

¹⁸ By music I mean “songs”. After exploring a bit of experimentation with sounds and processed noises we discovered that we would keep the drastic division of human sounds in a segment without music (howling, kicking, moaning, screaming) and a second part saturated with loud pop/rock songs. For this, it was fundamental the inclusion of Andrés Silva in the team, who was in charge of the Dj’ing in the final part of the process and gave us great advice on how to control the soundscape.

¹⁹ We never chose the option of going for a professional light design. On the contrary, the basic division of full home light vs low intimate darkness was enough. On the other hand, the lamps we were using as objects from the beginning of the show were delivering high doses of dynamics since it was an active element of body research. These were portable industrial lights that, because of their shape and intensity, were giving us high loads of images and inspiration during the research. These lights worked to manifest power, energy, and “illumination” (as in a postmodern ritual), it was there in the place of a “fire” that we were dancing around. They were, as well, some kind of hypermasculine tool that, because of their phallic shape were also making some quotes about the use of intimate organs.

²⁰ They were a huge problem when we were in the position of moving our show from a regular rehearsal room to Savarin. Since we were using the objects in a spontaneous way and taking the things that we would find around, we were always using chairs, tables, and classroom gear. I considered it fundamental to have objects around to *expand* the energy of the bodies. The impulse to build ephemeral structures with the chairs was activating the space in a creative way in the rehearsal rooms and was a highway to our energy. But it was 100% necessary that this gesture wouldn’t look *prepared* and with evident scenographic intentions.

²¹ A literary introduction was included in the final phase of the creation, in order to slightly frame the awkward variety of events that were occurring in the shows. My intention was to present that place as a safe environment and also to invite the audience to participate in an active way. In this text to get *high* was presented as an explicit goal.

objects in a frantic way) and the possibility of us getting really close and opening space for an intimate encounter. Without this element, the show appeared as a display of intense moments where not much was different from a regular party. The complexity was appearing when the energy was there but there was room for a true exchange of emotions, attention to the process of the other, and care for the safety of everyone. When the show was really taking off, considering these details was not easy.

Lights

The spectacularity in terms of the light design was controlled by renting light with no color and with a certain vibe of industrial illumination. But we were not able to get this effect since, until the very last moment, there was not enough light to see clearly what was happening, because of the hugeness of the space. The inclusion of a screen as a diffuser of a direct theater light, recommended by the photographer Michael Lozano, finally gave us the desired effect for the enlightened part. Making some tryouts with the lamps we were manipulating from the rehearsal stage we discovered they would deliver a good effect in the “dark-intimate” part.

Objects, space, and the positioning of the audience

The problem of the legitimacy of using objects in this venue was confronted taking a huge variety of objects that might look like they just appeared on the stage, the ladders and cleaning gear were the best option for it not to look absolutely prepared. But the real finalization of the setup²² was a result of a crisis that happened one day before the premiere. We invited our main dramaturgical advisor²³ to check the final shape, from her valuable point of view, we were not able to use the size and the qualities of the venue in our favor. This happened because of a matter of distance. In this version, for the first time, the audience would be sitting in chairs, in opposition to all of the other versions where they were sitting on the floor and integrated into the show. This decision was producing a distance that was making the gestures and

²² I want to be clear on how narrating a setup is directly related to the dramaturgical decisions in a show like ours. Since it runs over improvised gestures the initial elements will determine with a very drastic way the places where the show might go.

²³ Sodja Lotker.

happenings a bit insubstantial, small, invisible, and diffused. It was not awkward anymore, but *staged*, and the connotations of a fighting arena, or gym vibe were simplifying the complexity achieved in previous versions when we had the audience closer and better integrated. The energy was not contained and therefore accumulating, but leaking and barely appearing even when we were trying to use the size of the space and the possibilities to deliver our energy in our favor (as my intention was from the beginning to choosing a huge hall instead of an already big, but maybe better-controlled dance room).

The object choices were also not giving a major improvement to the sense of the show, so the beginning of the solution was to get rid of them, passing, in a second moment, to elaborate with them a series of seats, that would offer to the audience the option to sit closer or lay down according to their desire. The chairs were kept also as an option but inside the performing space, making a circle and closing the vias where the energy could leak.

The seats, formulated and made by Mara Ingea²⁴ were made of a variety of solid things, among them, dancefloor rolled, gas barrels, and average cushions, some of the objects that we dismissed as a part of the “constructions” we were planning to make before, but with the key element of being wrapped with pieces of fabric with the explicit intention of neutralizing them and making them more comfortable to sit on.

This final setup had a series of consequences that helped the show to give its best performance. The distance with the audience was reduced positionally and ideologically, they were not just sitting from a codified observance position on the chairs, but comfortable and close to the performers, integrated with the dynamics, available positionally to dialogue with the show and participate, which is an element that used to happen when the people was sitting on the floor in previous versions. Also, the objects that were integrated into the design of the seats were actually used when the *highness* appeared. Losing control was related to a particular way to use objects, a frantic explosion that outgrows the space and *destroys* the order. The

²⁴ Mara is in charge of objects and scenography ever since this episode of advice.

seats were dismantled in a part of the show and the fabrics worked to expand the movements and make them bigger, which was needed considering the size of the space.

Sound and songs. A dramaturgy

The position of the DJ was the last preset element that changed when we decided that Andres will not be primordially visible but *manipulating* our mood from a diminished position. In this case, the sensation of the music coming from behind, not in a visible way²⁵, was helping better to understand how the sound was working from an invisible but very direct way, without being distracted by its means of production. All these preset decisions substituted the assertiveness required to define the true order of events of the show. The introductory speech was kept and we made the decision of holding the music appearance until the second part, with the aim of repeating the experience of having an acoustic and mostly corporeal initial part, with awkward attempts to access the other body from the coldness of real life and, therefore, after warming up, and starting feeling the secretions (sweet, smell, saliva, sometimes tears) release the music that would take us for a ride of emotions.

The playlist of the songs was deeply discussed and was pendulating in two poles: on one side there were songs that were working well every time and that we knew we needed to access the desired ecstatic state. But, on the other hand, the anticipation and loss of surprise were diminishing the power.

1.- We created categories for the songs that were related to specific parts of the show, with a clear trajectory of starting slow, going higher (with the beats, with the volume), reaching the climax, and after that, navigating the static state through some re visited places like dancing together, running madly, or staying inactive and digging on blue sensations.

²⁵ This visibility of the operation of elements of the performance as lights and sound work as quoting the many shows I've experienced where the mains of production are explicit, contradicting the illusionist inheritance of drama theater to hide the sources of the effects, and supporting intensity and materiality (tech devices, musical instruments, cables, machines).

2.- We created categories relating songs to specific moments, but also to specific gestures of us the performers during the show, in this way “Daniel’s solo” was different from “Aljoshá’s breakbeat explosion”, or “Aljoshá’s and Michal’s last dance”. We played sometimes with these combinations discovering that a huge load of the effect of the show was relying on the way music was conducting the experience.

I knew for example that I needed an intense song before my *solo* because I needed to be almost exhausted already when I was about to start this part, when I’m supposed to deliver at my top capacity of energy. The exhaustiveness was key to turn down a part of my judgment, and this, added to the exploitation of a series of tricks (closing my eyes, losing myself on the ropes or the objects I was manipulating) was fundamental for me to deliver the kind of moves that would be surprising even for myself, above shame or judgment. I was finalizing my *solo* with what apparently was the last energy of my body, so, if Aljoshá’s climatic breakbeat song would come after, the connection with the movement would have to happen when I was considering myself done. This surpassing of my own limits, related to a moment of solidarity (Aljoshá needed us to be intensely active during this intense part) was highly provoking and put me in a productive state every time.

Another combination was contemplating the room we needed to make for calm, intimate, post-spectacular moments *after* the climax. Aljoshá formulated it in this way: “Accessing the highness is not a problem, the problem is what happens to us after being there. Especially considering how much we struggle in the first part just to be together”.

With these thoughts in mind, we were opening space to consider *getting high* not as the goal, but as the means to be closer and more together. For this, we tried making a more direct journey into the wild climax in order to open space for a silent/slow interaction at the end. This change maybe would produce a new combination of A/B/A+ (being A a series of slow physical parts with no songs and focused on our interactions in an almost *nonaffected* atmosphere, and B ecstatic club-like loud dancing parts) instead of the too stable and predictable version that A/B was (half

an hour struggling with the silence and nonsense, and half an hour dancing with powerful songs).

This A/B/A+ version worked well but only during rehearsals, probably because the stress of producing an anti-climatic ending was too big, and required more personal work among us the performers to be defended.

This version probably belongs more to a less spectacular version of the project, one more focused on the research, where the questions are more important than live show effects like keeping the rhythm and worrying about losing the attention of the audience.

This dilemma between A/B and A/B/A+ was never solved, and probably requires a second run of work focused only on it. We jumped on the scene without clarity on how the last part would work, and we gave a lot of the responsibility to Andres, who would conduct the mood of the final part of the show with the kind of songs he would decide to play. A/B/? It's a good way to name this final structure.

Chapter Two

Theater(s) of masculinity(ies)

1. The terms

The term *masculine* was chosen without the intention of exhausting the huge pack of implications it has. It came to my mind impulsively to name the impression I had on the desired output of the show. The kind of *vibe* I thought it would project considering the friends I was working with and the kind of interaction I imagined we would have.

Also, as I mentioned before, it came as a way to get proximate to a possible response toward the necessities of action demanded by the feminist movement. Addressing my position of power as a man was a starting point that put the energy in motion.

Naming the piece like this, and gathering a group of men to perform it, corresponds better to an interrogation than an affirmation. I didn't start knowing strong statements about my gender and devising a way to display them on the scene, but, on the other way, from the curiosity to understand if there was something among us that could be identified, moved, or described as masculine, and what were its characteristics, how would it perform.

On the other hand, the leap from *masculine* to *masculinity* was also a matter of question to me. Whereas *masculine* is an adjective that qualifies the noun *gender* and seems to stand for the name attributed to man in binary difference with feminine (the famous division depicted by these symbols ♂ ♀)²⁶ *masculinity* is a broader term with a different genealogy. It is a conceptual territory of a dispute with intense dynamics and constant transformation. Fortunately, among all of the other terms I could have used (ecstatic manhood, ecstatic maleness, ecstatic men) *masculinity* resulted as the most ambiguous and elusive, the only one that nowadays is almost exclusively a matter of performance.

²⁶

Oxford University Press, 2023, *Masculine*, Oxford Learner's Dictionaries.
<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/masculine>.

Masculinity is the particular pattern of social behaviors or practices that is associated with ideals about how men should behave and their position within gender relations. Masculinity is a relational concept, defined in opposition to femininity and expectations about how women should behave. One of the more common features of masculinity is the equation of manhood with dominance, toughness, and risk-taking. However, as with femininities, there are multiple masculinities, which change over time and between and within settings.²⁷

The norm that relates man to masculinity, and that puts strength, assertiveness, dominance, and abundant facial hair as features of the *masculine* man (or the man that depicts *positively* its gender) are at the same time, absolutely schematic and monstrously current. It has been criticized for decades by many laborious academics and, still, it remains a strong element within the global market and ultramodern iconology. The state of the term is permanently *shaken* by different trends and statements, surrounded by absurdity and craziness.

The latest turn of pluralizing the term and talking about *masculinity(ies)* adds a certain fluidity including the many possible manifestations of *the masculine* to manifest. In and out of the norm. Hegemonic²⁸ or experimental.

This state of the term works accurately to frame the elusiveness of the piece. Masculinity is, at the same time, banalized by pop culture formulations and social media pseudo-academic studies, as much as a matter of deep studies of highly serious consideration. Its ambiguity was enough to awaken already some presumptions about the ways our performance might go, and, during the show. It

²⁷ MenEngage Alliance, UN Women, UNFPA, *Men, Masculinities and Changing Power*, 2015. p. 15.

²⁸ "The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees, or is taken to guarantee, the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" R. W., Connell, *Masculinities*. University of California Press, 2005, p. 77.

would help to analyze the kind of gestures that we were performing, as well as the general effect that the piece would have on the audience. The fact that the show produced strong reactions, to which we, as a team, were not always ready to react back, is proof of how little we were based on a stable version of what masculinity means, or how clear we were of the reason why the word is in the title of the show.

Among the many facts that we *are* on the show (flesh, biography, nationalities, height, number of teeth) we decided to roll around our masculinity. For this, we were not addressing directly our sexual biological maleness, but our variant and diverse performative masculinity and, potentially, the way we embody the normative/experimental expressions of male identity.

The constant switch between these strong poles is a characteristic of the show, and the production of a middle area in between them is the most interesting research subject for me. For example, it has been a surprise that our first attempts to be closer and make contact were ruled by rudeness and even fury: “We know you so we know that your piece is a complex act, but considering other audiences the most important missing point is letting them know that you are not *really* like this”, this was one of the comments given by our main tutor in the rehearsal process. Why are we using rage and fury with performative means in a world dominated by hate? This is a question I ask myself still now. As *progressive artists* committed to research, and trying as much as possible to be loyal to the *event*, it was confronting to discover that our first impulse would be potentially linked with the most conservative and even toxic version of *masculinity*. So, why did we continue? What was happening in parallel with this soiling into the *normative masculinity* that was keeping us up and focused?

We are conceptually and perceptually surrounded by many ways to express manhood. In the case of this show, I anticipated that our heterosexuality was gonna be a definitive qualifier for the constitution of the show.

Heterosexual masculinity is supremely well-ranked in the classifications of hegemony²⁹. Other markers like whiteness, richness, and age were less stable or equally distributed in the architecture of our show, however, speaking (or moving) from our heterosexual masculinity was a common feature among us, and, for sure, was gonna be a tense starting point that would need to be framed accurately, to not diminish the efficiency of the show.

2. Dance and politics of the body

New masculinities, or deconstruction (applied to hegemonic masculinity) were concepts that I was keeping in the box as personal references to frame this work. In any case, derivations of the norm or *ideal* of man behavior. The work that is already being done by organized men all around the world³⁰ is a firm precedent for the same spirit of research that *High* had, only differing noticeably in the strategies and the way to frame the subject of study. Whereas much of the work done by organized men tries to implement long-lasting politics to fight the disparity in terms of privilege and facilitate the access to all kinds of goods by men and women, our performative endeavor was focused on identifying ways to subvert inside the topography of the body the ways the power was distributed. The connections that were letting some flows go and interrupting others. The gestural composition of our masculinity.

It is necessary to address the contemporary-classic association between dance (or practices of the body and movement, in general) and politics as a space to research sensitive topics like freedom, dignity, or justice. Performance and live arts as the proper scenarios to establish *temporary autonomous zones*³¹ and to experiment with alternative ways of existing.

²⁹ M., Quinn Patton, "Rules for privileged white males", *Utilization-Focus-Evaluation*, 05.06.20, consulted 10.05.23. <https://www.utilization-focusedevaluation.org/blog/2020/6/5/rules-for-privileged-straight-white-males>.

³⁰ The article *Masculinities, Imagination and Cultural Practices* documents the status of this movement with an overview of some projects that took part in Brazil, U.S.A, Belgium and Netherlands in 2018. A. Ramos, "Masculinities, Imagination and Cultural Practices", *IDEES*, 01.07.221, consulted 10.05.23.

³¹ A concept displayed by Hakim Bey on the essay *T.A.Z Temporary autonomous zone. Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. Bey, H., *T.A.Z Temporary autonomous zone. Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism, The Anarchist Library*, 1985.

This political turn is well documented by Erika Fischer-Lichte in her text *The transformative power of performance*, in which she addresses the possibility of change or alteration of the current order (which would be the political effect) within a performance, and strictly derived from the duration of the instant or the event.

In case it was gonna be possible, the potential subversion that we would be able to operate over our hegemonic masculinity would have to necessarily happen on the *immanence* of the performance, to use the term presented by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in a series of texts³². *Immanent* means that it would be strictly attached to its circumstances and would “not preexist the movements of deterritorialization that unravel it”³³, this requires a strong principle of momentariness and an excess of loyalty to the instant and the circumstances as a *fuge* plane that displays at the same time as the plane understood as a composition.

In the same way, Fisher-Lichte relates the potential of change of performance to the instant. She uses Turner’s term “liminality” to explain how, during a performance piece, the conditions of existing are altered and new possibilities are opened the same way it happens in social rituals that constitute real life, with the fundamental difference that in performance art, the change is transitory and inseparable to the circumstances and the rules of the show.

These notions put very close theater direction with research about ways of existing and the discovery of new paths for the biographical self, in a trusty atmosphere with safe islands of permissiveness. In performance, the possibility of going further, stepping back, making big leaps, and skipping steps are always on. This addition to the classic understanding of theater direction is particularly intense in the arts of the body and the performance that is strongly based on movement. In all cases, the director and dramaturges are making propositions to the bodies involved, designing a path to be walked by a certain biography, displaying a series of experiences for the chemistry of the body, which in its overwhelming complexity will always deliver a B version of itself.

³² *A thousand plateaus, AntiOedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, What is philosophy*, among others.

³³ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 270.

To observe the world as an accumulation of compositions is quite provoking from the point of view of arts, especially when it addresses micropolitics and subversion. That's the reason why D&G³⁴ ideas have been in constant mention in the commentaries about dance and performance practices in recent years.

D&G describe different ways to operate over compositions, re-composing or altering the flows of the compositions using the *lines* that compose them, and their structure. This works by identifying *molar* strong lines that stratify the flows, build up essences and protect stability and institutionalizations. On the other hand, this analysis shows the *molecular* fugue lines in which the flow of desire runs away from the instituted and produces a singularity, an exception, an experiment.

With an analysis of the lines like this, it is possible to envision a way to subvert the established order at the interior of the composition.

From this architectural description of existence, the dramaturgical composition of *High* as a performance piece runs in parallel with the potential re-composition of the bodies involved in it. Including all of the markers I mentioned before, sex, gender, and sexual preference, but also skin color, geographical origin, age, the abilities of the body, the capacity of the mind, heart, etc.

Both the show and the bodies have molar sections produced by strong lines (norms of use of the stage and the body, ways to represent and limits not to surpass) and molecular regions that display softer constitutions, experimental areas, a space for desire and potentiality, where its possible to find the conditioners (time, space) the *dynamizers* (the body, the movement, the desire), and the unknowns (the finalization, the participation of the audience).

3. Plane of immanence

The term *plane of immanence* is key to tensely relate the compositions in its many layers. It works to display a link between the characteristics of the show and the

³⁴ From this moment I'll start using this expression to shorten the mention of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

potential experimentation with the molecular expression of our masculinity inside of it. *Plane of immanence* is named by D&G to describe both the project and the realization of a destratification of a composition and the establishment of a period of open possibilities, a fugue, an anomaly.

A plane of immanence only belongs to the time it produces, and it's produced only by elements in the process of differing from themselves, of *becoming*.

In the case that we can affirm that a part of our expression of gender differed from itself during the show it is strictly related to the characteristics of it and its duration. It is immanent precisely because it cannot outgrow the show, it is attached to the show and perpetrated with the technical elements of the show: bodies, objects, lights, sound, rhythm, speed, signs, meaning, etc.

To compose *High* represents building a space of possibilities with altered rules opposite to the *plane of organization* that determines our gender expressions among all of the others in social life out of the show, which is the transcendental principle of the distribution of our power, dominated by strata, molar lines and structured individuals with defined identities. On the other hand, in the plane of immanence “unformed elements and materials dance and are distinguished from one another only by their speed and enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relations of movement”³⁵, it is a project (in the sense of a *to-do* process), but also as a material *projection* of a manifestation over the surface of another materiality, “no longer tied to a mental design”³⁶ but a display of “proliferation, peopling, contagion”³⁷.

Deleuze and Guattari describe the plane of immanence as the place where the singularity and minor gestures appear, as a break from generalities and major/dominant expressions of the self.

The plane of organization or development effectively covers what we have called stratification: Forms and subjects, organs and functions, are "strata" or relations between

³⁵ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 259.

³⁶ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *idem*, p. 266.

³⁷ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *idem*, p. 267.

strata. The plane of consistency or immanence, on the other hand, implies a destratification of all of Nature, by even the most artificial of means.³⁸

The whole sense of opposing immanence to organization, minor to major, and stability against constant transformation, is to depict the principle of displacement from both subjects and institutions into *becomings* or *haecceities*. These terms appear to name the self as a territory of chance instead of a territory of limits.

Haecceity is a term created by the philosopher John Duns Scotus, which means “a this thing”, a way to refer to a manifestation of the self that cannot be described by its relations with anything else than itself. When no concept applies to a particular existence and, in response, can't be described as a cat, a stone, a man, or a woman. What is this? A temporary manifestation of the being, hard to classify, and that, in response, must be named by its apparition, it is nothing but what we are experiencing here in front of it. A *this thing*. Because of its transience, it represents a *becoming* instead of a being, a moment of the intensification of a certain node of molar lines where its molecularity outgrew the stability and became something else.

The possibility of the eruption of a plane of immanence, where the identities become hard to define and the whole situation is perceived as a process of destratification, is depicted by D&G as a work extremely precise. It also implies a certain operation on the energy of the *fail*. The whole meaning of such an attempt is producing a variety of failures that damages the strength of the systems that keep the molarity erected, this softens the pillars and melts the solidifications. In the piece, as a strategy, we build an atmosphere where we can fail as normative heterosexual masculinities. The error is a gap in the social construct of the masculine male, and the gestures produced inside of this error are the momentum of the *production* of the self. We fail as what we socially are to facilitate emerging as a temporary new.

I can relate this sensation of *failure* to the awkwardness that dominates the experience for a big part of the show. And also, the sensation of assertiveness despite the discomfort experienced during both the rehearsals and the shows. When I asked myself early in this text, why were we continuing further on the path of discomfort or what were we experiencing that was pushing us to behave in such a

³⁸ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 269-270.

way, I think we were touching the fertility of the error and the crack of our system of limits. Via the error we were experiencing new corners of freedom for these bodies, so, in a way, the mistake was necessary and not a failure at all.

If we consider that the heterosexual normative masculinity was the node of strata that keep our identities ruled and limited to a certain expression, it would be a matter of planning to get from this rocky institution to a liquid fluent variety of ways of being. To become into an indetermination that is hard to name, but close to the singular *haecceity*, a process.

4. Paradoxes inside masculinity

In retrospect, I can identify a series of actual decisions as performance director that were putting us in this state of indetermination, where my limits and molar expression could be softened. It is possible to link an existential becoming for me in this show according to the connections or expositions between elements that were transporting the flow of some indetermination. As I mentioned in the first part, it was a matter of intensifying the proximity of the bodies and entering the sensorial realm (the sweat and smell, and the feeling of the muscular strength) the key element for me to turn off my presumptions of how close I was permitting myself to go into the other's body. Of course, I can identify that this set of limits is related, among many other factors, to the molarity of my gender and sexual preference normative expression. However, during the show, It was possible for me to be comfortable in extremely direct contact with private parts of the body of my partners in an assertive mind/body set.

From this point of view, for example, the intensification of the touch is a manner to surpass the limits of the pain as socially determined with the aim of constituting a unique body with the parts of the three of us. According to Derrida's statement, "no one can caress anyone without caressing oneself"³⁹, the bodies in extreme contact were becoming one since it's impossible to produce pain in another's body without suffering the pain ourselves. In this stage, the tendency to self-destruction,

³⁹ Chapter IV of *On touching. Jean-Luc Nancy* is a dissertation on the vast territories of touch, where hitting and caressing gain a central focus in the discussion about intensity. J. Derrida, *El tocar, Jean-Luc Nancy*, Amorrortu, 2011.

endurance, courage, and resistance usually associated with normative masculinity opens space to unusual manifestations of desire. We were hitting and allowing being hit not as a routine for proving our masculinity, not as a sacrifice of the body to dominate and rule a space, but as a process of pleasure and desire: we were doing it because we wanted it, because we built up the atmosphere to allow that for ourselves, and because we discovered that we could.

The same formulation is possible with fury and anger. I can declare that the big fuel of energy that I needed to perform the *solò* and the extremely demanding delivery of energy of the last part was only triggered by a genuine sensation of anger. One of the hidden processes behind this was a direct indication I gave to Aljoshia to “mess with me”, which means to disturb me, provoke me, tease me. My collaborator tried every time different ways to produce inside of me a real sensation of offense, that would lead to fury and a necessity to fight, which I would accumulate and use to dance minutes after.

The miracle here is the fact that we were able to define a show where all of these stimuli are not forbidden but used and transformed. In my understanding, that is exactly what D&G mean when explaining that a plane of immanence is gonna affect the plan of organization using the same lines that compose it. The fact that we have managed to remain playful touching these very delicate fibers, and activating all of these dimensions of *the real* (the show has been full of real blood, real tears, real rubbing and touching of intimate parts) is a characteristic that I can name as one of the structural reasons why this show gets to its goals from my point of view as its director.

5.- Integration, touch, contamination

The plane of immanence is an intersection that brings into coexistence any number of multiplicities, with any number of dimensions (...) the intersection of all concrete forms.⁴⁰

The many elements that constitute the show are spread on the stage, and available to connect with, in an open dramaturgy, without any molar indication of how and when those are to be used. We left open the possibility to look for intense flows and

⁴⁰ G.Deleuze, F.Guattari, *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 251.

become with them. This might be a song or a piece of fabric, a particular gesture of the body or assuming a certain position in a section of the stage, a moment of interaction with an audience member, or the construction of a certain structure with the objects in the center of the stage. The body is implied in all of these actions becoming fabric, light, speed, music, and keeping its way on until the next wave. What lies in the middle is our associative power and the one from the audience that integrates the whole composition into another that includes them as connectors but also as elements of the connection of the other audience members.

The display of the scene, where everyone is quite visible to the others was a key element of the contagion of the energy when the reaction was shared and experienced as a whole, where everyone is “a degree, an intensity, is an individual, a Haecceity that enters into composition with other degrees, other intensities, to form another individual”.⁴¹

Putting the body not as the generator of meaning, but as the transporter of a flow opens its possibilities. The display of heterogeneous elements that might get in touch is gonna determine the becomings of these bodies, which, in the end, is an unknown and a question. The *Spinozist* fundamental statement “nobody knows what a body can”⁴² it's an invitation to discover how much one can differ from oneself in exposure to other singularities. If it's true that “becoming is the process of desire. This principle of proximity or approximation is entirely particular and reintroduces no analogy whatsoever. It indicates as rigorously as possible a zone of proximity or copresence”⁴³, then the strategy of accumulating elements in a determined section of space and time and organizing a way to overcome judgment by a variety of means, might be enough to analyze the event as a moment for differing from ourselves.

Why are there so many becomings of man, but no becoming-man? First, because man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. It is not a question of knowing

⁴¹ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *idem*, p. 253.

⁴² B. Spinoza, *Ethics*. Hafner Publishing Company. New York. 1954.

⁴³ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 272.

whether there are more mosquitoes or flies than men, but of knowing how "man" constituted a standard in the universe in relation to which men necessarily (analytically) form a majority.⁴⁴

Therefore, while we were not becoming, we were being heterosexual normative masculine men, while the only way not to be it, is by becoming whatever else. To achieve the state of *becoming*. This principle of uncertainty reveals itself to me as fundamental for an experiment on masculinities. As a temporary conclusion I must declare that, in terms of experimenting with the performative of masculine, it is fundamental not to determine what I'm gonna become during the show, and not to display a series of gestures where my hegemonic masculinity is defeated, attempting to explicitly perform in a less standardized heterosexual way. On the contrary, it's more important to be sure that the elements I choose to be in touch with are putting me in the state of taking distance from me, failing, and making the normative masculine fail with me.

Watching the videos of the show I remember dancing in ways that are related to my memories of women dancing to a song in musical videos. This association would never be possible if the pop song that triggers this effect on my body would never appear, but also, if I were not exhausted, with the lights off, naked, and watched by thirty witnesses. That gesture might be considered less stereotypical than competing via push-ups of wrestling until the other one gives up, but the whole attempt is aligned with the same spirit of difference. From this point of view, an essay about pure difference⁴⁵ is maybe more possible with this show than a statement about normative/experimental masculinities.

⁴⁴ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, idem, p. 291.

⁴⁵ *Difference and repetition* is another text by Gilles Deleuze that would work as a way to accompany the discussions that this show might trigger.
G. Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, Continuum, 1994.

Chapter Three

High or the performativity of trance

1. The terms

High and *ecstasy* were the destabilizers of the binarity hegemonic/diverse masculinity. If the masculine is sometimes a sad global stereotype, and other times an element in the process of self-rescue via the quest for a new expression of itself (the so-called new masculinities), the highness and, even more, the ecstasy, were there to put another layer to the composition. Both appeared there to establish a horizon, a challenge, or a *b* moment as in the statement: "These men, being as stereotypical or diverse as they are, are gonna get *high*".

Ecstasy is a term derived from pre-modern ages, normally associated with a religious genealogy, where the connection with the *total* (god, universe, transcendental power) positions the individual "out of him or her self", in a realm of extreme joy or pleasure.

Ecstasy is the effect of rituals and spiritual exercises in many religious traditions, the anthropologist Mircea Eliade defines it in this way:

Ecstasy (above any other phenomena) is a transcendence of the human condition, perhaps both an escape and a superior understanding of it.⁴⁶

The traces of altered states, trance sequences that might last, days, weeks, and even an entire lifetime, are normally associated with reduced awareness of reality, an extrapolation of the sensorial experience of the world, euphoria, and infinite happiness. The perception of wholeness is described as the top spiritual experience in traditions as diverse as Greek, Buddhist, Hinduist, Christian, and Sufi. Each one of them explains the maximum intensification of the connection with the whole (God, in some cases) as a methodic practice that demands a process of separation of the banality of the world and the triggering of a different way to experience existence,

⁴⁶ P.Thompson, *Antonin Artaud: Ecstasy and Culture*, Brown University, 1975, p. 5.

which only some humans are able to achieve and it's usually mean to become a legend as a religious practitioner.

The portrait of Saint Therese from Ávila illustrates transparently what are the characteristics of the ecstatic state in terms of the use of the body. The sensation of being under the influence of the sacred, directly touched by the holy spirit, or even possessed by the presence of god or any other saint usually put the body in a position of abandonment, with an enigmatic gesture that combines joy with a melancholic touch, with the eyes out of function and the fluids out of control, particularly tears and sweat.

The connections with sexual climax are also some of the first associations of the expression, reaching the ecstasy would be, then, high states of peak sensations, superlative enjoyment, loss of reason, and the end of the dominance of the brain as the conductor of the experiences of the body.

Ecstasy is also the name of a powerful drug associated with party and peaceful communion. *High* is the informal way to refer to an altered state produced by drugs, but also by other factors, such as fun or love. I found a particularly interesting topographic meaning (being high as being up, or going high, or dancing higher) as the manifestation of any *crescendo* of a phenomenon. *High* is a powerful term with many performative possible results, like the sense of accumulation or intensification of a process, or even the direct positioning of the bodies on the scene. It's a term with choreographic and scenographic potential.

2. Ecstatic theater

The associations between *ecstatic* states with artistic and nonartistic performances are recurrent throughout the centuries. The mere origin of theater is traditionally associated with the Bacchus festivals in ancient Greece *Dionysias*, which used to include drugged, dancing trances where the reason was turned off and the bodies were establishing a temporarily altered distribution of the energy. In the modern tradition theater revitalizers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Antonin Artaud addressed directly the methodic disorganization of the reasoned movement and action as a

central matter of theater. Nietzsche, in *The Origin of Tragedy*, proposes the Dionysiac input of the tragedy versus the Apollonian organization of the literary theater as a dynamizer not only of theater but culture itself. In a similar way, Antonin Artaud transported his own ecstatic experiences experimenting with drugs to envision a “bridge” that connects everyday life with a “paradise or golden age”, a “temporary ascension” which “is an enhancement of the basic energy of life”.⁴⁷

Artaud is above all antagonistic to limits, and it seems clear that “stasis” is for him any fixed or limited state(...) he seems to take the same approach in his increasing involvement of ecstasy in cultural values; he insists in a particular pattern of movements, access or passage out of given conditions, or a kind of suspension out of fixed forms. He develops this abstract idea of ecstasy much more than the vague kinds of “frenzy” or “rapture” that are commonly and unanalytically referred to as ecstatic.⁴⁸

In many ways, this ecstatic tradition has continued especially as a strong part of modern, contemporary, and postmodern dance, as well as the many body-based practices performance art involves nowadays. Anna Missopolinou, for example, used this formula to describe Jerzy Grotowsky’s orientation of training and his gradual abandonment of performance shows when gaining interest in para-theatrical practices that would take place in scenarios away from the art market. For her, Grotowsky “appears to have developed a special affinity to ecstatic and healing rituals, the methods and principles of which were applied by his performers”⁴⁹ and became a priority and even the goal of the work of the body and the matter of his efforts.

The work of these artists is key to understand the ways theater, dance, and performance have kept an eye on the group intensification of the bodies. Dancing and moving irrationally is a gesture that has constantly been appearing on the stages during 20th and 21st Centuries.

⁴⁷ P.Thompson, *Antonin Artaud: Ecstasy and Culture*, Brown University, 1975, p. 5.

⁴⁸ P.Thompson, *idem*, p. 9.

⁴⁹ A.Misopolinou, *Grotowski: Ecstasy and Initiation in Performance*. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London.

It's possible to track the tendency in many theatrical traditions, to produce a theater that “act(s) on the senses and the nerves of the spectators”⁵⁰. And operates by exposing the bodies to huge loads of sensorial stimuli. Producing a journey in intensity⁵¹ that might be related to the ecstatic experience in the laic ecosystem of 20th Century theater.

I found mesmerizing the telling Erika Fischer-Lichte made at her conference in the Segal Theater Center⁵² in 2016, about the mass spectacles of Max Reinhardt, in which he made a series of adaptations of classic texts where the sensorial effects over the ear (the chorus was performed by a group of almost one hundred performers who were prepared to de-semanticize the texts and open the possibility for the pure emission of voice sound very close to the spectator), the eye (the shows were designed to be performed inside of arenas, where the visual experience was particularly curated pushing several technical devices to perform sequences of electric lights and color, this in the first decades of the 20th Century), and the smell (the experimentation with materials usually led to add a smelly layer to the shows with the use of natural materials and smoke), were producing a “strong physical impact” on massive audiences of more than two thousand spectators.

Georg Fuchs, Reinhardt’s collaborator and former disciple of Nietzsche, believed in the more than narrative potential of theater, where you could experience a journey in the body as much as on the meaning and understanding, for him, therefore, “acting is the rhythmical movement of the human body on space, executed out of the creative urge to express an emotion through the means of the own body, with the aim of throwing off the inner urge with such a passion that leads other people into the same or similar ecstasy”⁵³. Lehman would include as one of the postdramatic manifestations of theater, that one where, instead of following the development of a

⁵⁰ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*. Conference on the memory of Gerould. Martin E. Segal Theater Center. 2016. Watched 10.05.23
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSshi5BPWSU&t=4227s>.

⁵¹ This is a term also presented by Deleuze and Guattari to name the experiences of displacement that occur inside of the same body when it achieves an experimental “mode”.

⁵² E. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*. Conference on the memory of Gerould. Martin E. Segal Theater Center. 2016. Watched 10.05.23.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSshi5BPWSU&t=4227s>.

⁵³ G. Fuchs, *The revolution of the theatre: conclusions concerning the Munich Artists Theatre*. Kennikat Press, 1959. p. 5-6.

textual narrative, a certain “texture of perception”⁵⁴ is built up, kept, and bold as the thread of the attention of the spectator.

Lyotard’s “energetic theater” also speaks for an experience produced out of “forces, intensities, present affects”⁵⁵, this is an act to liberate theater as an event from the theater as a representation. The postmodern association of representational drama and modernity pushed the need to formulate a theater in which the thread to follow is a sequence of events, a “concrete theater” that puts in line a series of happenings involving the whole theatrical machinery.

Gilles Deleuze in his doctoral thesis *Difference and Repetition*, also makes use of the description of a nonrepresentative theater, that exceeds its responsibility of communicating via signs, attempting to produce, instead, an actual movement of the energies and the bodies involved.

Updating or actualizing forces and movements, a multiplicity of forces and movements, different from each other, and this without going through mediations, is what Deleuze calls here repeating. (...) He proposes a compact formula that underlines what the theater brings into play when it brings into play movements (which, in turn, update or actualize forces): that of a theater of repetition.⁵⁶

3. Journey in intensity

With this variety of terms and theater conceptualizations I’m not aiming to determine the gradients of representativeness or unrepresentativeness of a piece, nor to capture the moment when representation is successfully canceled from the theater as a victory over modernity. Rather, I try to acknowledge what are the traces of an intensification of the body or the potential *possession* of the performers and the audience members that might occur in contemporary theater and that might be

⁵⁴ H-T. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006, p. 85.

⁵⁵ J-F. Lyotard, *The Tooth, the Palm*, in T. Murray (ed.), *Mimesis, Masochism and Mime: Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977, p. 13.

⁵⁶ J-F. Chevalier, *Deleuze et le théâtre. Rompre avec la représentation*, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2015, p. 30.

related to the long history of the term *ecstasy*. There is a certain sensorial intensification of the happenings on the stage that constitutes a journey of the body, that establishes a new force or energy that *takes* the body and transports it towards unknown places. The effects of a display of energies, a combination of elements inside of an atmosphere dominated by loudness, alteration of the sight, and saturation of stimuli.

Here I'm focusing on the means to spread or irradiate energy from the stage that involves the audience in a sensorial way. Music and smell, for example, are direct means to display such an effect. From Fische-Lichte's point of view, this happens because sound, as a physical process "resonates and continues affects vibrating in the bodies" and smell is impossible to block since it is connected to the "physical act of breathing".⁵⁷

In both cases, both physical elements infiltrate the body in a manner impossible to stop, unless you abandon the room or cancel your automatic processes. The shared atmosphere and experiences are going on from the moment everyone in the room is perceiving the same.

In *High. Two or three words about ecstatic masculinity*, the access to a state of pure joy and recreation with ourselves were successfully achieved according to the dramaturgy (or anti-dramaturgy) devised for this effect. On it, many dynamics of the mentioned ritualistic methods to ascend into "the absolute" were practiced with successful effects: it is a communal experience based on the inversion of the order of the body, the mind is distracted and the flows of the body take over as the threads to knit a surprising experience. It is a frantic dance that works after a determinate period of time where the exhausted bodies abandon the rule of the reaction and open space for other forces to control the ways to go, particularly, the music and the connection with "objects of power"⁵⁸. It is a spectacle to be entertained, a display of wonders displayed to prove the "magic touch" of the practitioners. It is intended to

⁵⁷ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*. Conference on the memory of Gerould. Martin E. Segal Theater Center. 2016. Watched 10.05.23.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSshi5BPWSU&t=4227s>.

⁵⁸ Mircea Eliade describes the varied use of all kinds of materials that work as the connectors of the "normal body" with divinity and magic. Sticks, stones, fire, water...and of course animals or parts of dead animals.

spread its effect on the audience, producing a whole ambient or atmosphere of excess and fluids. The music was absolutely loud, we were sharing a steamy environment where the smell of the sweating bodies was preeminent, in an already activated non-semantic use of speech and voice, with the direct aim of creating an environment of open performative possibilities. Being playful with the logos and addressing constantly the bodies as protagonists of the piece (either ours or the one of the audience) produced a pendulating movement from a distant judgment and merged acting.

4. Rave culture and politics of the dance floor

In the summer of 2021 I had the chance to be a part of the Santarcangelo Festival where I could watch a series of shows and projects that were highly influential for my proposition of an *ecstatic* show. *Jezebel*⁵⁹ by Cherish Menzo was a solo performance where the dancer was quoting the hypersexualized gestural alphabet of the dancers of the hip-hop video clips, building a controversial performance where it was not absolutely clear what was the use of the intensified eroticism of the show, but that was working perfectly on the bodies of the audience with its steady musical immersion and effective use of lights and paraphernalia. *Be water, my friends*⁶⁰, was a collective show organized by Mara Oscar Cassiani that happened in the huge extension of a football court, and started with a youngster's choreography and ended as a dancing invasion from the audience, absolutely possessed by the effectiveness of the italo-disco Dj'ing and the references to Bruce Lee philosophy of the body. In a more direct way, the parties organized by the "political" section of the research project *How to be together*, addressed directly the fusion between party, rave culture, and the display of a utopic atmosphere of obtained desires and the liberation of the self via communion with others.

All of these projects were a manifestation of a contemporary turn, that is using the energy of the rave culture for the re-intensification of dance to empower and bold

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQ1fflr0eXk&list=PLjhqZi6k4-zj_I6usA66M62cBTCySw044&index=21.

⁶⁰

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1eOxxYZM2c&list=PLjhqZi6k4-zj_I6usA66M62cBTCySw044&index=13.

21st Century performance. In many ways, rave culture is the ultra-postmodern manifestation of the ecstatic rituals of previous eras, and has been defended by many academics as a popular manifestation of the quest for reconciliation with one's own body and others.

In his text about the evolution of the rave culture as a space for re-appropriation, Herman Ott mentioned raves as “ecstatic celebrations”⁶¹ where “physical places were transformed into festive moments”⁶², “that catalyzed a strange wondrous atmosphere of collective intimacy”.⁶³

Here *ecstasy* reappears as an actual substance (MDMA popularly known as Ecstasy or simply E), a potent drug that tours all along the whole effect of alienation on the practitioners in the same way the herbs worked in the classic Greek *Dionysias* and the peyote worked to help Artaud to envision his Theater of Cruelty. The rave as a working-class massive ritual of communion, runout of authorship, and masking of identities is a potent comparative figure to animate contemporary approaches to academic and professional dance. The collective production of a “living text”⁶⁴ of raves within its immanent indiscernibility operates inside of the body in a more radical way than the experiences described by Ficher Lichte about Reindhart’s mass events. Here, a drugged community goes and goes dancing fed by an invisible Dj that only connects with the other via the rhythm, to the point that the experiencers of them felt that *dancing on E feels like being inside the music*⁶⁵. It is a merge, a reconnection, an erasing of the limits of the body and individuality.

It is important for me to address the complexity of the contemporary version of the ecstatic ritual, in a time where ecstasy is a pill synthesized in laboratories and spread to young and energetic communities. Being *high* or getting *high* depicts in a more accurate way the possible access of the individual to unknown forces that revitalize existence and triggers moments of radical enjoyment of life. The explosion of the

⁶¹ B.L.Ott, *Mixed messages. Resistance and Reappropriation in Rave Culture*, Western Journal of Communication, 67 (3) (Summer 2003), p. 252.

⁶² B.L.Ott, *idem*, p. 254.

⁶³ B.L.Ott, *idem*, p. 259.

⁶⁴ Gaillot, M. *Multiple meaning techno: An artistic and political laboratory of the present*, Editions Dis Voir, 1999, p. 52-53.

⁶⁵ B.L.Ott, *Mixed messages. Resistance and Reappropriation in Rave Culture*, Western Journal of Communication, 67 (3) (Summer 2003), p. 258.

barriers and the construction of a temporary autonomous zone coexists with the inevitability of the *low*⁶⁶ and the reunion of forces to organize the next event.

Establishing a project as the laboratory for the production of serotonin, regaining the sacrality of human energy as the generator of its own pleasure, and reconnecting with human peers in controlled and violent-zero atmospheres sound like a goal entertaining to pursue.

5.- The men in search of meaning (on stage)

It is necessary to address that the relation of *High* with religious rituals and the naming of the show as an *ecstatic* scene is framed in an ultramodern, laic, and even ironic way. *Ecstasy* works as a horizon for the expectancies we deposited on it and the references that I present now were not a part of the research. The result was a stumble process and a stumble shows that our bodies suffered in many moments because of the responsibility of keeping a performance show going, with certain characteristics of a ritual of methodological madness. Despite how far we were feeling from making a point out of the gestures improvised, the mere envisioning of “the threat of nothingness”⁶⁷, was a menace that we were supposed to recover from minute by minute, employing strategies to continue and to enhance our motivation. Here, *high* and *low* topographic positions are transformed into the existential statuses of the individual. It is a fight that is particularly present in contemporary societies and was addressed during the creative process. We needed to get high desperately, we were looking for ecstasy surrounded by a gloomy atmosphere, with a pack of bodies devastated by the consequences of savage capitalism, war, and COVID-19 pandemics. Nietzsche and Artaud were non-addressed presences when we attempted this piece as a manner to interrupt a certain oppressive flow in the culture enhancing our energy and displaying manifestations of happy chaos. In the same way, rave culture was there to provide us with the direct DIY to a handful of random ultra-industrial materials to compose a joyful celebration of pure movement, cool lights, magic encounters, and great songs.

⁶⁶ In rave and pop culture this is the term to name a *quasi-depressive* moment that follows the end of the effect of the drugs in the body.

⁶⁷ H-T. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006, p. 99.

We addressed this state by adding a literary intro that is supposed to be read by a different woman every show.

Hello everybody

Welcome everybody

We are very happy that you are here

This is late in the evening, though week

You must be tired, I am

(small pause)

So, what do you do when you are tired?

Or bored

Or sad

Or angry

What kind of things have you tried to improve your mood?

When was the last time that you got high? Who was there?

What was the key element?

It's true that it has become harder and harder

Times when I needed nothing but a playground, sand and the girl of my dreams are gone

It has become harder and harder not to care about anything to many things to be solved

Big crisis everywhere

I cannot waste time just like that anymore

I guess I'm slowly becoming an adult

It's on me now

Times are hard

But the harder the times the harder my need

I'm gonna get high against all odds
And keep highness as long as possible

This is a work in process
I don't think is gonna be complete ever
So I'm gonna keep on trying new things
Everytime
(small pause)

Feel free to move all around the place
You can sit
You can stand
You can run
You can jump
And you can get as close as you want
Keep it real
I love you

Tiredness and pessimism are a constant, politics and economics push us to give up on continuing and start adventures. Still, we felt the responsibility of enjoying our lives and keep connecting, merging, and looking for belonging or satisfaction. *High* as a piece addresses this A state, a place for uncertainty and stress, an obligation to exercise ourselves as humans with agency, creativity, and imagination.

All of this process, which is saturated with concepts and overthinking, reaches its critical moments when attempting to reach the other. Sex and love are dramatic experiences, instead of doing nothing and staying alone with our heaviness, we attempt to find in the sensorial connection some kind of awakening of the spirit, a reason, a meaning for everyday actions. These situations are normally awkward and sensitive spirits run away to the intimate loneliness in order not to feel again the failure of the exposition or opening to the other.

We can say that the same process we are living in everyday life we were also living it while rehearsing and showing this piece: what for going to the encounter of the

other? Is there some clue hidden in the body that can trigger the true belonging to a sensorial shared realm? Is it possible to defeat the regular heaviness and down feelings with the exchange of affects with another one?

High is desperate on the impossibilities that it addresses, it regularly looks forced and might be considered a failure during a big part of its length. *Ridiculous* or *unwatchable* were some of the qualifiers that we received since it is not based on a system that is made to succeed, but on a transposition of an existential situation that most of the time we are not able to surpass in real life, with life compromising consequences.

However, we as performers were able to access *highness* every time during the shows, and most of the time during the rehearsals.

Being *ecstatic*, maybe we achieved it two or three times during the entire process.

6. Dramaturgy, equations for *highness*

I made the proposition of connecting highness with physical intense actions recalling the way I personally deal with emotional blocks, anxiety, or pure misery. While jogging and playing loud techno or rock music I try to explode a flow of energy that is hidden inside of my body and directly connected with positivity, hope, and affirmation. It does not happen every time, it's not really in my control to access even when the elements are the same almost every time. It depends on the way I run, the energy I count on, and the perfect synchronization of my needs and the perfect song, the perfect space to increase the speed, the amount of effort that I need to go in determinate paths.

Sometimes the perfect song comes but I don't have the energy, sometimes the music sounds dull and never appears to save the day, sometimes the place is not adequate and the power can not be released. It's a tricky management of factors.

The key principle activated by this piece is the transformation of low energies into highness, triggering a sense of enjoyment exactly in moments of loss and heaviness.

This is some kind of alchemy of the mood that appeals to a positiveness that resides hidden in the body and that is activated via the movement.

It's important, then, to address the elements that are added to the equation when I transform this personal experience into a performance of my direction.

1.- There are other two bodies with their particular archives and biographical approaches to mood and movement that I can not anticipate.

2.- There are other bodies that are there, in the first instance, to watch the show and compare its effectiveness to fulfill artistic expectations.

3.- The elements that are crucial for my personal process obtain here a second meaning as theater signs. Music, light, the dimension of the space, the rhythm and speed of the delivery of the information, etc. This means, a certain responsibility derived from my position as director.

Luckily, the aim to get high was embraced by my partners and defended as a legit aim for a performance show. During the whole process, we were able to establish an alphabet of events that would be very useful to name the different states that we were experiencing at every rehearsal and every show. *I was dead* (tired), I was lost, I was really following you, I was *really there*, I was pushing too much, It wasn't working, where the most repeated expressions in the process of pulling an act of reconnection with the possibility of being extremely happy.

This is a quite valuable turn of events, considering that having an aim with a performance (other than just performing it) it's not always necessary or required. I can name the complicity built among me and my colleagues as a fundamental element of the empowerment of this show. Being together with an existential goal, with the structural conditions of a theatrical act is a very complex and delicate situation, and we succeeded in going in the same direction together.

The fact that in my case, I was always accessing highness during the shows, and most of the time during rehearsal, points out the necessity of the audience for the

event to happen, and the functioning of the event on the experience of the audience. The thrill of the contemplation of the spectator was always pushing me further, resisting more, increasing the speed, and varying the possibilities of my movement and my actions. Those were so intense that they were able to stop momentarily the logos in just the required way to *react* to the combination with empowering results. In rehearsal, the phase of proposing, experimenting, and testing the effectiveness of the exercises was always an anchor to the logos of the director, who is normally compelled with making smart decisions. On the stage, with eyes on me, I was more able to be elevated from my own judgment and connect with the context in a material way: everything might be a stimulus and a motive for constant variation and enjoyment, a light, a spot of the space, a member of the audience, the movements of one of my colleagues.

7. The audience as an intensifier

The open feedback with the audience was effective according to the commentaries we received. The piece was creating an atmosphere of open possibilities, the enjoyment was visible, and the immersion was an option to take. The effect of wanting to join but not being sure the rules of the show allowed them was constant, and the pure going with the flow, dancing on the seat, and having a nice time was experienced by some audience members.

The question of if this show is only accessible to people with a tendency to like parties and music clubs is, of course, valid. This show is undoubtedly hysteric and weird. The sensitivity of some individuals might (and was) affected by the way we intensify effects in an almost violent way (via the harsh contact among us the performers, the way we manipulated objects, and the loudness of the music, for example), and the sense of the validity of it might be questionable according to dramaturgical decisions. We were always feeling that the initial part was too long, where we were mostly rolling on the floor, biting and smelling each other, producing pain mutually, and fighting for a closer touch, of course, this was related to the fact that hard times are experienced as longer and struggle and life is directly connected with an elongation of time. The second part, when we were dancing and having an ecstatic good time, was usually too short for us and too long for the audience, since

there was less space for detail and the saturation produced an effect of tiredness on the audience.

The combination of one low awkward part followed by one high dancing part was not leaving room for a post-discovery *after* the highness. Is the *highness* a goal or a mean, we were asking when we tried to alter the linearity and open room for new experiences.

The version of a three parts show appeared when we decided to open a whole ending part, again without a music and focused on the detail of the contact of the bodies. This version proved to be even more difficult to perform since we needed a long initial part to access highness, and the anti-climatic ending was confusing to our state, the logos came back to reign and the awkwardness domain the general feeling, which was an effect not desired by us.

So far, the most effective version of our show is composed of a porous combination of *rave moments*, with other periods without music, where we can endure the true struggle of pure contact, and “stay with the situations”. This mixed second part was synchronized with the variations of the music and the way it should push the dramaturgy.

The audience in this show represents both the social judgment and the energy receiver of our practices. As social normativity, it establishes the limits of behavior and constitutes the establishment to defy. The fact that devised theater has a thin layer of separation between pure theater and the affections that occur on *the real*, we keep a playful door open to understand our act as real as our seat and our tears, which are, in many cases tricked by triggers that we created in the rehearsal process and pretty much under our control nowadays.

However, we have managed never to lose the thrill of being watched dancing naked, showing our imperfections, struggling with our lack of meaning and with our potential lack of importance.

On the other side, we have experienced how the madness is a flow that is present in many bodies, and similar strategies as ours are tried in contexts outside of our show: the body recognizes movement, rhythm, and collectiveness as transporters of the sacred energy of happiness, and, no matter how dark the times are, we are able always to dance the pain away and find the ecstasy inside of the body, hidden in some spots where the sweaty skin touches other sweaty skin and both share the same heat, the same fulfillment.

Conclusion

With the work of analysis practiced during the elaboration of this thesis I can approximate a series of conclusions on how masculinity and ecstasy interact in a theater piece.

I consider both terms actualize each other when they are put in contact. Masculine boundaries are hard to defy inside of the patriarchy, and the demand of making sense every time and accumulating power and importance are orders that require a structure of experimentation full of traps. The goal is to produce failure on the system that erects man as the dominant individual and essay ways to elaborate performatively this fall, to document it, to obtain cues out of it. Accessing to *highness*, and losing control in a ritualized way might be a strategy because it includes opening space for the unknown otherness.

On the other side, *ecstasy* requires an existent sensorial body to occur. Contemporary times have separated people from satisfaction, and the tendency to survive without hope is increasing with the passing of time and generations. However, pleasure and joy are there, close to the skin, on the experience of the other and the hearing of every single opinion, and the elaboration of the agreements on how far the group is able to go. If in the past the wizard would gain recognition because of his way to transform energy, the same principle is available now, only that distributed in many bodies that together generate the spark. The possibility of being able to differ from oneself will always display a layer of hope inside of all the impossibilities.

Masculinity and highness do not always interact in a positive way. The role of the audience in *High* is also of great importance to keep it as an ethical exercise and a propositive performance piece. As we could test from the initial phase when we invited different female dramaturges to orientate us, and during the whole process with the strong presence of our main advisor and our classmates, we could test the importance of the monitoring of men-organized action. The commentaries re-shaped the piece consistently and the exercise was similar to a process of modeling our inner tendencies, both the shiny and funny and the dark shameful ones. Gestures

that were *beyond the tolerable* were erased and this decision helped the piece to stay on its foot.

In a way, I confirm my own preference to conceive theater not just as *pure emanations* of diverse inputs, but as a laboratory of observance, qualification, and elaboration of new rules and regulations, even if I'm also aware that this responsibility exceeds the functions of theater and belongs more to the field of social sciences, from the point of view of some creators.

My impression at the end of this creative process is of an enormous satisfaction derived from finding in which ways the events configure themselves, and the tools that are available to configure a project close to the individual, almost a prolongation of the same process of breathing, eating, loving.

Safe environments, patience, self-care during the hard times of work, constant studying, and accurate analysis are basics that reveal fundamentals for the kind of work I appreciate the most. Against all odds, such a tricky terrain as masculinity was shaken inside of my own existence with some analyzable consequences in the body of others. In the transitory field of performance, I found ways to be and modes to establish a relationship with others that were true findings for me.

With the help of collaborators, I managed to be close and distant enough to project a third part, which is the piece itself, and to extrapolate an issue that expresses inside of my body, but that runs through me as a member of occidental society.

The title of my thesis one year ago was supposed to be *Big issues small actions*, to name the propensity of choosing always subjects of extremely dense complexity and proceeding to attack their inexplicability with raw actions, misconnected gestures, and minor manifestations of human capability.

Above everything I think I've given a step ahead on affirming mistakes and failure as performative textures. From my point of view as a part of a culture dominated by the constant nostalgia of the golden eras before the invasion of European societies, and the denial of a way of thinking considered archaic, the spirit of empowerment that I

obtained is a whole revelation for me and a harvesting of unusual associations that might be the cores of a permanent investigation.

Masculinity and *ecstasy* are still two frontiers that I´m walking every day in different scenarios. The input from the social crisis never stays the same and many other factors might be relevant if I erect new spaces to research with this project in other places (México and the rest of Latin America), and during the time (when I´m forty, fifty and even eighty years old), the experienced achieved during 2023, the valuable system I was introduced to and able to try inside of MADOT, and the trust in my inner way to associate cause and consequence, the interior and the exterior of the self, the tense relation between theater and reality, as much as the way a profession might become a form to exist

On the other side, the process reveals to me that the implementation of an anti-methodology sometimes sorts effects depending of the kind of project that the creator is facing up. A system of temporary conclusions and the constant formulation of propositions might be a possible way to perform considering the responsibility that implies exercising theater direction nowadays. Postdramatic theater happened twenty-four years ago, and the turn of the new century with its new urgencies (being the necessity of a more than human theater, for example) demand a new way articulate collective aims and inputs. Here, the dialogue between the personal and the communal is a tense territory that requires high doses of creativity and assertiveness. Again, with assertiveness I don´t mean the exclusion of the error, but the focus of the energy on the conditions of the possible, the questioning of the limits, and the proposition of strategies to intervene in the regular flows of causality.

I appreciate enormously that both theater and academy have opened room for such a personal point of view of performance as space for action like this project and this thesis.

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