

## **Body, sex and subversion: reflections on two queer theoreticians**

**Corpo, sexo e subversão: reflexões sobre duas teóricas queer**

**Cuerpo, sexo y subversión: reflexiones sobre dos teóricas queer**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this text is to present two important queer theoreticians, Beatriz Preciado and Marie-Hélène Bourcier. After outlining their work and highlighting their definitions of sex and gender, I discuss the centrality of the body in the general economy of their works. I conclude by posing some questions, in which I emphasize the urgency of inquiring into the various vectors of differences that result from inequalities and exclusions.

**Key words:** Body. Sex. Queer. Gender.

### **RESUMO**

Neste texto apresento duas importantes teóricas queer, Beatriz Preciado e Marie-Hélène Bourcier. Depois de delinear o trabalho das autoras e ressaltar suas definições de sexo e gênero, discuto sobre a centralidade do corpo na economia geral de suas obras. Finalizo elaborando algumas indagações nas quais ressalto a premência de se inquirir sobre os vários vetores da diferença, resultantes de desigualdades e exclusões.

**Palavras-chave:** Corpo. Sexo. Queer. Gênero.

### **RESUMEN**

En este texto trato de presentar dos importantes teóricas queer, Beatriz Preciado y Marie-Hélène Bourcier. Después de delinear el trabajo de las autoras y resaltar sus definiciones de sexo y género, discuto sobre la

centralidad del cuerpo en la economía general de sus obras. Finalizo elaborando algunas indagaciones en las que resalto la urgencia de inquirir sobre los varios vectores de la diferencia resultante de desigualdades y exclusiones.

**Palabras clave:** Cuerpo. Sexo. Queer. Género.

Queer theory presents a provocative semantic field, composed of words like: reconversion, displacement, reconfiguration, denaturalization, subversion, performance, parody. Many of these expressions are tropes that indicate movement and transformation, and denote that something changes after the performative act of transforming an insult into a proud form of identification. The texts seem to highlight, stress, emphasize the unusual and seismic character of inversions and differences, and this is the explanation for the hyperbolic tone of the narratives. In addition, there is a particularity that is seldom observed by researchers, but which presents itself when we think about the synonymy with parody: the answers to homophobic voices that state the abjection of certain bodies in the process of queer self-designation are also good-humored and irreverent. In this impressionistically outlined context that I hope to delineate below, two authors stand out precisely because they are sarcastic and have a fine sense of humor; they are sensitive to the contemporary literature of the humanities and, at the same time, they fiercely criticize it. I refer to Beatriz Preciado and Marie-Hélène Bourcier.

Preciado published, in 2000, in French, *Manifeste Contra-sexuel*, which was issued in Spanish in 2002. Bourcier launched the first version of *Queer Zones* in 2001, and *Sexpolitiques: Queer Zones 2*, in 2005. These books have not been translated into Portuguese up to the present moment, and references to them are rare in Brazil. Except for an interview with Preciado, published in *Cadernos Pagu*, and sparse quotations in specialized journals, the authors do not seem to be known in the country, a gap that distances us from the fruitful polemic that they have been causing in Europe<sup>1</sup>.

In this essay, I approach the main ideas of these authors, with the aim of filling the above-mentioned gap, even though in a brief and limited way. In the following sections, I will tackle the books cited above (Bourcier, 2006, 2005; Preciado, 2002) without the intention of being extensive or encompassing the totality of the approached issues; afterwards, I will

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<sup>1</sup> The interview was published in the dossier “Sexualidades Disparatadas”, in *Cadernos Pagu*, organized by Richard Miskolci and Júlio Assis Simões (2007). Although the first reference to Preciado in Brazil was made by Daniel Welzer-Lang (2001), I believe that the first person who disseminated the author’s work in a systematic way in the country was Berenice Bento (2006). See also Andréa Lacombe (2007) and Vera Paiva (2006). Concerning Bourcier, we have the allusion made by Welzer Lang (2001) and Bento (2006). Regarding the impact that the authors have caused, it is enough to remember that in Spain, the Counter-Sexual Manifesto was received as one of the most innovative and provocative proposals of our days, and that Bourcier has been acclaimed as the sharpest queer critic of France. For an analysis of queer theory, see Louro (2001).

highlight the place and importance of the body in the general economy of these works. Finally, I will pose some general questions with the purpose of highlighting dimensions that are particularly interesting to me: I analyze the role of laughter in the authors' work; I defend the necessity of inquiring into the vectors of difference that result from inequalities and exclusions; I ponder over the urgent need of paying attention to the sayings of form; I approach the dimension of violence in sexpolitics.

### **Counter-sexual manifesto**

Preciado's counter-sexual manifesto develops a proposal for subversion of the mechanisms of cultural, social and political power that have constructed what is understood today as sex and gender. The choice of the term "counter-sexuality" is inspired in Foucault, to whom the most efficient form of resistance to the disciplinary production of sexuality would be counter-productivity, that is, the production of alternative pleasure-knowledge forms of modern sexuality (Bourcier, 2002). And the structuring of the narrative as a "manifesto" is due to the influence of *Manifesto for Cyborgs*, by Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1991a, 1991c).

The intention is to promote a critical analysis of the gender-sex difference, a product of the heterocentered social contract, whose normative performativities have been inscribed in the bodies as biological truths<sup>2</sup>. This heterocentered contract should be replaced by another one, the counter-sexual one, in which "speaking bodies" would try to establish procedures that enable to escape from heteronormative subjection. Besides criticizing the naturalization of sex and of the gender system, the counter-sexual contract proposes a society of equivalence, of speaking subjects that establish relations in a contractual form – thus, the elaboration of this contract owes a lot to the practical and also contractual knowledge of the sadomasochist communities.

The counter-sexual manifesto defends the total sexualization of the body. This justifies the continuous search for the understanding of the praxis of sex technologies, as in the space of parody and plastic transformation, the first counter-sexual practices emerge as a possibility. Among them, the eroticization of the anus, the utilization of dildos and the establishment of sadomasochist relations<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The basis of the sex-gender distinction was Rubin's (1986) work. It is the idea that (biological) sex would be molded by human and social intervention, conducted in a conventional form. Afterwards, Rubin (1989) pointed to the need of analyzing sexuality and gender as independent categories, problematizing the link between gender, sexuality and subjectivity. I will approach the theme further on.

<sup>3</sup> Dildo is an object designed to be inserted into the vagina and anus, being different from vibrators; the latter have models that are analogous to dildos, but with a technological apparatus that enables them to vibrate. I use here the definition proposed by Maria Filomena Gregori (2004).

Discourses and practices affirm the equality of nature and heterosexuality. The heterosexual system emerges as the social apparatus of production of feminine and masculine, which operates through the division and fragmentation of the bodies, and which identifies parts of these bodies-fragments as natural and anatomical centers of sexual difference. In the body fragmentation process, the anus is one of the first organs to be privatized and placed “outside the social field”<sup>4</sup>. In its task of identifying the erroneous and defective spaces of the structure - manifested, for example, in the intersex and hermaphrodite bodies -, and reinforcing the powers of the forms that deviate from the heterocentered system, counter-sexuality re-sexualizes the anus, which assumes a status of universal counter-sexual center.

Heterosexuality is a social technology and it is not possible to presuppose it as a “founding origin”. The counter-sexuality principles are intended to disassemble the heterocentric system and subvert the production practices of sexual identity. The efforts are directed towards the process of re-signification of the body. By electing the anus as the universal counter-sexual center, for example, we have a parody of the heterocentered relationships, a parody that subverts the very basis of these relationships, denaturalizing it and demolishing the fiction of origin.

In the new biotechnologies of production and reproduction of the body – the body emerging as space of oppression and locus of resistance -, the prostheses have an outstanding position. The dildo transforms sexual expression into plastic, denaturalizing the traditional notion of sex and gender. Counter-sexuality focuses on the relations that are established between body and machine, precisely because human nature is an effect of the social technology that reproduces the bodies.

The counter-sexual inversion practices reaffirm the function of the prostheses. It is not the case, here, of the exclusive use of vibrators, but of converting any part of the body into a dildo. Many times, the utilization of the vibrator is associated with Freud’s theory of lack of a penis; in counter-sexual theory, the vibrator supposes an operation of displacement from the supposed organic center of pleasure production to a place outside the body - or to the erroneous spaces of the body, like the anus. This body-fragment is re-signified: errant parts are allocated as center, parts that are not associated with the body are transformed into body. The action of removing - or of destabilizing - the centers of gravity of the heterosexual body subverts the very form of thinking about the body. In the case of the dildo, for example, anything or any part of the body can be transformed into a dildo, including the penis.

The dildo is the truth of heterosexuality as parody, and signals that gender is not merely performative as Butler (2004, 1998, 1990) desired. Gender is, above all, prosthetic, and manifests itself in the materiality of the bodies, purely constructed and entirely organic. Gender is similar to the dildo, because its carnal plasticity destabilizes the distinction between the imitator

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<sup>4</sup> The idea is authored by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1998 apud Preciado, 2002, p.27): “The first organ to be privatized, placed outside the social field, was the anus.”

and what it imitates, truth and the representation of truth, reference and referent, nature and artifice, and between sexual organs and sexual practices. By distancing more and more from the anatomical referent, the dildo counter-sexualizes the body, stimulating the original illusions. When some lesbian theorists criticize the utilization of the dildo due to its complicity in male domination signs, they focus exclusively on the vibrator as the penis in sex, and overlook the effects mentioned above, failing to remember the displacement and reversibility process that enables multiple combinations. The vibrator's subversive character is related to the re-contextualizations of the queer practices.

In addition, Preciado criticizes the sex technologies – for example, the heteronormativeness of the interventions of the intersex beings, or the surgeries performed on transsexuals - showing how these interventions express a male gaze. However, the author does not view technology as a mere effect of male domination, as this would obscure the contra-sexual dimensions and possibilities of these technologies. The movement should be the opposite: understanding sex and gender as technology.

### **Queer zones**

Bourcier analyzes the current dominant configurations of biopolitical action which she and Preciado call sexpolitics. The aim is to understand thought zones, focusing on forms of expression like: pornographic cinema, sadomasochism, the construction of the figures of the transvestite, transgender and transsexual. The queer zones constitute, the author believes, privileged intervention spaces.

The polemic film *Baise-moi*, directed by Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh-Thi (2000), and the movies of the independent director LaBruce, are fundamental to the present discussion<sup>5</sup>. The cinema of these directors and the lesbophobia and homophobia reactions that it arouses led Bourcier to go deeper into the possibilities and limitations of pornography as an instrument of liberation and questioning of sexuality.

Foucault (1985) stated that the function of pornography was not that of liberating pulsions, but of constructing sexual identities. In his analyses of the history of sexuality, he had already shown that talking about sex alone did not fight against repression. Sexual repression was neither the only nor the main sexuality control device, and sexual misery did not derive exclusively from repression. The question was seeing how the positive mechanisms that produced sexuality were organized. Talking freely about sex may generate the same sexual misery attributed to repression. In fact, the sex discourse emerged as a technology that naturalized the heterosexual couple and heterosexuality; therefore, discourse invents sex.

Pornography - as we know it nowadays - is the product of a visual production regime that emerges during the Enlightenment and develops with positivism. That is, pornography is born in a moment of production and

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<sup>5</sup> Among LaBruce's films, Bourcier mentions *Super 8 et ½* (1994) and *Skin Flick* (2000).

diffusion of taxonomical analyzes of human behaviors, a time in which detailed publications about typologies, obscenities and sexual perversions proliferate, and private collections of erotic content multiply. In this period, the first publications that tried to decode and decipher the female sexuality appear, always from the male point of view and in a process that objectified the female body. As it is known, in the construction of the modern pornographic gaze, psychology and medicine were fundamental.

A porn movie proposes pedagogies of sexuality and operates by normalizing and naturalizing the relations between bodies. Therefore, pornography creates models of sexuality; signals how we should use the organs; states which are the sexual organs and which are not; sustains in what situations, with whom and in what place they should be used. Thus, it does not merely portray the reality of sex; it is a performative production that creates what it wishes to describe.

The existence of a monopolizing pornographic regime, which is supported by a heterosexual pornographic cinema, does not obscure, asserts Bourcier, the possibility of the existence of other forms of actions, experiences and representations of sexual practices. The author believes that a new type of pornographic discourse is emerging, which she calls “post-pornography”, with direct connections with the queer presuppositions. And, based on the notion of sexuality as performance, she identifies post-pornography elements in new filmic proposals - like the above-mentioned *Baise-moi*. This film uses some narrative resources of the modern porn movies, but from a perspective that neutralizes their effects, destabilizing the heterocentered gaze. In it, a denaturalization of the pornographic discourse is processed, occurring by means of an inversion of the gender roles and a re-reading of the habitual thematic motives. Such experiences disrupt, according to the author, the hegemonic sexual production regime and intend to create new forms in new performances of sexual experiences.

If modern pornography is a regime of production of the truth about sex, post-pornography indicates a disruption in the codes of the traditional gender gaze, proposing a change in the sexual roles that ends up placing directors and actresses as agents of sexual production. Post-pornography is no longer a field reserved for men. By denaturalizing pornographic discourse by means of an inversion of the gender roles and a reinvention of the thematic motives, post-pornography emerges as a political gesture that is connected with the queer strategies of reappropriation of abject notions, attributing new meanings to them.

With the title *Baise-moi*, the directors reappropriate a phrase, circumscribed to a heterosexual scenario, that men like to hear from women to confirm their desire and power; Nadine and Manu, the two protagonists, and Despentès and Trinh-Thi, through amalgamation, resignify this consecrated formula. They reappropriate the pornographic sentence but remove the authority and privilege of the dominant masculinity, because *Baise-Moi* means Fuck me! and also Fuck off! The film operates a reconversion by women in the economy of sexuality.

Porn is a hyperbolic and hyper-realistic celebration of the norms of heterosexuality. Pornographic realism, which is a realistic fiction like the

others, an organization of representation, and not the “reality” of sex, seems to announce a change in ways. Traditional pornography is under total deconstruction, as its main functions – the renaturalization of sexual difference, the freezing of gender identities and social practices – are being reconfigured.

Despentes and Trinh-Thi take hold of the codes of pornographic representation and denaturalize them. They become agents of porn representation, not its objects anymore; when they film like men, they embarrass the masculinistic essentialism according to which pornography is the naturally male expression. If women can shoot pornographic films like men, the opposition between men and women is invalidated, and also the opposition between those who love porn and those who love eroticism.

As we have seen, the counter-sexual contract is the heir to the practical - and also contractual - knowledge of the sadomasochist communities, and it is to this experience that Bourcier will direct her gaze. It is possible to notice that these authors’ desire is to expose the readers to the limitations and subversive powers of the subcultures of the body.

On February 19, 1997, the European Court of Human Rights starts to legislate about sadomasochism as a deviant sexual practice, focusing on the case of Laskey, Jaggard and Brown, three Englishmen who were condemned to imprisonment for sadomasochist practices. British policemen entered their homes to confiscate the evidence of the S/M sessions. Then, the event started to be called spanner case. In the juridical unfolding of the case, the Englishmen argued that the penalty imposed on them contradicted the European Convention on Human Rights and constituted an interference of a public authority in the defendants’ private life. The juridical problem in question was not related to knowing whether the interference in the private life was legitimate, given that the law mentions situations in which it is justified, mainly in view of the argument of protection to health and morals (paragraph 2 of article 8). The point was the character of interference in a democratic society. Moreover, one of the argumentations was that the S/M practices were performed without the adequate medical attention. Such event revealed the political dimension of sadomasochism - as a different contractual exercise -, showing that these practices oppose the levels that legislate about bodies.

The differentiated sexual practices, in situations viewed as uncommon, in public, with many people, in places that are not the bedroom of the heterosexual couple, confront the habitual confinement of sexuality in the private and domestic sphere. Resexualization is translated by a re-localization and a re-socialization that give rise to new social, political and epistemological dimensions of sex.

Besides the analysis of pornography and sadomasochism, the author approaches the figures of the transvestite, transgender, transsexual, emphasizing aspects like the origins of the medical-juridical regulation of “transsexuality”, and the new theories about genders’ performativity.

In *Sexpolitique. Queer zones 2*, Bourcier returns to the investigation of pornography and sadomasochism, and also approaches other themes, like the unitary female subject and the polemic concerning the utilization of the

veil. Closer to post-colonial studies, these themes become relevant in the critique of the desire of abolishing differences and the French civilizing will, that is, the desire of exercising a civilizing cosmopolitanism as a way of controlling diversity. In addition, the author criticizes what she calls “Badinter’s unisex universalism”.

Nevertheless, maybe one of the most stimulating moments of *Sexpolitique* is its critique of Bourdieu’s famous analysis of the “male domination”. The author wishes to oppose what she calls “reificatory description of male domination”, since, to her, Bourdieu’s formulation is based on a dualistic conception of gender that ends up sticking sex and genitals, and genitals and gender.

Bourdieu’s analysis of male domination is supported, according to Bourcier’s perception, by the binary system of gender hierarchy. When Butler redefined genders as performance and performativity, she wondered about the production and reproduction of the normative and binary sex/gender system, concluding that, in the same way that sex and sexuality are not the expression of the self or of an identity, but the effect of the discourse about sex - therefore, a disciplinary device -, gender is also not an expression of sex. If femininity should not be necessarily and naturally the cultural construction of the female body; if masculinity should not be necessarily and naturally the cultural construction of the male body; if masculinity is not stuck to men and if it is not a privilege of the biologically defined men; it is because sex does not limit gender, and gender can exceed the limits of the female sex/male sex binarism (Bourcier, 2005)<sup>6</sup>.

Every gender is a gender performance, that is, a parody without the original. Bourcier emphasizes that, in Bourdieu’s analysis of male domination, there is a dissociation of the symbolic force that enables the domination and force of gender performativity. In fact, if the force of the performativity that presides over genders is derived, if genders can be re-signified, then the characteristics of the performative force are not the same as those of the symbolic force that imposes the male domination. On the contrary, the exercise of domination is located in the attempt to put limits on the performative force. In Bourdieu’s approach, the Kabyle women and their symbolic strategies are annulled and insufficient to subvert male domination; but, if it is true that performative force is reversible, it can arouse a variety of places of resistance and appropriation/derivation of identities construction. The homogenization of women is a masked universalism, because women are not an exploited group, but a political coalition to be constructed, and which is not defined solely by gender or by gender oppression.

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<sup>6</sup> Gender, to authors like Butler or Bourcier, should be understood as a social order that precedes sex and provides possibilities of reading and of actions for sex itself. Thus, gender is not limited to sex, for it transits from one body to another independently of sex. What Bourcier emphasizes in this sentence is the possibility of types of identities in which gender does not derive from sex and in which desire and the practices derive neither from sex nor from gender, as manifested in the queer bodies.

## Queer bodies

The gender category emerged in the discussions about the Woman, and about women, as historical subjects, always in an attempt to question the universality attributed to Man; this category is thought of as being constituted by social relations based on the differences perceived between sexes, and which were instituted within power relations. Gender was, ultimately, the social organization of sexual difference. The sex-gender difference - that is, the gender relation and the differences perceived between sexes - presupposed the antecedence of sex. Such presupposition, however, ended up placing sex as a pre-discursive element, as was pointed out by a certain feminist critique which, based on analyses of authors like Foucault and Laqueur, started to reflect on the historical character of sex. This movement allowed to state that, in reality, sex is a discursive result, and that gender constituted sex.

Butler, for example, was one of the most incisive authors to question the gender category as a cultural interpellation of sex, arguing that gender is not related to culture in the same way that sex is related to nature. Therefore, she questioned the pre-discursive constitution of sex. Furthermore, the author argued, the distinction between sex and gender maintains the binarism of the stable categorial complementariness between man and woman – which reproduces the logic of heterosexual normativity. Thus, the sex-gender difference should be criticized, and conceptions that establish ideas of stable gender identity should be offered as an answer.

To Butler, gender would be social performance, and gender performativity is an effect of discourse – sex would consist, therefore, of an effect of gender. The discursive rules of normative heterosexuality produce gender performances, which are reiterated and cited. The very sexualization of the bodies derives from such performances. In the process of reiteration of gender performances, some people, outside the heterosexual matrix, begin to be considered as abject. Queer politics consists of disturbing the gender binaries and playing with the mentions made about gender – the privileged space for queer theorizations and practices.

However, the critique of the sex-gender distinction destabilized both the category of biological sex and the category of gender identity, as Toril Moi (2001) and Íris Marion Young (2003) pointed out. If this destabilization enabled to think about the plurality of identities and practices, it also increased their abstraction in relation to corporeity and, simultaneously, made the concept of gender become virtually useless to theorize about subjectivity and identity (Moi, 2001). Within this picture, Preciado's and Bourcier's works come up. Both are Butler's heirs and both search for something more than a performativity theory that is supported by a language model based on speech acts; they are authors who act within a queer politics that bets on the subversive possibilities of the abnormal bodies (abject, strange, queer), and who search for the bodies' materiality. This is why they approach the techniques that construct the bodies (vibrators, pornography, cinema, surgeries), and the need to historicize the categories of sex, flesh, body, biology and nature, as Haraway (1991b) clamored. This makes the

concept of sexpolitics and the importance attributed to the body become central issues in the authors' arguments.

Sexpolitics is the dominant configuration of the biopolitical action in contemporary capitalism (Preciado, 2005a). Sex – the so-called sexual organs, sexual practices, and the codes of masculinity and femininity – is a fundamental element of power calculations, as sex and the technologies of normalization of sexual identities are agents of life control. Heterosexuality, conceived as the political regime for bodies administration and life management, conforms to a technology that is intended to produce normality, to produce heterosexual bodies. However, the body is multiple and plastic, and has a plurality of expressions that cannot be reduced to masculine and feminine. The gender category was invented to restrict this multiplicity to masculinity and femininity.

Thus, there is a link between identity production and the manufacture of certain organs as sexual and reproductive. Sex is converted into a central object of politics and of governability. This is the reason for the need of regulating, controlling and normalizing bodies – defining normality and establishing what would be defined as abnormal. This control depends on technological production - silicone flows, hormones, surgical techniques -, besides a flow of representations. As not everything circulates in a predictable and constant form, the bodies' appropriation is not uniform, and there are displacements of organs in the bodies and the bodies' constant reinvention.

The body is far from being the effect of a closed power system or of ideas that act in the passive matter; on the contrary, it is possible to define it as the name of a sexpolitical device – medicine, pornography, vibrators -, and this device is reappropriated by sexual minorities, by the “abject” and “abnormal” beings<sup>7</sup>. The body is not a passive datum of a biopower, but the potency that enables the prosthetic incorporation of genders; sexpolitics is not only a place of power, but the creation space where homosexuals, feminist movements, transsexuals, intersex and transgender individuals succeed each other and are juxtaposed. These bodies destabilize heterosexuality and the very economy of power.

The technologies that aim to produce normal bodies and the normalization of genders are re-signified. If the queer bodies carry the mark of these normalization technologies - as failure or as residue -, they can intervene in the biotechnological devices of production of sexual subjectivity. In this context, abnormal bodies and identities are political potencies – potencies that enable the prosthetic incorporation of genders.

Bourcier and Preciado highlight, therefore, the reappropriations and reconversions of the discourses - of medicine or pornography, for example – that constructed queer bodies. The emphasis is placed on the re-appropriation of the knowledge/power disciplines concerning sexes, the rearticulation and reconversion of the sexpolitical technologies of sexes

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<sup>7</sup> From what we can infer from Preciado's and Bourcier's argumentation, the underestimation of the body is one of Butler's theoretical particularities, despite the attempts accomplished in *Bodies that Matter* and *Undoing Gender*.

production. The queer bodies rebel against the construction of normal and abnormal bodies, subverting the subjectivation norms of sexpolitics. The queer experience promotes a turn in the performative force of the discourses precisely in the reappropriation of the sexpolitical technologies of abnormal bodies production, and enters the current scenario as a transformation proposal for discourses circulation and bodies mutation.

### **Strange themes and inconvenient laughter**

It seems evident, after what has been exposed here, that Preciado's and Bourcier's narratives are notable for an infidelity to the Academia (Bourcier, 2005), an "infidelity" that can be observed in, at least, three dimensions that I would like to emphasize here: the extremely critical and polemic posture, the elected themes and the very form of saying.

The critical and polemic character suggests "infidelity" in relation to their sources of inspiration. Few authors escape uninjured from their writing. Butler is one of the first targets. As I mentioned above, Preciado and Bourcier state that the orthodox queer analyses in terms of gender as performance are insufficient to understand the processes of sex and gender incorporation. When Butler stressed the possibility of crossing genders by means of theatrical performance, she had underestimated the bodily and sexual transformation processes that are present in transsexual and transgender bodies, and also the standardized techniques of gender and sex stabilization that operate in normal bodies<sup>8</sup>. The transgender critique put on the agenda the bodily, sexual, social and political transformations that occur in the public space.

Another target of the critique is Foucault. The notion of sexpolitics, although inspired by this author, questions the political conception according to which biopower just produces normalization disciplines and ends up determining the subjectivation forms. In Preciado's and Bourcier's narratives, the queer bodies emerge as political potencies, and not as simple effects of sex discourses. Moreover, the form of manifesto, as elaborated by Preciado, although based on the counter-productivity proposed by Foucault, does not share the suspicion of the author of *Discipline and Punish* in relation to identity as a place of political action.

Finally - and focusing only on three of the main theoretical references of Preciado and Bourcier, which are fundamental in the general economy of their works, as we can infer, for example, from the discussion about body fragmentation -, the other target: the author of *Anti-Oedipus*. According to Preciado, Deleuze criticized what he called "molar homosexual" identity because he thought it promoted the gay ghetto, and idealized molecular homosexuality, which enabled him to make the good homosexual figures - from Proust to the effeminate transvestite - become examples of the "becoming-woman" process. By talking about molecular homosexuality, Deleuze could discourse on homosexuality instead of questioning his heterosexual premises.

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<sup>8</sup> Many women theorists try to understand these intersections, such as hooks (1990) and Young (1990).

Besides this polemic character, the recurrent themes are those that are often avoided by Academia and by traditional feminism: sexual games, prostitution, anal sexuality, sex designation of intersex boys, sex-change operations, sadomasochism and fetishism. "Smaller" themes and objects, like vibrators, pin-ups, porn movies, "mass culture", which are frequently despised, gain visibility, and receive the attention of the authors' intriguing eyes. Despite the impact and importance of this new gaze, perhaps it is mainly the form of saying that most singularizes the narratives analyzed here.

Butler (1990) stated, in the preface to *Gender Trouble*, that laughing about serious categories is indispensable to feminism; to Preciado and Bourcier, this laughter mentioned by Butler is in the center of the argumentations. The movement of perceiving the body under mutation, sustaining a hypersexualization and a hyperconstructivism of the body and its sexual organs, seems to signal with strong colors the parody dimension of the gender performances. Parody which, as the synonymy indicates, cannot be separated from laughter. And a simple skimming of the titles of the chapters of the analyzed books is enough for us to observe the importance of laughter and humor. In *Manifiesto Contra-sexual: Dildotectónica, La lógica del dildo o las tijeras de Derrida, Breve genealogía de los juguetes sexuales o de cómo Butler descubrió el vibrador, De la filosofía como modo superior de dar por el culo*; in *Queer zones: Baise-moi encore, Ceci n'est pas une pipe: Bruce La Bruce pornoqueer*; and in *Sexopolitique. Queer zones 2: Dirty talk, Nique la Rep. Dominator contre Madonna, Il y a une vie après l' éjac faciale, Nique ton genre. ZAP la psy*.

Laughter here refers to a sense of humor that questions the seriousness and normality of life. When Preciado and Bourcier place laughter in the center of the narratives, they seem to defend that, when insult is transformed into praise; when anomalous bodies advocate normality; when esthetics is confused; when bodies change their logic and exhibit the centrality of parts and organs that used to be undervalued; then, queer laughter emerges, sustaining that the power that constructs normal bodies is defective, incongruous. Humor emerges as perception acts that transcend the reality of ordinary life, showing, many times hyperbolically, the disturbance of reconfigurations. Therefore, it does not mean running away from reality, but questioning it, reinventing it and perceiving the reinventions.

Narratives with such critical verve, texts that are so strongly exposed, become more vulnerable to criticism. I will further approach this "exposure" at the end of this essay, but, before I conclude, I would like to make some remarks about: 1) the urgency of inquiring into the several vectors of difference; 2) the need to pay attention to the sayings of form; 3) the dimension of violence in sexpolitics.

1) We could wonder whether the queer experience, in singular form, extended to all places and conjunctures - and without a more precise delimitation of the contexts of nationality and race, for example - would end up naturalizing what it wishes to denaturalize. This possibility leads to some questions. For example, would the experience of today's transsexual be equivalent to that of the universal gay, that is, would transsexuality be

independent of local contexts, having a universal applicability? Would the queer experiences be the same in all places? What are the dimensions of one of the main sources of identities of the modern world – the nation – and what are its effects on the queer experience? In other words: what would be the relation between queer and the identitary dilemmas of nation or race? According to the theoretical movement of Preciado and Bourcier, we can also ask the following questions: how should we reflect on technologies that construct racialized bodies? (see, for example, hooks' (é em minúscula?) (1997) approach to the representation of black female sexuality). In what way are biotechnologies reinvented regarding race? And how do they act? In short, I am asking about the place of variants like race and nation in queer theory<sup>9</sup>.

This question is fundamental to queer theory, as negligence towards differences, and towards the politics of difference, implies, many times, the universalization of certain aspects – culture, race, class, sexual orientation -, deleting the subjects' specificities. Concerning this aspect, Butler (1998) had already stated that gender - which is not always constituted in a coherent and consistent way in different historical contexts – would be intersected by racial, ethnical, sexual, regional and class-related modalities of discursively constituted identities. Thus, it is impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural intersections by means of which it is invariably produced and maintained.

If, in *Manifiesto Contra-Sexual*, Preciado does not approach, directly or extensively, such questions, in subsequent works she analyzes what she calls over-crossings of oppressions (Preciado, 2007). The question, the author warns us, is not only taking into account the racial or ethnical specificity of oppression as one more variant, together with sex and gender oppression, but inquiring into the mutual constitution of gender and race (Preciado, 2005b). Bourcier (2005), in turn, advises us against a certain French civilizing will and the desire to exercise a civilizing cosmopolitanism as a way of controlling diversity. The way I read it, the authors signal that we can wait for further analyses of these aspects in future works.

2) A theoretical proposal that does not want to revolve around itself, abdicating from its critical vocation, must face the specificity of discourses and languages. Cinema is not an ideological discourse among others; nor is it just a historical-social document. Therefore, we should not apprehend it as a separate discourse; rather, we should perceive it in its particularity, in such a way that the main objective does not center exclusively on the study of the treated themes, but on style, the intrinsic relations between form and content (Pereira, 2006). Thus, the socioeconomic aspects and the author's position – his/her differential place - need to be viewed as integrating the fictional text. In this perspective, we should ask: can “post-pornography”, as visualized by Bourcier in Despentès' & Trinh-Thi's and LaBruce's films, disrupt the traditional language of pornography? Does the way of telling alter? Or is

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<sup>9</sup> Many women theorists try to understand these intersections, such as hooks (1990) and Young (1990).

traditional pornography's form of narrating perpetuated, and the only alterations are in relation to centrality, gender and types of characters? I believe that Bourcier's texts, one way or the other, approach – or mention - the aspects listed above; what I am suggesting in this defense of the need of paying more attention to the sayings of form is that maybe an approach that insists more on filmic specificity can both radicalize the critique of traditional porn movies, and present the queer gaze of post-pornography.

3) Vance (1989), problematizing the direct association between sexuality and coercive domination models – as well as the articulation of these models to static gender positions -, stated that sexuality involves the dimensions of pleasure and danger<sup>10</sup>. Pleasure because there is a promise of eroticism and a search for new erotic alternatives in transgressing the restrictions imposed on sexuality when it is viewed only as a reproduction exercise. Danger because it is important to reflect on aspects such as rape and abuse as elements of the exercise of sexuality. However, Vance warned us, there is a certain tendency to dissociate pleasure from danger, taking them disjunctively, without examining the connections between the two dimensions. In sadomasochism, for example, there is the disposition to a conception of pleasure as liberating force, mainly when it is submitted to the consent between partners; danger is treated as if consent, as a willful act, guaranteed the translation into pleasure, thus disregarding the dimension of violence.

One example can help clarify the relations between pleasure and danger. Between the years of 2004 and 2005, I conducted research into “heterosexual pornography”. At the time, I followed the course of dissemination and transit of these films, like newsstands, internet, websites, discussion groups. The analysis of the material I collected and of the experience I lived in this period suggested that these films worked with violation as a presupposition – I used, then, Segato's (2003) definition of violation. Heterosexual pornography was constituted of violation performances; therefore, it is a type of cinema that allegorizes violation, transforming it into an object of fantasy. Signaled pleasure – at least in the films that I could watch and analyze – is the one that enables, in the level of fantasy, the response of a male subject that performatizes violation over the female subject. In this way, violence was the structure of pornography. By focusing on heterosexual porn movies, I could verify the role of violence - or danger - in pornography, but concentrating on one type of cinema ended up showing the limits of this kind of analysis; limits that can be observed in Bourcier's approach and in her interest in other filmic experiments (in post-pornography).

Nevertheless, would the focus on the analysis of subversion be overlooking the dimension of violence, both in pornography and in sadomasochism? The queer practices show that subversions emerge precisely in the flaws of the repetition chain, suggesting other repetitions that question the identity regulating practice. So, could it be that the focus on the subversion

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<sup>10</sup> I follow, here, besides Vance's (1989) text, Gregori's reading of the pleasure and danger dimensions (2004, 2003).

movement makes the violent traces and contents involved in sadomasochist practices and in pornography be invisible? In other words, would queer subversion imply – to use Vance’s terms – a concentration on pleasure and an invisibility of danger? In what way are post-pornography and the current S/M experiences distant from or close to each other in violence’s gender grammar?

The points that could be seen as possible drawbacks in Preciado’s and Bourcier’s thought are already being developed by the authors themselves, as I suggested earlier. Even though I believe that issues like the violence dimension in sexpolitics or the possibility of a universalization of the queer experience that disregards the local and racial contexts should be better clarified and analyzed, I note the authors’ effort and movement in this direction.

Anyway, reading Preciado and Bourcier would be interesting not only due to the dimensions that I have been commenting on here. In addition, we must say that the authors: 1) warn, in the very action of disturbing, that using renowned author(s) without questioning negatively affects the queer thought; 2) emphasize that the queer gaze (critical, disturbing) must be directed to all authors, including sources of inspiration and main interlocutors; 3) argue that the movement of just “applying” the queer theory implies distancing oneself from anything that may be called queer; 4) show the instability of the queer itself – which should also be one of the targets of the actions of distorting, transgressing, perceiving as strange, disturbing.

In short, what can we conclude in view of Preciado’s and Bourcier’s narratives? Smaller, strange themes said in an inadequate form, in an inappropriate tone. Evidently, such considerations could only be expressed within the point of view of a gaze that the authors themselves wish to avoid and subvert. If the discourses cause strangement on the part of more orthodox or conservative thoughts, this fact, instead of disqualifying the authors, indicates their characteristics: they disturb, destabilize, incommode; they invert gazes, criticize canons, annoy the resigned ones; they subvert the very form of narrating and polemizing. Perceiving as strange, subverting, disturbing, destabilizing – the authors seem to reaffirm, insistently and hyperbolically – are marks of the queer experience.

I mentioned earlier that all who expose themselves open flanks for future criticism. But I believe that this “exposure” highlights the works’ strong points and fragilities, enabling a constant, intense, reflective and self-critical dimension – characteristics that give vitality to the queer theory. The act of exposing oneself is perhaps a great invitation to debate; and maybe the criticism, the constant laughter and the polemic themes should be perceived as incitement to dialog. I attempted, in some way, to respond to this incitement in this essay; however, my aim was not to move along possible flanks, showing limits or expressing disagreements; rather, I intended to indicate the potentialities of Preciado’s and Boucier’s approaches – queer theorists who play a central role in the contemporary debate about body, sex and gender.

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