



A LIFE ON THE BORDER BETWEEN LIVING AND PERFORMING. CASE STUDY ON THE PERFORMER SUCIA INFECCIOSA INMUNDA

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DOSSIER WORLDS IN PERFORMANCE: 20 YEARS
NAPEDRA

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A LIFE ON THE BORDER BETWEEN LIVING AND PERFORMING. CASE STUDY ON THE PERFORMER SUCIA INFECCIOSA INMUNDA.

I begin this article with a personal note of sorrow. It bears the weight of memory, outrage, sadness, but at the same time happiness, gratitude, and pride. A few words weights tons.

I'm talking about a life on the border. Sucia is the border itself. In History, the borders are not a place for segregation, or a barrier. On the contrary, it is a place for gathering and exchanging. In addition to living on the border between Brazil and Paraguay, she was a border between life and art. The performer I introduce to you is no longer present in a physical way. This text is about someone I love and who, probably, is

the reason why I write mocking the lack of gender neutrality in writing. Sucia present!

In memoriam of Sucia Infecciosa Inmunda.

I first saw Sucia in 2013 when Pope Benedict XVI visited Brazil on World Youth Day. I was one of those millions who gathered full of faith in Rio de Janeiro to receive the Catholic leader. I wasn't into the artistic scene, so that would become the first performance I watched in my life. That's how Sucia shocked me the first time: "Sobressalto," a human body performing the masculine and creating a gender counterpoint, walking the streets in high heels, facing a sacred religious event.

FIGURE 1
"Sobressalto"
Copacabana
Circuit, at the
World Youth
Day in 2013.
In the photo in
high heels and
gray shorts,
Sucia Inmunda
DeLabassura, and
in high heels, red
shorts and pipe,
Nizael Almeida.



Little did I know that Sucia would shock me many more times and would become part of my life. From performances in the corridors of a college in the countryside of Brazil, to roundtable sessions, and nightly reflections before sleep: "Why?" "Why do that?" "What is the purpose?" "Isn't it unethical to walk naked in the college corridors?"

I can say that Sucia was a performance pioneer in the Performing Arts course at the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD), located in the countryside of a predominantly agrarian Brazilian state called Mato Grosso do Sul. The Performing Arts course was relatively new, Sucia was

studying in its third cycle, while I was in the fourth. Like many pioneers, Sucia was not understood, so she became news, joke, but she never stopped performing, including her name, which is part of a life performance. Sucia Infecciosa Inmunda, translated from Spanish means “Dirty Infectious Unclean.” Sometimes she liked to be called Sucia Inmunda DeLabassura. The choice for “DeLabassura” is due to a prayer from some Christian churches, which is spoken in tongues, also known as “angelic tongues.” The incomprehensible words sounds something like “orincanta labassura [...]” which Sucia relates with “la basurra” (trash in Spanish). Therefore, when a Christian prays in “tongues”, they would be calling out for Sucia. I see such a thing as an insult to Christians and that is exactly what Sucia was an insult especially when she assumed her trans body.

It is all part of the Performance Art. This desire for creating discomfort or arousing some “evil eye” from the public, an active element in the performance. In the case of the “Sobressalto” circuit, Sucia aimed to capture people looking at her as she walked around the city centers, focusing specially in the countryside of Mato Grosso do Sul where Sucia was turned into a monster, or “monsterfied,” according to Inmunda:

I’ve always been very renegade within the processes. Thinking about that as “monsterfied” in the countryside, people walking around with guns in their pockets, in their truck, so when I performed on the streets, there were always looks of “monsterfication,” “exotification,” and sexual desires. Nothing more. (#21 Sucia..., 2020)

The excerpt from Sucia’s interview was taken from a set of videos organized by

the artist Vulcanica Pokaropa, in the series “Desaquenda.” In the interview, Sucia talks about her work, which focuses on gender issues and highlights the impossibility of achieving the objective of the performance “Sobressalto” since the recording was, almost always, made by a cis person. How could this person capture the judgemental looks that only a transgender person can identify? At this point, she notices that her performances collided with the invisibility produced by the cis-hetero-normative capitalist system, even in its production process. Sucia was the first trans person I met, and she was the only one at the university. Her performances were filmed, watched, and debated by cisgender people. In other words, they were almost always underappreciated or misunderstood.

The filming results frustrated Sucia. Her objective was to capture the way people looked at her. While she did attracted attention, the camera was not able to identify what a trans person feels. The performer said that a

cisgender person, no matter how attentive they are, would not know the right moment to film, when to capture tension, repulse, or hate. While Sucia lived the performance, the camera operator made poetry. So, why the insistence on presenting “Sobressaltos”? Those records were cis interpretations of a trans life and production. At this point, the contradiction between the performance and its potential subjectivity or interpretation stands out. What I comprehend from “Sobressalto” is my impossibility to feel what Sucia lived. As a cisgender person, I can record strange reactions from people, but I will never be in the place of those who are being looked at. Likewise, writing this text I perform the one holding the camera and each reader will make a singular interpretation from the same words.

Tania Alic, in her text “Diluição das fronteiras entre linguagens artísticas: a performance como (r)evolução dos afetos” [our translation: “Dilution of borders between artistic languages: performance as the (r)evolution of affects”] highlights performative art as a language “that breaks the logics of systems immediately decipherable or interpretable.” (Alice 2014, 35; our translation). Thus, it is not fruitful to experience the performance “Sobressalto” in a momentary manner, but rather you must be touched by it. I was immediately affected when, as a highly devoted religious teenager, I saw a male figure in high heels. My reaction was a mix of anger and sadness. I was sorry for Sucia, but she, probably, also felt the same for me.

Despite “Sobressalto” being the performative action that I pointed out in this article, it does not prefigure the border life I refer to at the beginning of the discussion. The border life is Sucia herself, in her entirety. Infecciosa was, at first, indecipherable, such as her performative actions. Therefore, I invite you to leave the boundaries of this reading and think of Sucia Infecciosa Inmunda, create a personality for LaBassura.

*

Offstage she was sweet, kind, had the greatest patience in the world, and talked kindly to everyone. Despite being constantly affected by the lack of knowledge of the Mato Grosso do Sul society regarding transsexuality, her attitudes were always marked by dialogue and sharing. For many people, that is not the usual behavior expected from a person that looked like Sucia, someone who takes rotten garbage as her name. She was a contradiction from the very beginning to the very end, the border itself between life and art.

For Alice, the performative language can be connected to a movement of desire for change, “generating political awareness and encouraging actions for social transformation” (Alice 2014, 39; our translation). Thus,

such performances dialogue with the recent term “activism.” Part of the performances dealing with gender and LGBTQIA+ issues are part of an activist movement that pursues social transformation without an explanatory booklet or a pedagogical discourse. Quoting the German Gumbrecht, the author says “those languages present themselves as a production of presence, much more than as a production of meaning” (Alice 2014, 40; our translation) and, they also produce affections and presence.

Sucia was the presence that broke with the established traditional social system within the context she was inserted, in a conservative town in the countryside. Perhaps, for those who live in capitals like São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, or other cosmopolitan cities around the world, I may not be completely understood. Sucia’s presence was disruptive even in world of theater, one of the most diverse places. Sucia stood out. I remember a conversation in which she narrated when she stepped into the hallway of the University after graduation, performing her trans body, and one of her former professors asked “What are you doing here?” To which she replied “Isn’t the university public?” At the time, Sucia understood that former students continued to attend the campus of their Universities; however, when that came to her, people found it strange. They could not even disguise their curiosity about “will she walk naked again?” As if she was “just” her eccentric performances. That was the feeling she expressed in her tired outbursts mixed with disgust and certain expectations from others. Indeed, that is something to be emphasized when talking about genre and performance. The ones on the border are often seen as the “others,” those who don’t fit, who are weird, seen as something curious and repulsive at the same time.

Sucia’s presence was always an event. Sometimes she wore just high heels and masking tape, enough to get everyone amazed by her circus pirouettes, her infectious faces, her sounds. In all performances of hers, Sucia seemed to say: “I exist,” “I am here.” In these two years without her, I always listen to “Sucia Presente” (Sucia Present) in meetings with artists around Brazil and all over the world.

Thus, it seems clear that Sucia didn’t need to perform “Sobressalto” to be in evidence. Her entire life was a performance and, ironically, by her death, a resident from Campo Grande, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, recognized Sucia by her shoes. According to neighborhood reports, she always walked around the region wearing her high-heels.



FIGURE 2
Sucia on display at
the Ecological Fair
in Dourados -MS¹

I conclude this reflection with an exercise proposed by a course from the Post-Graduation Program in Performing Arts at USP “Des/identities”: performance and constitution of oneself in the contemporary scene whose statement was: Write a letter to the first memory that comes to your mind.

LETTER TO THE WORLD, TO MY FRIENDS AND TO ME

I watched “Beijo do Samuca,” a performance by Sucia, while she still performed with her male body.

Shocking!

A friend, psychoanalyst, said: “this is not just a performance, it’s a cry for help. He has suicidal thoughts; he is going to kill himself.”

Those words stuck with me for a while.

That episode disappeared along with the artist who went to live in Asunción, Paraguay.

When the artist returned, there was Sucia Inmunda DeLabussura or Sucia Infecciosa Inmunda.

1. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3x7fKas>. Accessed on: Jan. 30, 2023.

She returned the same sweet person with a powerful and violent art/
weapon.

She performed everywhere.

At the June Festivals in the countryside, there she was on the floor scream-
ing against the cis normativity.

At a festival called “Pussy Day,” she screamed calling herself a woman [...]

Until the day she stopped screaming.

Sucia had fulfilled the psychoanalyst’s prophecy.

Like Oedipus, Sucia did not escape from her destiny.

Destiny?

She screamed for help, she was heard [...] And we did nothing.

FIGURE 3
In memoriam
– monterfied
illustration
by Sucia
deLabussura,
2020²



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ABSTRACT

The artistic performance is an act, or rather, an action that almost always respects a pre-conceived performative program that considers duration, location, and execution. However, several performers extrapolate what is understood by program, and experience performative actions for a longer period of time. But when life and performance are blended together, what is left then? How can we identify what is life and what is performance? In that sense, for those who experience being on the border between living and performing, in this case, instead of a limitation or a wall, this border is a place for meetings and exchanges, where you can't tell where one space ends and the other starts, that is, it is the in-between place, where life simply flows. This is an article about Sucia Infecciosa Inmunda, a transgender person, a performer who was "monstrified" by society, and who decided to perform "monstrification" as a way of (r)existing.

KEYWORDS:

Performance;
Genre;
Transsexuality;
Activism

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