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Theatre, Gender Diversity and Border Pedagogy

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Abstract:

The way as society deals, understands and treats gender diversity affects drastically the relationships for people who are identified as transgender, transsexual, as well as those identified as gender fluid or non-binary gender. Our group from a university in southern Brazil develops several activities seeking dialogue with different social groups, bringing diversity as an issue for debates, actions and thoughts. Through interventions, artistic presentations and educational activities, we promote debates and reflection, and encourage the understanding of and respect for diversity in society. The aim of this article is to describe a project about theatre playwriting addressing diversity as the central theme. Furthermore, we explain how these actions are guided in our proposals for a Border Pedagogy and Aesthetics of Ginga. Dealing with these issues in our local society, the playwritings were fundamental for unveiling these people and stimulating their self-esteem by showing their stories as nobody else had done before.

Keywords: gender diversity, border pedagogy, aesthetics of Ginga, dramaturgy, education, theatre.

Introduction

The way as society deals, understands and treats the diversity of gender has been a widely discussed thematic in all areas. The implications of these relationships affect drastically the lives of people who are identified as transgender, transsexual, as well as those identified as gender fluid, non-binary gender. But how can we help those people considered diverse or minority gender identities in a society that has built its arguments based on dichotomous heteronormative discourses?

The reflexions of the damages caused by misunderstanding and social hostility affect and manifest in different ways in the lives of people with different gender identity, compared to traditional normatizations. Different social groups not always have the availability to look for knowledge about the reality and difficulties faced by these people, as long as regards to the acceptance of their own gender identity, as the barriers imposed by society for these people to have a professional development and life in society with equal rights and duties towards the others.

Traditionally, theatre is often the place where humanity exposes all its ailments to foster reflexion and debate all issues. These approaches can be given on stage or through theatrical dramaturgy about stories, reports and issues often difficult to approach in social dialogues. Thus, theatre acts as an interstitial place where these issues can be brought to light.

However, the dramaturgical production for theatre involving issues related to gender diversity still appears very discreet in Brazil, compared to these discussions and the relevance in contemporary debates. The transgenders daily reality, their living conditions and problems faced in a society that stigmatizes these people to live on a marginality has not received due emphasis in the current Brazilian theatrical dramaturgy.

Art, as well said by Vygotsky (1999), has the strength and ability to organize our behavior with a view to the future, a future that may never come to materialize, but art leads not only life, but also what is above and behind it. So, we can also say that actions that combine artistic and educational activities can move toward a better quality of life.

Facing this, the Nucleus of Arts, Languages and Subjectivities (NALS) and the Programme Boundaries of Diversity (PBD)¹, in the Faculty of Education, from Federal University of Pelotas (UFPEL), in a city in the southern Brazil, develops a series of activities seeking more dialogue with different social groups, bringing diversity as one of its foci for debates, actions and thoughts (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013). Through interventions and artistic presentations, workshops, events and educational activities, the members of our group seek to promote debate, reflexion and encourage understanding and respect for diversity in our local society (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013; Vargas & Bussoletti, 2014).

Considering some activities performed by members from NALS and PBD about issues related to gender, sex and sexuality, we observe that local population was not used to directly discuss about these matters (Alves, 2012; Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013; Vargas & Bussoletti, 2014). During these meetings, after several reports from gays, lesbians, transvestites, transgenders, bisexual and transsexual people, we found that these people needed to expose their problems so that society would be willing to hear them and think about these questions. Due to a deep engagement of our group in enabling different human conditions to have an expression in society, we decided to find a way where these may happen through arts (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013).

In this sense, our group has created a project called "Dramatic Theatre for Diversity", where all these stories and issues would be transformed into small

¹ The Programme Boundaries of Diversity, was classified and covered by proclamation No. 4 by University Extension Program, PROEXT 2011 - Ministry of Education and Culture of the Secretary for Higher Education from the Brazilian Government. Performs its functions since 2011 at UFPEL.

plays, with dramatic readings, performed in a second moment (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2012; Bussoletti, 2013; Vargas & Bussoletti, 2014b). We believe that, for a first approach, it would be necessary to transform some real stories, as well as create other fictional about these issues to build a more solid contact of general population with these thematic, before they could be turned into stage productions.

Moreover, due to the scarcity of theatrical texts focused on lives of transgender people, our group decided to open this possibility by writing two books, in separate volumes, called "Readings in Theatrical Dramaturgy for Diversity" (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2012; Bussoletti, 2013). Thus, the aim of this article is to describe the project "Dramatic Theatre for Diversity", as well as exposing the gender diversity issues that have been raised. Furthermore, we explain how these actions are guided in our proposals for a Border Pedagogy and Aesthetics of Ginga.

Through where gender diversity becomes in theatrical dramaturgy

The Programme Boundaries of Diversity (PBD) proposal is guided to cultural agents in educational training, with the aim of creating a permanent forum for debates about these issues in the university, which we named "University of Diversity". This forum will act as a promoter and enhancer for diversity of cultural practices, set in the perspective of the development and consolidation of an educational practice where university allies in promoting citizenship through deconstruction of prejudices and as a contrary to all forms of intolerance.

In this scenario, we created the project "Laboratory of Differences and the Workshop for Diversity". Their main objectives are to create an educational facilitator for expressions of cultural diversity, seeking to identify the different narrative territories through which differences can be seized and demonstrating that the creative exercise is a key factor in the emergence and approach to new educational paradigms. All of these activities are conducted through all art languages.

During the activities of the "Laboratory of Differences and the Workshop for Diversity", we developed an activity called "Readings in Theatrical Dramaturgy for Diversity", which was the production and collective reading of theatrical texts about and to the diversity. The process was done in weekly sessions during the year 2012, with production of texts made by members of our group and dramatic readings open to general community. However, we consider important to highlight elements that conceptually and methodologically based the propose of dramaturgical production and readings.

We argue that only pedagogical principles of an education focused on diversity can provide conditions for effective implementation of emancipatory practices in an educational scenario in Brazil, particularly when focused on issues of gender diversity. On this matter, we emphasize what Homi Bhabha (1988: 63) refers about

difference and diversity. For this author, cultural diversity is an epistemological object, where culture is perceived as an object of empirical knowledge, since the difference is a process of culture enunciation 'as' knowable, legitimate, appropriate to the construction of cultural identification systems "is a process of signification". In this process of signification, culture affirms itself as a force field where different groups recognize and affirm their own identity, never homogeneous, much less as representations of separation of totalized cultures or "protected in the utopia of a mythic memory of an unique identity collective".

Teaching playwriting for theatre is not only directed to the work of the professionals from performing arts, it can be used as a methodological option for the promotion and practice of writing, as it can be an alternative to propose discussions in different situations (Solomon, 2008; Barreto, 2010). Working with theatrical language is not always linked to the scenic exercise. The goals of any activities in this area should be related to what we want as a final product (Roubine, 1992; Ryngaert, 1995; Japiassu, 2001).

However, theatre can also be used with educational aims in various educational levels (Koudela, 1992; Vaz, 1998; Santana, 2000; Japiassu, 2001; Desgranges, 2003). Furthermore, when there is no intention or structure for an on stage production, we can appropriate ourselves of some alternatives offered by this language in order to promote discussions, reflexions, to propose other types of artistic creations, as well as theoretical (Courtney, 1980; Magaldi, 1989; Solomon, 2008; Ryngaert, 2009; Barreto, 2010; Racièri, 2010).

For the realization of our project "Theatrical Dramaturgy for Diversity", we held workshops to instrumentalize participants to playwriting, as well as to define the means we would use in our texts to address the issues of gender diversity. In these activities, some members from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have participated, they work with transsexuals, gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people, as well as members from NALS and PBD has enrolled these activities. Meantime, despite this workshop being articulated with these institutions, the workshop was also open to general people, even if they had no institutional affiliation.

Thus, due to the fact that the PBD already have an articulation among these social agents representing various institutions that address these issues and people from general public, interested in the reflexion of these matters, we believe that the playwriting workshop we proposed would enable these agents to express their text and context by writing short plays for theatre. Furthermore, we would be promoting articulation of theatre with people from various sectors of society who are interested in debates and reflexions about diversity of gender, through the construction of texts for theatre playwriting.

The diversity was not only present in the themes addressed in each text, but also expressed in the choice of textual approach taken by the authors. After each

reading, discussions were held not only about the problems presented there, but also about the aesthetic option adopted by the author to tell the story. Thus, these meetings as well as promoting discussions on gender diversities, allowed participants to discuss aesthetic conceptions to the theatre work. During these meetings, participants also debated about dramaturgical production for contemporary theatre in Brazil.

As NALS and PBD also develop their activities related to educational practice, due to the fact that these texts explore concerns that may be difficult to approach both for teachers in the classrooms, as local community in general, whether were proposed in a direct manner, its applicability also lends us to promote discussion of these topics in both areas of formal, as in non-formal education. In addition, small dramatizations of these texts can also help teachers, social workers and general people to think about various situations that those characters are facing.

The promotion of literary writing can stimulate exercise and pleasure for writing, as well as the production of texts that address issues not commonly observed in the literature in general. With respect to dramaturgy for theatre, the writing of short plays for theatre provides some situations that are explored briefly, but no less profound.

In the stories created, questions have arisen related to the difficulties faced by transsexuals and transvestites to achieve the legitimacy of their social name, bullying, homophobia, emotional relationships, self acceptance of their sexual condition, sexual identity x gender identity, family reactions on the existence of transgender in their family, difficulty to transgender join a professional career, giving continuity of education, etc. (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2012; Bussoletti, 2013). Dealing with these issues has enabled the harsh reality faced by transgenders could be recorded in these texts. If society has difficulties to know these people and their problems, the record of these texts, enabled readers evidencing this universe so often ignored and, that here, through dramaturgical writing, could act as a way for information and knowledge transmission. Thereto, as these texts were written for theatre, these stories can also be brought to the stage by actors in different places (Vargas & Bussoletti, 2014b). We also cannot forget to emphasize the novelty and uniqueness of our proposal, since the production of these texts came from individuals who face this reality in their daily lives.

Border Pedagogy and Aesthetics of Ginga in defense of gender diversity

Our activities would be nothing effective if we were not committed to a Border Pedagogy, connected to the Aesthetics of Ginga, these postures and methodological options that allow us to work in the education field, and the arts as our place of speech, this is the way we do. However, in a multicultural society, other aspects

need to be highlighted, such as what Pansini & Nenevé (2008) understand in the relationship of the educational context to multiculturalism historically formed:

[...] multicultural education suggests a break to pre-established models and hidden practices that within the school curriculum produce an effect of colonization in which students from diverse cultures, social classes and ethnic nuances take the place of colonized and marginalized by a process of silencing to their condition. (Pansini & Nenevé, 2008: 32)

According to these arguments, we believe that the possibility of paradigm changing toward innovative educational proposals is necessary and it involves the recovery of the ethical dimension of making education combined with another aesthetic principles for human existence. Such direction questions and confronts, as well as, the social-economic and political relationships of silencing, rebels against the evaluations coming from these relationships, it is what Boaventura dos Santos (2005) calls as "epistemicide".

Beyond the suffering and devastation unspoken that has produced in people, groups and social practices that was for him (epistemicide) targeted, meant an irreversible impoverishment of the horizon and the possibilities of knowledge. Whether today is installed a feeling of blockage by the absence of global alternatives to the way as society is organized, it is because for centuries, especially after that modernity, was reduced to capitalist modernity, there was proceeded to the systematic liquidation of the alternatives, when they both in the epistemological level, as in practice, are not compatible with hegemonic practices. (Santos, 2005: 329)

In order to promoting a break from the production models of imposed *silencings*, is necessary to focus on the searching of silenced voices concepts, dipping in identifying their differences and issues in their adversity, with the purpose that the possible distances not turn away further alterities. Thus, we would be minimizing the difficulties in establishing efficient pedagogical proposals, capable of generating identification and significance in many different social groups.

Accordingly, McLaren (2000) when talking about the left-liberal multiculturalism, accepts cultural differences and points out that the emphasis on equality between races stifles important characteristics that differentiate one race from another. Anyone working with this perspective tends to treat the difference as an "essence" that exists independently of history, culture and power. With regard to our work on gender diversity, we deal with these situations focusing our arguments on gender diversity in the same way this author does with race or background ethnicity, referred above. Peter McLaren (2000) also points out that:

Revolutionary Multiculturalism recognizes that the objective structures in which we live, the material relations conditioned to production in which we are situated and certain conditions that we produce are all reflected in our daily experiences. In other words, the life experiences are more than values, beliefs and subjective understandings, they are always mediated by ideological structures of discourse, political economies of power and privilege and social division of labor. The revolutionary Multiculturalism is a socialist-feminist multiculturalism which challenges the historically sedimented processes through which identities of race, class and gender are produced within capitalist society. (McLaren, 2000: 284)

We believe that our activities with the PBD, transit through historically demarcated borders which we dare transgress, because we realized that current social dialogue in Brazil requests these confrontations not in the sense of struggle, but for the path of a new way for relationship, generated from understanding. In this regard, Silveira (2005: 23) refers to the existence of borders implies in exchanges that can terminate multiple meanings, point contact in which the exchange can be favorable to both sides, contact points in which "hybridization" is possible forming a kind of "third included". From this author viewpoint, we can consider boundaries as especially symbolic spaces in which differences and asymmetries are well marked, being away from meaning an affectionate bond and removal of conflicts. For this reason, when considering any educational practice transiting this concept of borders threshold, we have to take the precaution of being blurring the differences in the search for the respect and understanding diffusion, rather than accentuate inadequate attributes about the perspective analysis of the differences.

Also with Homi Bhabha (1998), we find some clues that enable us to survive, or even live at this time, whose name, now said by many, we consider still insufficiently taken. We affirm that we transit among postmodernism, post-colonialism, post-feminism, and as many other "post" that we can evidence some confusion, disorientation, causing some explanatory inconvenience. Bhabha says what can be innovative, in terms of theoretical and political, in contemporary times, is the need to focus on moments and processes which subjectiveness are produced, respecting and articulating cultural differences. This fits into a space, called the "in-between places" where different strategies of subjectivity, both singular and collective, can mean new identities, both in the sense of collaboration and contestation of defining the idea of society (Bhabha, 1998).

The cultural borders, as well as political boundaries are symbolic manifestation forms of the complex human phenomenon, in which otherness emerges as a fundamental value, since a policy of difference configures as possible. In order to exist the difference, is necessary that the margins, the boundaries that separate the self from the other, and that allow the game between proximity and distance, is given as an adventure of knowledge as an opening to dialogue (Silveira, 2005: 28).

In our work, provoked by all of these questions, we put art as the place to confront the acts of silencing as an educational proposal that transgresses the boundaries imposed as unique, diluting differences, hybridizing thresholds, proposing art as catalyst and reflexive, all through its multiple languages. We adopt the character potentially transgressive of concepts and standards imposed, in proposing to transit within these "in-between places" where we find premises of alterity still unknown and that through diversity may be potentiating the bond in the search for knowledge.

In this regard, we emphasize the proximity to the speech made by Gómez-Peña (2005: 203), that even talking about performance art, gives us clues to overcome these concepts to our action field, when he says that at the place of speech, the only social contract that exists is our willingness to challenge dogma and authoritarian models and continue pushing culture and identity boundaries. Precisely in the matched borders among cultures, genres, crafts, languages and art forms that we feel most comfortable and where we recognize our colleagues. We are interstitial creatures and border citizens by nature - members and intruders at the same time - we rejoice in this paranoid condition. Just in the act of crossing a border, we find our emancipation ... temporal.

Accordingly, we also consider what McLaren & Giroux (2000: 44) refer to say that multicultural education not only has to listen to the "voice of the other", of marginalized groups, but help them to produce new narratives. This model requires a committed educator. We are interested in, thus, through an initiative of the Programme Boundaries of Diversity, exploring the process of identity formation by the diversity and the discursive practices that occur in what Bhabha calls "third space translation", or in what is lately identified as being the "in-between places" of culture, where different subjectivation strategies, both singular and collective, can mean new identities, both in the sense of collaboration and contestation of defining the idea of society (Bhabha, 1998).

We believe in the importance of questioning the representations of identity and alterity in ballast of what Cultural Studies suggest as a "Border Pedagogy" (Giroux, 1992), or what McLaren (1999) termed as "Identity Border" created "from the empathy for others as a passionate connection through difference 'in the fight' against our failure to see our own reflection in the eyes of others [...]" (McLaren, 1999: 193-195).

Starting from this understanding, we are led to believe in the importance of consolidating this which can be understood as a Border Pedagogy. A pedagogy that is committed to restore a critical space that can raise more questions than conceptual and finished answers, supporting the radical experience of diversity and difference, bringing to foreground the lines that sometimes separate and make, unfortunately, the boundaries insurmountable.

What we have presented so far is that we understand the possibility of treatment and apprehension of a subjectivity model that resists in the condition space-temporal of border. The understanding of this process contributes and ends up revealing emerging aesthetics derived from the miscegenation and the scenarios in which interculturality leads, configuring what we defend also as an Aesthetics of Ginga (Bussletti & Vargas, 2013).

The Aesthetics of Ginga take as the basis the conceptual work made by Hélio Oiticica, a Brazilian who lived between 1939 and 1980. A revolutionary artist that has been recognized internationally through his experimental and innovative work. In the aesthetic conception by Oiticica, an artist does not born, but transform unleash creative states. In this process, there isn't the figure of the observer, he becomes a 'participator'. Rolling concepts, Oiticica assumed that there hadn't become an artist, but someone who enabled people to emerge in this peculiar state of creative action elaborating proposals that seek which is beyond the art to which he called "invention".

Paola Jacques (2003), researching the Oiticica's work, identifies that this artist has created a proposal of "Aesthetics of Ginga", a genuine Brazilian product, where the miscegenation and the information mix nuances and cultures, creating a panorama that transits in the illustration of a carnival joy. According to this precept, the mixture and interlocution of different aspects generate new information that, just by transit and movement, as the cadence of a swing, allows the exchanges and interchanges remain active and constant in society. So, just this aspect of the Aesthetic of Ginga would let individuals reach a state where joy would be generated by acceptance and of a awareness that differences exist, but that openness to the possibility of movement and exchanges among them, generates new colorful which only enriches the characteristics and social relations toward a state of respect and appreciation for all spectra hues that constitute the identity of this population.

Final Considerations

We defend the possibility of art experimentation by education, as a web that is realized among boundaries. We aim "exercises for a behavior", as said by Oiticica, operationalized through participation and the transmutation of the spectator in narrator, whose authorship is manifested through experiences as a manifestation of life in the direction of creative activity. Between imagination and ecstasy, our proposal is deterritorialise behaviors and possibilities suppressed and/or hidden and grant the educational space in the direction of transgression and resistance of alternative practices, not submissive to the historical political concepts based on the tradition maintained by the cult of the regularities and stabilities consumable as products of a contestable order.

The results we have observed in the texts produced by our group, as well as the reflexions that emerged from discussions after dramatic readings, led us to demonstrate the commitment of our activities from the perspective of a Border Pedagogy and in relationship with the Aesthetics of Ginga. We believe that methodological approaches that will work in this direction will get best results when they are aimed at addressing issues related to gender diversity. After reading the texts produced by our group, we observed the uniqueness and importance of giving opportunity to many different social groups to make their voices heard and their words could be read by society. The content of the plays has revealed a vast universe, deep and unexplored issues that unfortunately still affect people in Brazil who simply do not have their gender identity classified into the dichotomy imposed by social heteronormativity.

However, none of this would be possible, whether the ways for dialogue and experimentation for our actions were not the arts. This means that the arts are the ground which enables us deterritorialization of socially constructed norms and dogmas. In our activities, arts were essential for stimulating reflexion on the importance of valuing diversity as a factor in human and social development and the respect for difference as a structuring of new pedagogical boundaries.

There are so many ways for dealing with gender diversity in our society. What we have done with this theatrical dramaturgy production was a way for putting stories of people who faces them in their daily life and giving the opportunity to make these situations appeared from the obscurity. The playwrightings were fundamental for dealing with these issues in our local society, unveiling these people and to stimulate their self esteem by showing their stories as anybody else did before. Besides, our pedagogical, ethical and aesthetical proposals lie to another way for working in social and educational fields in Brazil, proposing a radical epistemological change in facing our roles as active social agents, which may be experienced in other places.

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