

The Feminist Scenics: theorizations about science and practice of the feminist theater scene and the space and importance of feminist epistemologies in the theatrical field

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ABSTRACT – The Feminist Scenics: theorizations about science and practice of the feminist theater scene and the space and importance of feminist epistemologies in the theatrical field¹ – This article describes a *feminist scenic*, resulting from the application of feminist epistemologies to theater, synthesizing the criticism they make of the canonical demarcations linked to the act of knowing, which contribute to the invalidation of women's experience. Its way of functioning is associated with the awareness of gender hierarchies, to which it reacts through the formulation of poetic and political strategies to confront discriminatory and sexist social models and their symbolic supports. It is concluded that this *feminist scenic* finds centrality in pedagogy, where emancipatory forms of knowledge and territories of resistance and creation emerge, which give new meaning to being.

Keywords: **Feminist Scenic. Feminist Epistemologies. Theater Pedagogy. Critical Theories.**

RÉSUMÉ – La Scénique Féministe: théorisations sur la science et la pratique de la scène théâtrale féministe et l'importance d'une pédagogie féministe dans le domaine théâtral – Cet article décrit un *scénique féministe*, issu de l'application des épistémologies féministes au théâtre, synthétisant la critique qu'elles font des démarcations canoniques liées à l'acte de connaître, qui contribuent à invalider l'expérience des femmes. Son mode de fonctionnement est associé à la conscience des hiérarchies de genre, à laquelle il réagit à travers la formulation de stratégies poétiques et politiques pour affronter les modèles sociaux discriminatoires et sexistes et leurs supports symboliques. On conclut que ce *scénique féministe* trouve une place centrale dans la pédagogie, où émergent des formes de connaissance émancipatrices et des territoires de résistance et de création, qui donnent un nouveau sens à l'être.

Mots-clés: **Scénique Féministe. Épistémologies Féministes. Pédagogie Théâtrale. Théories Critiques.**

RESUMO – A Cênica Feminista: teorias sobre a ciência e a prática da cena teatral feminista e a importância de uma pedagogia feminista no campo teatral – Este artigo teoriza sobre uma *cênica feminista*, resultante da aplicação ao teatro das epistemologias feministas, sintetizando a crítica que fazem às demarcações canônicas atreladas ao ato de conhecer, que contribuem para a desvalidação da experiência das mulheres. Associa-se seu modo de funcionamento à consciência das hierarquias de gênero, às quais reage por meio da formulação de estratégias poéticas e políticas de enfrentamento aos modelos sociais discriminatórios e sexistas e aos seus sustentáculos simbólicos. Conclui-se que essa *cênica feminista* encontra centralidade na pedagogia, onde emergem formas de saber emancipatórias e territórios de resistência e criação, que ressignificam o ser.

Palavras-chave: **Cênica Feminista. Epistemologias Feministas. Pedagogia do Teatro. Teorias Críticas.**



For Socorro Trindad, the first Brazilian feminist was the Potiguar Indian Clara Camarão, a leading figure in the struggles against the Dutch during the first half of the 17th century. On the battlefields, she led a group of female Indians in encouraging the pro-Portuguese fighters to heroic feats of arms (Sharpe-Valadares, 1989).

How do feminist epistemologies fit into the theater field? Can it be said that they constitute a territory of observation on theatrical making that departs from general theater theory, or even that they inspire processes of creation and training that are different from “general” stage practice? Is its usefulness focused on the “place of women” on scene, or does it extend beyond their protagonism, intervening in ways of understanding scenic phenomena, crossed by the relationships between living people, men and women? Is it possible, then, to describe a *feminist scenic*, which involves a praxis of theater whose mode of operation depends to a high degree on awareness of gender hierarchies and which, in the face of this evidence, unfolds into poetic and political strategies to combat discriminatory and sexist social models, as well as their symbolic underpinnings?

Feminisms are movements that aim to transform social relations, which have been perpetuated by a notable inequality between individuals. Their emphasis on reacting to the hierarchies that sediment the place of privilege that some people occupy, to the detriment of others, is in relations between the genders, initially between men and women. For these movements, which have been organizing and changing ever since women were able to find ways to go through their individual experiences and perceive in other women sufferings and satisfactions that identified with their own, one of the aims is to question the social structures that maintain these differences, and the reasons why men have prevalent value over women.

Feminisms, therefore, are allied with other social movements in favor of human rights, or the right to a life that dignifies what has been consecrated as humanity, but without excluding any species of life from this project of humanity, including animals, plants, minerals, etc. For feminisms, with regard to human diversity, the positions attributed to men and women are understood as culturally instituted and historically and geographically demarcated and, therefore, subject to change. This transformation, feminisms note, will come when there is a broad understanding that the rigidity and compulsion of these positions is harmful to both men and women.

Pragmatically, however, they infer that it will be up to women to push for these changes, since those who have benefits are unlikely to want to give up what favors them in order to share whatever it is with others.

From the perspective of feminist movements, this revolutionary impulse calls for many fronts of action, which are related to the focus of the struggle: whether it takes place in the streets, in the intimacy of homes, or in the workplace; in the big city or in the small rural village; in the fields of justice, politics or subjectivities. They also derive according to the women involved in feminist groups and organizations, situated in their realities, which determine the urgencies to be faced. For this reason, although feminism is a global movement, feminisms have varying demands and different compositions.

At the same time, because they are anchored in the historical flow – since it dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, germinating from women's struggle for the right to universal suffrage – it is possible to list facets that characterize phases in the course of these movements over the decades, as well as the places where they had the most forceful expression. For example, this flow began as a way for women to achieve basic civil rights (the right to suffrage, independence in marriage, inheritance, etc.) in European countries and, from there, in other regions of the world. It continues in the discussion about the right to education and better working conditions, comparable to those of men, and expands in the debate about the power to decide over one's own body (involving sexual rights, the right to express multiple forms of desire, the right to choose about maternity and birth control, etc.).

There is a consensus that, later on in history, women's movements will differ in terms of protagonisms, demands and strategies, with the necessary confrontation of inequalities within the class of women itself. The agendas diverge and sometimes meet again, in the confrontation (led by black women) of racism intersected with social class and gender exclusions; in the recognition of loneliness and dorority²; in the screaming for the inclusion of trans and transvestite women in social institutions (schools, State institutions, etc.) with a cisgender majority; in the struggle for the inclusion of trans and transvestite women in social institutions (schools, state institutions, etc.) with a cisgender majority; in the coalition of womanities³ which



are pro-critical revision of whiteness; in the struggle for land led by peasant women; in the perspective of indigenous feminism, thematizing the reaction of original women to the dominations of coloniality... Alongside this list of things, other still urgent agendas survive, such as the freedom to occupy public space, or the urgency of interrupting the cycle of violence against women.

As there is a complementarity between feminist ways of acting and thinking, intersections occur, combining these different forces. Without confusing ourselves with the question of where the spark came from, we can see that the fire continues to spread wherever there is fuel, whether it is in the daily mobilization of political agents or in spaces for philosophical reflection. If we look from the angle of social movements or study groups, we can see how subject and object are linked in the act of knowing; an act that derives from (and enshrines) demarcations regarding “[...] the nature of agency, justification, objectivity, rationality and knowledge itself [...]” (Satler, 2019, p. 3). Feminist epistemology will confront the canons of the act of knowing, making dialoguing context, power and validation criteria of epistemic authority (values and conceptions that justify its superiority, subordinating other subjects of experience and their cognitive styles) and denouncing the political-ideological system that governs the dynamics of social exclusion.

This dialog is also provoked between feminist theories and other critical theories in the fields of Philosophy, Anthropology, Literature, Economics, History, Arts, etc. Thus, it is possible to speak of a feminist art, as well as a feminist pedagogy, which would be applications of feminist understanding to the most diverse fields of thought and transformative action. Engaging with women’s issues therefore inspires a way of approaching all these areas of human knowledge, since they all contain the same operations that subjugate women.

Feminist theaters as *ethos* of a way-and-thought

It is in this context that feminist theaters are differentiated, described in a plural term, highlighting their reactivity to any aesthetic standardization that stands in the way of an *ethos*⁴ of their own, from which their objectives, expressive strategies, practices and conceptualizations derive, and



around which their ways of being and doing are redirected over time. From this formulation, a feminist theatrical theory or a feminist science of the scenic can also be envisioned, based on the same engagement with women's experience in the territory of the theater, in conjugation with social life. It is worth exploring the meaning and scope of this feminist scenic theory (which synthesizes the science and practice of the theatrical scene), in order to value its power to inspire the various territories of theater, from creation to critical production.

The American philosopher of Science Helen Longino (2005), writing in *Can There Be A Feminist Science?*, about the professional world in which she works, proposes to discuss the meaning of defending a feminist science, in other words, what is gained (or lost) by associating the science done by women with a notion of *another science*. However, instead of determining this science based on some singular quality (for example, that it would be "less objective", or more in line with a supposed temperament of women, or even their cognitive capacity), the author prefers to refer to a feminist way of doing science, strongly related to the social conditions that would make a feminist science possible.

At the same time, when asked about these social conditions, Longino replies that it is only possible to demonstrate the social conditions that have made some types of scientific reflection misogynistic discourses. As an example, the author invites us to look at the history of women scientists, within the framework of the social structure of professional science, and perceive both the difficulty they face in sustaining their daily work, with structural pressures that do not favor their path, and the way in which they have been expanding their achievements. A similar path and conclusion is reached by art historian Linda Nochlin (2016), in *Por que não houve grandes mulheres artistas?*, a question that, while it seems to seek to understand the place and power of women in the visual arts and other creative practices, reinforces the negative assessment that circulates around women artists in the history of the discipline and in common sense, because it does not even question the hypothesis about their fragile presence in the hegemonic canon. The author proclaims:



But in reality, as we all know, things as they are and as they have been, in the arts as well as in hundreds of other areas, are boring, oppressive and discouraging for all those who, like women, were not lucky enough to be born white, preferably middle class and above all male (Nochlin, 2016, p. 8).

Nochlin and Longino agree that instead of “[...] rationalizing the bad conscience of those in power [...]” (Nochlin, 2016, p. 10), perpetuating their distortions of reality, it is necessary to open up what is assumed to be natural and strive for “[...] a reinterpretation of the nature of the situation or a radical change of position or program on the part of the issues themselves [...]” (Nochlin, 2016, p. 10). In the Performing Arts, we recognize a number of signs of androcentric patterns, such as the frequency with which productions by male authors are highlighted in theatre culture (demonstrating the *sexual division of labor* within the performing arts); as well as the continued adoption of male artists as role models; the insistence on a certain neutrality of the body (from acting systems to training activities and analyses of stage presence), and the use of masculine terms for general categories, such as actor/audience/artist.

These conditions, true forms of symbolic domination that exist in the theater environment, are also reflected in the inequality, in relation to men, in the attendance and permanence of women in teaching activities at a higher level and in academic research in the area, replicating what happens in professional theater criticism and in certain functions of stage practice, especially those that concentrate greater decision-making power within the creative processes (for example, staging, dramaturgy and production direction). This analysis, to be gauged in up-to-date quantitative terms in new research focusing on the theatrical area, will probably not differ from what is seen in the academic world, as cited by the Brazilian sociologist Lourdes Bandeira (2008), based on the statistics provided by CNPq in 2007 (with data from 2004). She lists: “Data from the CNPq’s Directory of Research Groups (DGP) show that, as far as research productivity grants are concerned, [...] in 2004 there were 41,168 men and 36,080 women engaged in research, which means 47% female participation” (Bandeira, 2008, p. 208). Of the total, the major area of Linguistics, Letters and Arts is in third place in terms of the number of female researchers, below the Humanities and Biological Sciences and above only Engineering.

The defense of greater access for women to the field of theater (as well as to the sciences), however, is part of the issue, which serves to value the diversity of thought and expression in human societies, as well as to repair the exclusions still present in the dominant canon. On the other hand, we see that the persistence of women has led to the production of alternative imaginaries, which disrupt the standardized and traditional norms of scenic behavior and allow the recognition, in the theatrical space, of more multiple individualities; in addition to promoting the insertion of other analytical perspectives, which have been suggesting new themes and reformulating the way of producing and sharing knowledge.

Helen Longino's (2005) reflection helps us to evaluate some of the pros and cons of circumscribing feminist theater in relation to theater *in general*, as well as feminist theater theory in relation to established theater theory. In both cases, it is a question of emphasizing a feminist way of creating and reflecting on the scene, but without any assumption arising from a feminine taste or talent, or from practices more suited to women. What drives this feminist character in the way we make theater and think about it are precisely the social structures and conditions that in the arts of presence, as in other environments, make women subject to discredit and hinder their professional and personal fulfillment, but which also mobilizes them as a class of theater women. Back to the author:

[We] women are too diverse in our experiences to generate a single cognitive framework (Lugones and Spelman 1983). In addition, the sciences are themselves too diverse for me to think that they might be equally transformed by such a framework. To reject this concept of a feminist science, however, is not to disengage science from feminism. I want to suggest that we focus on science as practice rather than content, as process rather than product, hence, not on feminist science, but on doing science as a feminist (Longino, 2005, p. 2).

At the same time as valuing the choices of the feminist way of doing science, Longino rejects a universal dimension to define a "woman's science" and dismisses the woman-holism relationship, among other meanings that try to define what is the dominant behavior of women (an aspect that she considers to be an unfortunate confusion between femininity and feminism). In this way, the author seeks to undo any universalist and essentialist traits that might cross the dialog between science and the female gender. We can also transfer these considerations to the theater, an environment in



which diversity among women is reflected in the multiple ways in which they insert themselves into the performing arts, as well as in the varied understandings they bring to performing and in the discourses they express in their works, from the scene to the text.

If the feminist *ethos*, then, does not derive from absolute conditioning factors, determined only by biology, or only by the environment or culture, its emergence derives from the adoption of strategies, chosen consciously and procedurally, even if they are appropriated by each person according to spheres of affinity and other horizons of expectations. We agree that this feminist praxis will appear in the use of a feminist epistemology, that is, in the adoption of certain interpretative frameworks that will support the understanding of the phenomena of the world⁵. This choice is always determined by the beliefs and values that motivate us and, in the case of feminist scenic, it is revealed in the choice of more plastic and dynamic models, to the detriment of others that are more plastered and linear. That is, an epistemology (in the sense of a search for truth) will do justice to feminist proposals if it harbors a tendency towards complexity and plasticity, because the political point of view of feminisms defends the potential for agency and transformation.

Feminist scenic, therefore, is not just about affirmative action, nor is it a way of being or thinking born out of the experience of being a woman, but it must be credited to a voluntarily applied point of view, which does not ignore equality as a right – or as Joan Scott (2005) puts it, the thought of equality supported by differences that are never fixed – and which aims to bring the performing arts closer to social justice. For this reason, it will require the creation of more “interactionist” and complex models, as Longino (2005, p. 8) summarizes:

We cannot restrict ourselves simply to the elimination of bias, but must expand our scope to include the detection of limiting and interpretive frameworks and the finding or construction of more appropriate frameworks.

More appropriate frameworks, we might add, are those that understand that analytical capacity is formed by political considerations, which determine the attention we pay to a content or phenomenon, at which point the disputes and tensions between positions will direct interpretative resources, acting on reflection. It is this evidence that allows us to evaluate

feminist theater as a kind of political vision of what theater can do, in other words, the feminist attitude towards the science of theater is also anti-hegemonic and subversive. Feminist theaters are a political theater, even if feminism, in general terms, is a political gesture that is born as non-political, as Eleni Varikas (1996) points out, or contrary to the gap between revolutionary (or “progressive”) political discourses – even “liberal” ones – and their view of women.

Ever since Olympe de Gouges⁶, a French abolitionist and feminist from the 18th century who was also a playwright, women have had to distrust and criticize institutional politics in order to see their demands for equality between the sexes included on the agenda of public disputes. It is known that de Gouges was not only a militant, but also harshly criticized her male partners in the revolutionary struggle, especially Robespierre and Marat, being arrested and murdered by the Revolutionary Tribunal. In this trajectory, de Gouges, like her successors in militancy inside and outside the theater, occupied the public space demanding participation in political life in order to demand a change in the systemic theory of political organization of the modern project⁷, an organization based on the conventional family, a space deprived of rights, which is home to hierarchy and inequality between men and women (Varikas, 1996).

The impasse that de Gouges had to overcome – a dilemma that is nonetheless part of her political work – coincides with the necessary *deconstruction of differences* that feminism aims to achieve, finding a passage between me and us, by demarcating the difference between men and women. In principle and by principle, feminisms are movements for equality, but in terms of public argument and militancy, they operate from the point of view of exposing gender differences and, strategically, they need to deconstruct the opposition between equality/difference in order to then affirm “equality in difference”, that is, to constitute a more effective opposition for women’s experience, which would be between equality/inequality (Pierucci, 2008). In other words, for feminisms, there is no general principle of difference, but rather an extensive diversity (not just based on the male-female opposition), which serves to combat the categories that have supported the naturalization of difference: in late capitalist societies, diversity is crushed by a kind of *sameness*, which eliminates the differences between groups of



equals, while increasing the differences in value between categories, allowing for hierarchy and exploitation.

In a way, in feminist scenic, it is necessary to adopt a similar stragem, composing with the theorizations and practices of political theaters to, from it, reconsider the way in which they oppose the social class structure, in the interest of not maintaining the subordination of women on a level underlying that of the economy, of exploitation of man by man. This is the task that feminist gestic criticism has carried out, as I describe in *As contradições sobre a posição das mulheres em encenações de 'A Vida de Galileu Galilei': jeitos de fazer gênero com Brecht no Brasil* (2017), through the “[...] use of Brechtian dialectics and the resources of his epic theater as tools of feminist theater, precisely because they offer the possibility of exposing the construction factor of social gender conventions, paving the way for the transformation of dominant patterns and values” (Romano, 2017, p. 7).

Authors such as Alisa Solomon (1994), Della Pollock (1989), Iris Smith (1991), Jill Dollan (2012), Elin Diamond (1988), Janelle Reinelt (1986; 1996) and Sue Ellen Case (1983) recognize in the *gestus*-historicization-epic structure tripod a legacy that can be appropriated by theater makers and researchers, in a way that the thinker and playwright himself did not intend, such as the use of his theory as a model for feminist theater (Mumford, 1997). At the same time, despite the usefulness of Brechtian theory for defamilizing the social order and the social places assigned to the genders, the authors do not fail to observe in the German author’s thought problems inherited from Marx and Engels’ analysis of the role of women in class society, which Brecht updated, without largely solving⁸.

Bárbara Santos (2019), creator of the guidelines of the *Teatro das Oprimidas* (Theater of the Female Oppressed), also continues the insertion of the feminist perspective into the political *scene*, extended from institutional practice, in a *macro* field, to the theater of engagement. Based on Augusto Boal’s proposals for a theater committed to the class struggle, in the bias of historical materialism, Bárbara Santos and other artists and activists who cooperated with her, modified procedures and invented techniques, turning to exclusive groups of women and, primarily, from the popular sectors and “peripheral” countries (Santos, 2016). In the words of Maria Bernardete Toneto (2022, p. 100-101), this is a crucial determination: “To



talk about women and their diverse conditions, it is not enough to repeat the old: new aesthetic proposals need to be invented. What is new at the moment is the network condition that Ma(g)dalenas assume, in which Brazil and Latin America have a lot to share”.

The aspect of invention is the attitude expected of the feminist scenic, but not with the intention of cooperating with the economy of novelty, one of the facets of the logic of capital, translated into the universe of artistic creation. On the contrary, invention is at the service of overthrowing self-mystification and individualized genius. In the revision of theatrical games and the foundations of Boal’s Method, which began in 2010 at Laboratório Madalena (in Rio de Janeiro), then at Estúdio Kuringa (in Berlin), and later in different spaces (in Latin America, Europe and Africa)⁹, the joker and researcher created alliances with other women, making the construction of networks one of the central aspects of the combination of feminist epistemology and T.O. Finally, she complements:

Its foundations [of the Theater of the Female Oppressed] include positions based on a worldview from the perspective of the Aesthetics of the Oppressed, which joins a network of women from non-central countries. The aim is an intentional network of partnerships and the identification of a common struggle, even in dispersed and distant geographical situations. All those involved, in addition to their feminine condition, bear the scars of the colonization of their peoples. In this sense, they undertake a decolonial struggle (Toneto, 2022, p. 113).

We recognize in the women’s network of the *Teatro das Oprimidas* the opposition, which qualifies the feminist mode, to the overvaluation of individual achievements. On the other hand, they seek to establish collaborations and value relational aspects, modulating scenic praxis as a “[...] scientific objectivity [that] has to be reconceived as a function of the communal structure of scientific inquiry rather than as a property of individual scientists (Longino, 2005, p. 5) The constant dialog with other feminists also guarantees the design of a communal thought, which goes beyond a single point of view, or a single moment, or a limited territory. Strategically, recalls Argentine sociologist and activist María Lugones, writing in partnership with American philosopher Elizabeth Spelman (Lugones; Spelman, 1983), the network can also strengthen minority blocs, which gain greater negotiating power in relation to the supremacism of other groups, such as what happens between “color-

ized” women (Latinas, Black and Indigenous people) and “non-colored” women (white Anglo-Saxons). For the authors:

We have heard it said that now that Third World countries are more powerful as a bloc, westerners need to learn more about them, that it is in their self-interest to do so. [...] Seeing us in our communities will make clear and concrete to you how incomplete we really are in our relationships with you (Lugones; Spelman, 1983, p. 580-581).

Strengthened as a collective, colored women in the Third World acquire the status of recognition of a unique otherness, expressed by themselves, which will lead to the establishment of more isonomic intercultural “friendliness” relationships. This will require circumspection, self-questioning on the part of the dominant episteme and, finally, the joint construction, through mutual dialogue, of another sensibility.

Once again, we see the power of feminisms in offering other possibilities for how theatrical knowledge is constructed. The adoption of concepts that break with the masculinist model of knowledge-power – for example, the use of gender as an analytical category¹⁰, or belonging as a way of awakening feminist consciousness and activism¹¹ – has helped feminist theatrical science to create another symbolic order, as well as to relate to the concerns of social movements, not just “women’s” movements (Bandeira, 2008). This results in feminist theatrical research that is oriented towards more inductive processes (which are born from the phenomena investigated themselves), that considers multiple temporalities (paying attention to the various narratives that make up history¹²) and does not give up an approach to life, including inserting reference materials (such as interviews, letters, artifacts, life stories, etc.) that exceed more traditional bibliographic sources (Neves, 2012). Portuguese psychologist Sofia Neves (2012) adds that we need to take an intersectional perspective, in response to the risk of essentialism that gender as a category can incur. Intersectionality also implies a more comprehensive analysis of the complexity of discriminatory processes, especially involving racialized women. In her words:

The intersectional perspective avoids the biological redux on which essentialism is based, as well as the stereotyping of identities (DeFrancisco & Palczewsky, 2007), proposing a reading of gender beyond gender. Intersectional analysis thus recognizes the plurality of processes that condition discrimination, with gender being just one of these processes (Neves, 2012, p. 2).

Feminist thought practice in the theater also proposes to know and recognize theatrical historiography, in order to reveal the perspectives and



ideologies at work, and how they influence the choice of landmark events and the understanding given to the participation of historical subjects in the historical flow itself. It is this revision of history that makes it possible to give visibility to what has been rendered invisible, that is, to reveal erasures and silences covered up by the Law, which forges the fabric of reality (Foucault, 2009)¹³.

In the context of writing a *herstory*, as the formulation of historical narratives from the perspective of women has come to be known (Morgan, 1970; Scott, 1998; Perrot, 1988), Michelle Perrot (2003) will recover the history of women's bodies, which have been the most silenced of all. The body, which in rationalist thought is "[...] the main enemy of objectivity" (Jaggar; Bordo, 1997, p. 10), will acquire central status in feminist epistemology. Science's conception of itself, which determines its methods and assumptions, including generalizations about the nature of knowledge and the cognitive, expressive and social abilities of men and women, will be frankly confronted by the construction of embodied knowledge, which prioritizes the constitutive relationships between ethics, knowledge and the living body. Embodied knowledge becomes a feminist philosophical starting point and a way of accessing knowledge and describing it in a language "saturated" with experience. This is what Daniel Lemos Cerqueira (2021, p. 36) points out:

In this way, the understanding of knowledge extends to other types of information coming from our body's sensory mechanism: touch, spatialization, kinaesthesia (which together make up movement, gesture and bodily expression), smell, taste and a more comprehensive use of sight and hearing.

If, in society as a whole, corporeality is the territory of disputed gender inscriptions, reflecting masculinist domination and social control, feminist epistemology confronts the mind/body dualism and elevates the body, in its systemic complexity, to a way of rescuing unsubmitive female subjectivity, which resists male oppression (spread from beauty standards to health models, and from sexual arrangements to visibility policies). The gendered body, in this way, is a distinct unit – because it can be known – but never an "object", since it shows itself to be an active exemplar of multidimensional reality, bearing material witness to both aspects of subjectivity, embodied and realized in living presence, and ideology, replicating values and social institutions that organize and shape everyday existence.

Therefore, in feminist scenic, the body is not a mere support, but is performative, that is, “[...] it does not repeat itself. It does not become static and fossilized [...]” (Lugones, 2014, p. 948). In the space of practice, the body promotes groupings, escapes the logic of merchandise and resists representation, because it plays with the names and affections that are determined for subjects, generating complex situations where it is more difficult to recognize the “[...] lived modes of embodiment [...]” (Butler, 2018, p. 37) that legitimizing practices manage to normalize. In research, on the other hand, embodied knowledge converges on the notion of research-creation, in which the researcher is integrated into the artistic object being analyzed, with creation being a way of getting to know better what is being examined theoretically, at the same time as a way of describing the reflections that have been elaborated.

The highlighting of the body as the locus of embodied knowledge, finally, makes the feminist way a praxic¹⁴, which allows us to name the praxical foundation of the entire feminist scenic, in which theory and practice feed back into each other. In terms of stage theory, the feminist way derives from recognizing the failure of working with theoretical analysis in an objective way, attached to the pretension that objective data leads to a repertoire of knowledge: for feminist epistemology, however, values are contextual and governed subjectively and culturally, and this is how phenomena must also be described. The reproduction of a dualistic and hierarchical vision, presented in a series of universals (nature/culture; body/mind; emotion/reason; margin/center), contributes to a sexist reading of the world, corresponding to the binarism of woman/man. In this way, theory/practice binarism and the fragmentation between these instances also need to be overcome, giving rise to a dynamism between the world of life, the theoretical world, practical reason, technique, knowledge in and through the body and theoretical cognition (Deconto; Ostermann, 2021).

Conclusion: learning from the mutant game between “equality and difference”, establishing a feminist scenic pedagogy

Contemporary feminisms have absorbed the idea that subjects are discursively made men and women by defining a natural sex at birth. The effort to unveil this construction and the damage it does to so-called “minori-



ties”, however, is developed through strategies whose foundations lie in the positive and productive affirmation of the difference between men and women (which resulted, as already mentioned, in the writing of a new history, the history of women; as well as the formulation of a “feminine culture” and the constitution of the field of “women’s studies”).

Alongside this discourse, counter-discourses confront any possibility of stabilizing the gendered subject, taking on the powers of various trends, including queer theory and anti-speciesism, of the radical environmentalism (Agra, 2016). It can be said, therefore, that the game between “equality and difference” constitutes the very learning path of feminism.

Learning from the experience of women’s struggles reflects how central the possibility of knowing once again, or knowing differently, is in feminist epistemology. Ever since the founding discourse of the first feminists, in Brazil and abroad, changing established power has depended on the plasticity of knowledge, in such a way that education, in direct correspondence with changes in the world project, was and has been an incomparable resource. In order to question spaces of privilege, education is called upon to consciously transform even the last bastion of women’s oppression.

Nísia Floresta Brasileira Augusta (1989), a poet, educator and writer from Rio Grande do Sul, immersed herself in the work of English philosopher and activist Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), inaugurating the first inks of national feminism. She also wrote the *Opúsculo Humanitário* (Humanitarian Opuscle) (1853), in which she argued that only an “enlightened education” could free us from the oppression of the rulers, since the difference between women and men stemmed from a lack of education and schooling, not from biological inferiority.

The relationship between the defense of education for women and political emancipation, with effective participation in civil society, also motivated the creation of a school for women in 1838, named “Colégio Augusto”. João Telésforo (2015, s. p.) comments on the educational project of this founding Brazilian feminist:

While other schools for women were basically concerned with sewing and good manners, Nísia’s taught languages, natural and social sciences, mathematics and the arts, as well as developing innovative pedagogical methods. It was an affront to the dominant ideology that this knowledge was only for men, and that women should learn the care of the ‘home’ and the moral virtues of a good mother and wife...

Guacira Lopes Louro, more than one hundred and thirty years after the foundation of Colégio Augusto, turns to the school, offering a *queer* approach¹⁵, in a post-identity context, to question the normalization of bodies. Analyzing the effect of heterosexual technologies in order to contrast them with other possibilities for understanding subjects, the Brazilian researcher and educator re-evaluates the environment of pedagogy as a strategic and contradictory place of submission, but also of emancipation of subjects who find themselves on the borders.

It is possible to glimpse the relevance of confronting gender hierarchies through theater pedagogy in the dimension of a feminist scenic, which questions the feminist way of doing theater from multiple womanities, to the point of challenging values rooted in the very conception of teaching and learning. In the face of hegemonic theatrical models, it is up to a feminist scenic pedagogy to be disruptive, because it carries the potential, “[...] ultimately to transform the character of [the] discourse” (Longino, 2005, p. 09). This pedagogy conceived in a feminist way also emerges from a non-sexist process of choices (Romano, 2019), from teaching practices, pedagogical materials, vocabularies and training activities to aesthetic models and interpretative schemes¹⁶. It is impossible not to extend its inventive curiosity, finally, to the type of involvement between teacher and student, to the summoning of corporeality, to the group’s enunciative autonomy and the critical stance towards disciplinary technologies, known to be of masculine hegemony¹⁷.

Imaginamos esta ação formativa, entretanto, distante de uma visão essencialista do que é a mulher, ou seja, nunca a partir de atributos biológicos, aspectos intelectivos ou expressivos únicos, ou “próprios da mulher”. We imagine this formative action, however, far removed from an essentialist view of what a woman is, in other words, never based on biological attributes, unique intellectual or expressive aspects, or “women’s own”. As Longino (2005, p. 9) would have it, the formative action of the feminist scenic will be “[...] done by feminists [...], and by members of other disenfranchised groups [...]” *as feminists*; in other words, determined by resistance to compulsory heterosexuality, racism, cisgenderism, speciesism and capitalism, patterns of existence that also intersect interpersonal relations and the forms of representation embodied in the scene.



Thus, feminist scenic is also a frontier, part of the world of theater “in a general way” and, at the same time, foreign to it. If the predicates we see in this scenic seem insufficient or excessively radical, since they suggest the alternation of the places of knowledge-power established in the theatrical field, it would be worth remembering, as Heleieth Safiotti (1976) points out, that the forms of oppression against women are also responsible for the precariousness of social interactions in competitive societies; in her words: “In real life, however, the actions of men and women continue to complement each other so that the mystification of female beings is matched by the mystification of male beings” (Safiotti, 1976, p. 6). Finally, it will be in the central engine of this feminist stage, pedagogy, that the opportunity to build more equitable symbolic values will occur, taking on the adventure of “decolonizing gender”. This pedagogy qualifies as feminist and decolonial because it outlines “[...] the space where the restitution of subaltern knowledge is taking place and where border thinking is emerging” (Mignolo as cited in Lugones, 2014, p. 947), miles ahead of the reading of sexual differences as a dispute.

Notes

- ¹ This work was developed with the support of CNPq, Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico – Brazil.
- ² A concept defined by black Brazilian feminist Vilma Piedade to specify the feeling of sisterhood among black women, determined by the violence of colonial slavery and its echoes in the present day. She adds to the feminist concept of sorority the marks of racism, translated into the social and subjective experience of black women in “Moral suffering, sorrow, grief, affliction, pity, compassion” (Piedade, 2017, p. 17).
- ³ *Mulheridades*. This is a strategic formulation that reacts to the essentialization of the category “woman” and its description within the heterosexual binary system, supporting itself by bringing together multiple attributes that affect the various subjects who identify with the class of women. It is associated with Joan Riviere’s *womanliness* (2005) and feminisms of difference, in order to define its rhetoric and agenda of demands based on less fixed identity structures that represent a plurivocal political subject.



- ⁴ According to Maria Silvia Cintra Martins (2007): in the chapter *Ethos aristotélico, convicção e pragmática moderna*, Eggs (2005) explains how, for Aristotle, discourse or argumentation is built on three pillars: *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. *Logos* refers to the rational argumentation itself; *pathos* refers to the involvement and convincing of the interlocutor; *ethos* refers to the ethical or moral aspect that the enunciator reveals in their discourse.
- ⁵ In the example of the stages of scientific research, data analysis would be one of the possible types of support.
- ⁶ In the work *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*, published in France in 1789, Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) demands that women have the same rights as men, since they were born free like them. The free and sovereign nation, therefore, should be made up of these two subjects and guarantee them the same benefits of justice and freedom, while preserving their natural rights. Olympe de Gouges does not end her claim with the abstract guarantee of these rights, but postulates that, because the oppression of women is due to the yoke of some (men) over others (women), it would be up to the law (which expresses the truth) to restore what belongs to them, placing measures in the domain of men, in a kind of “conjugal revolution”. In the same way, all women should be considered citizens and share in the contribution that is theirs: work, but also the right to write the laws that will govern society through the Constitution.
- ⁷ In this project, politics seeks to constitute a cohesive whole, governed by a stony, fundamental reason, which underlies a dilemma between equality and difference that often masks inequalities.
- ⁸ Other criticisms concern the author’s personal behavior in his personal and work relationships, these latter based on the little recognition he gave to the collaborations of authors such as Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin and Ruth Berlau in his works.
- ⁹ According to Bárbara Santos (2021, s. p.): “This initiative, called Laboratório Madalena, was multiplied between 2010 and 2011, in Argentina, Uruguay, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Germany, Portugal, Spain (Catalonia and the Basque Country), Austria and India with groups of artist-activists, in partnership with feminist movements, women’s rights organizations and socio-cultural associations”.
- ¹⁰ As Margareth Rago (1998) points out.



- ¹¹ The methodology of awakening consciousness applied to theatrical spaces exclusively for women is discussed in my article *Provocando gênero na criação cênica em colaboração: contribuições feministas para os processos colaborativos do teatro de grupo* (Provoking gender in collaborative scenic creation: feminist contributions to collaborative group theater processes). See Romano (2023).
- ¹² Walter Benjamin (1993) summarizes that “[...] history is the object of a construction whose place is not homogeneous and empty time, but a time saturated with nows” (Benjamin, 1993, p. 229). Jacques Rancière (2021) argues that temporality is also a political and aesthetic category, from which he formulates his notion of “any moment”, a plane of temporality redefined by political subjects, and which resists the homogenization of time (which orders life and pre-determines destinies), thus allowing for emancipation and dissent. Leda Maria Martins (2021), inspired by Yoruba tradition, goes far beyond Western philosophy’s model of temporality, suggesting “[...] time as spirals [...], now tangled in new diction, like ritornellos. The compositions, as if they were synthesis cells of resurgent ideas, can be read in a consecutive syntax or as complementary cumulative condensations that, as in the responsos, maintain the theme, but also improvise with it, like the spiral time itself that inspires them (Martins, 2021, p. 17).
- ¹³ The author summarizes: “Fiction therefore consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing how invisible is the invisibility of the visible” (Foucault, 2009, p. 225).
- ¹⁴ *Práxica*. In Marx (2007), the notion of praxis is situated in the revolutionary context and is described as a theory that emanates from practice and which, once experienced, allows for new reflective considerations. In this way, it cannot just be defined theoretically, but must be “acted upon”, or socially realized; in other words, it is a practical-critical activity.
- ¹⁵ For Butler, taking a queer perspective, policies should not only aim to recognize identity, but also to oppose the “surveillance of identity”, refusing the heteronormative perspective also present in the logic of the liberal-democratic state (where the sense of “right”, of “legality” is fundamental).
- ¹⁶ Here, a feminist pedagogy is associated with a feminist curatorship, which looks for examples in scenic practice, in an expanded field, that combine the perspectives listed here, providing themes, aesthetic operations, poetics and process practices. These examples are not discussed here, due to the limitations of the article’s scope. However, they can be found in other theoretical produc-

tions on contemporary feminist theater, in Brazil and abroad. We only emphasize that they will always be examples rooted in the localized contexts of their creations.

- ¹⁷ In order to consider the achievements and possibilities of feminist scenic, it is also worth remembering the lack of a single feminist current, but rather of currents that collaborate with each other and compete trying to explain the reason for the subordination of women in various fields. This attempt involves awareness, reaction/revolt to androcentric, totalizing and universalizing knowledge, as well as the struggle to transform the systems of domination that are also present in the performing arts.

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