

Docile Object and Proposing Object: a study on the qualities of the object and its possibilities in the creative process in Performing Arts

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ABSTRACT – Docile Object and Proposing Object: a study on the qualities of the object and its possibilities in the creative process in Performing Arts – This article develops, identifies and presents two qualities to think about the objects used in creation processes in Performing Arts, in which we investigate body-object relations. We present the objects as docile or proposing and discuss their respective characteristics. Our methodology involved the selection and analysis of contemporary works in which we could examine principles relating to the physical characteristics of materials as well as the approaches adopted by the body in its relation to the object. This article is inspired by the Foucauldian notion of displacement applied to the consideration of other ways of thinking about the object beyond the so-called theater of objects or the understanding of the object as a scenic prop. In conclusion, we argue that recognizing these qualities of the object can contribute to expand the uses of the object in creation processes, including the production of specific objects for the Performing Arts.

Keywords: **Michel Foucault. Object. Creative Process. Animation Theater. Performing Arts.**

RÉSUMÉ – Objet Docile et Objet de Proposition: une étude sur les qualités de l'objet et ses possibilités dans le processus de création en Arts du Spectacle – Cet article élabore, identifie et énonce deux qualités pour penser les objets utilisés dans les processus de création en arts scéniques dans lesquels les relations corps-objet sont étudiées. Les objets sont présentés comme dociles ou proposant et leurs caractéristiques respectives sont expliquées. La méthodologie a utilisé l'analyse et la sélection d'œuvres contemporaines dans lesquelles les principes relatifs aux caractéristiques physiques des matériaux ainsi que les approches effectuées par le corps lorsqu'il est mis en relation avec l'objet sont vérifiables. Ce texte s'inspire de la notion foucauldienne de déplacement au sens d'envisager d'autres manières de penser l'objet au-delà du théâtre dit d'objets ou de l'appréhension de l'objet comme accessoire scénique. Il est conclu que la reconnaissance des qualités mentionnées peut collaborer aux choix liés aux utilisations de l'objet dans les processus de création, y compris la production d'objets spécifiques pour les arts de la scène.

Mots-clés: **Michel Foucault. Objet. Processus Créatif. Arts de la Marionnette. Arts Performants.**

RESUMO – Objeto Dócil e Objeto Propositor: um estudo sobre as qualidades do objeto e suas possibilidades no processo criativo em Artes Cênicas – O artigo elabora, identifica e enuncia duas qualidades para pensar os objetos utilizados em processos de criação em Artes Cênicas, nos quais se

investigam relações corpo-objeto. Apresentam-se os objetos como dóceis ou propositores e explicitam-se suas respectivas características. A metodologia recorreu à análise e seleção de obras contemporâneas, nas quais são verificáveis princípios relativos às características físicas dos materiais, bem como as abordagens efetuadas pelo corpo quando colocado em relação com o objeto. Este texto inspira-se na noção foucaultiana de deslocamento no sentido de considerar outras formas de pensar o objeto para além do chamado teatro de objetos ou do entendimento do objeto como acessório cênico. Conclui-se que o reconhecimento das qualidades enunciadas pode colaborar nas escolhas relativas aos usos do objeto nos processos de criação, incluindo a produção de objetos específicos para as Artes Cênicas.

Palavras-chave: **Michel Foucault. Objeto. Processo Criativo. Teatro de Animação. Artes Cênicas.**

This article aims (and challenges) to present two possibilities for the object, characterizing it as either docile or proposing. A classification of this nature requires an approach that considers not only the object's usefulness, form and function, but which also involves an exercise in sensitivity to perceive what is created in the body-object relationship and its possibilities for the Performing Arts.

We take this sensitive look at objects as our premise and start with the understanding that their uses on stage can be viewed as a theme found in contemporary works of art. This finding points to an expanding field that demands research. Therefore, the object classification presented here (docile and proposing) is how we, the authors of this text, respond to questions raised in our work with scenography, props and animation theater over the last twenty years¹.

These questions can be articulated as follows: what is the role of the chosen object in producing the desired images and narratives; how to deal with the object's formal and constitutive characteristics; when is the body that adapts to the object and when is the object that adapts to the body?; what happens when the material of which the object is made cannot be controlled in the encounter with the moving body?; when does an object begin to limit the creation process itself?; when does the object allow an expansion of creative possibilities?; when does the use of unexpected objects drive the creative process, leading to outcomes other than originally intended?; and how to deal with the eternal challenge of choosing materials so that efficiency and budget are simultaneously taken into account?

The question that stood out among all these concerns the possible ways to approach the object bodily, considering its relational aspect and the formal characteristics of the material out of which it is made. Based on this question, this article aims to identify the qualities of the object that animate and guide the various bodily approaches to scenic creative processes. We understand that the characteristics of the object itself are not novel. However, thinking about an object as docile or proposing implies arranging and grouping these characteristics – known a priori – and looking at them in a new way, which opens the possibility of thinking about the choices made during the creative process, as well as about the creation of novel scenic objects. We understand therefore that we are investigating here expressions that are close to performance and are relevant, but also transcend the animation theater or the theater of objects itself. So far, we are not aware of any similar proposal.

To this end, our method involved the selection of contemporary works, from which it was possible to infer a set of characteristics for the object that would help to outline the qualities of what we understand as docile and as proposing. The criteria for selecting these works were as follows: first, we considered only the works with which we had contact in our professional activity and in our researches at the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM); second, we considered the subjective impact of these works on our own aesthetic repertoire (how they engaged us, what led us to ponder or reconsider and how they stimulated us to think differently about the relationships between body and object); third, we selected with the first works that had an impact on us and excluded similar ones that we came to know later; and fourth, we included the work *Infláveis* (Inflatables), by Élcio Rossini, which addresses the production of a scenic object and was created before the conclusion of this study, as we consider it consonant with our objective. We then identified the specific characteristics of the selected works and conducted our own experiment of creating an object. Based on these criteria, we obtained a set of nine works for this article, which make up the study corpus.

Furthermore, with regard to the selection of works, the difficulty we found in defining the categories used was due to the impossibility of confining a work to a fixed category – either docile or proposing. This is because

these categories are specifically aimed at studying the presence and use of the object in the performing arts, and are not mutually exclusive. In some cases, we observed complex associations of these two categories in the same object, a fact that opens many possibilities and enriches this study.

In taking the idea of a bodily approach to the object as a principle, we understand that a relational field, both physical and thought provoking, is established. In this sense, we understand the relationship with the object as an open field, that is, for each creation process a particular poetics has to be created. This happens because

[...] there is a way of apprehending things, regardless of the object: you have to find a path, a relationship with the object, whatever it might be. [...] the implementation of the relationship with the object is almost always done in the same way: it is a way of questioning the object, its form, its potential for movement. [...] Working with the object is a working principle. [...] It is a way of building a particular relationship with reality (Schoëvaërt-Brossault; Lelièvre, 2011, p. 02)².

Bearing in mind the above approach to the object, our own approach in this article involved a shift in characterization, that is, we chose to characterize not the agent, but the object in the creation process. One certainly cannot speak of an object without considering its relationship with the living being (Schoëvaërt-Brossault; Lelièvre, 2011). Our approach, therefore, only makes sense within a relational field. It is in this aspect that we understand the use of the Foucauldian notion of displacement to be fruitful. This notion is the inspiration for this exercise of thinking about objects, since displacing them from their original use or function allows for the creation of other ways of creating and relating to them.

The notion of displacement is dear to Foucauldian thought because it engages its three axes of analysis: power, knowledge and subjectivation. In his archeology, the procedure of setting aside the great historical periods, and then seeking another way of observing – other than linear or evolutionary – the constructions of thought, indicates that “[...] there have always been displacements” (Castro, 2014, p. 74) in Foucault’s works. Indeed, reading Foucault encourages us to be attentive to the things of the world, to not to take any given things as an undoubted truth, but to observe their forms, to “[...] dispose of our own thought; [to] start, then, a conversion,

to look in another direction in order to think again” (Noguera-Ramírez, 2011, p. 78). The objects, in this case, are the things of the world. And exercising other forms of relationship with them in a *poietic* procedure can mobilize other ways of being in the world. This is an operation that makes it possible to dispose of what is given and go beyond common sense, which is a necessity in the artistic field.

This movement of displacing was carried out by Foucault himself, in his quest to dispose of his own thoughts in order to follow other paths, think in other ways, see in other ways. If, for Foucault, theory consisted of a practice, this movement was accomplished precisely on and within his thought. The author explained that

[...] theoretical work [...] does not consist in establishing and fixing the set of positions on which I would stand and the supposedly coherent link between which would form a system. My problem, or the only theoretical work that I feel is possible for me, is leaving the trace, in the most intelligible outline possible, of the movements by which I am no longer at the place where I was earlier. Hence, if you like, this constant need, or necessity, or desire to plot, so to speak, the points of passage at which each displacement risks resulting in the modification, if not of the whole curve, then at least of the way in which it can be read and grasped in terms of its possible intelligibility. This plotting, consequently, should never be read as the plan of a permanent structure. It should not be subject to the same requirements as those imposed on a plan. Once again, it is a matter of a line of displacement, that is to say not of a line of a theoretical structure, but of the displacement by which my theoretical positions continually change. [...] So, a new course, a new line. And once more we return to the same themes [...] (Foucault, 2010, p. 58-59; translated into English from the original French by Graham Burchell, in *On the Government of the Living*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

We have no intention here, therefore, to develop a system or establish a set of categories for the object in the Performing Arts. This particular arrangement of qualities has the sole purpose of allowing us to approach the objects and their possibilities. We are thus interested in discovering other paths, in questioning the object through a bodily approach.

Furthermore, the choice to approach the objects using the Foucauldian notion of displacement echoes in the considerations of three specialists in Puppet Theater who are in line with this article’s objective.

The first is Aurélia Ivan, a Romanian artist residing in France, who, when asked the reasons for her passion for the object, replied that: “Objects force the subject to take a position” (Enjalbert, 2014, p. 188)³. For her, this position has different levels. One of them may be the immediate position of the body as an organic unit in relation to the object. However, in this movement in time and space, positions on political, philosophical and even psychological issues are intermingled. For this artist inspired by Sartre and Nietzsche, each action is, or should be, a choice that inexorably involves responsibility as an aspect. Thus, when an artist takes a position in relation to an object, they could also awaken “this obligation in the spectator, [...] this feeling of freedom, but also of responsibility” (Enjalbert, 2014, p. 188). This leads us to think that the artist intends an action for herself, which she hopes to reverberate in others. In this sense, we understand that to take a position is also to displace.

The second is Claudia Orenstein, professor of Theater and Performance at the City University of New York (CUNY), who comments on the expansion of the puppet arts, both in the beginning and in the second half of the 20th century. For Orenstein, when humanity finds itself in moments of crisis, it is the objects that allows us to question “[...] longstanding paradigms about human beings and our relationship to the inanimate world, offering concrete means of playing with new embodiments of humanity” (Orenstein, 2017, p. 92). In a dialogue with this idea, the third specialist, Sandra Vargas, an artist from the Brazilian group *Sobrevento*, points out that this movement means that we would be seeking the human within us (Terceiro Teatro Brasil, 2021). It is in this sense that we understand the importance of approaching objects from the perspective of displacement, reshaping and remaking the human and the very idea of what it is to be human.

That said, the reader will find below considerations about the object and the existence of different approaches, which make it impossible to embrace a single conception of the so-called Theater of Objects. Next, the qualities we ascribe to the docile object and the proposing object and their perspectives will be addressed, in an effort to explain the procedures for approaching the object according to each of them.

The object beyond the notion of a unique theater of objects

We now present a line that is not necessarily evolutionary, but of transformations of the theater of the object from its emergence in the second half of the 20th century, especially since the 1970s with Italian (Teatro delle Briciole, Alessandro Libertini, Assondelli and Stecchettoni) and French manifestations (Vélo Théâtre, Théâtre de Cuisine), to the expansion of the meaning of the object, consistent with contemporary expressions (Jurkowski, 2008).

We begin with the question: what is the theater of objects? It is possible to identify some attempts to circumscribe its concept, which remain intermediate, that is, neither theater of actors nor puppet theater. It can be considered as

[...] a branch of Puppet Theater that uses ready-made objects, instead of puppets, displacing them from their function and ascribing them new meanings, without, however, transforming their nature, exploring a dramaturgy that makes use of figures of speech, to the detriment of the importance of manipulation itself. According to this concept, therefore, trying to make a puppet, forcing the illusion of human movement by joining different objects, or by placing two eyes on an object, would not constitute a Theater of Objects, but a Puppet Theater made of objects (Vargas, 2010, p. 33).

This branch of puppetry demands, according to Didier Plassard (2011), a prior agreement on what is the object. For Plassard, the object would not be an effigy prepared in advance for a show, but “[...] ordinary objects, most often untransformed, utensils used in everyday life, toys or all kinds of things that are subject to misuse” (Plassard, 2011, p. 02)⁴.

These definitions allow us to perceive two different actions: one that turns the object into a character and at the same time causes a displacement, that is, it removes the object’s everyday utilitarian essence in order to open it to the scenic space. In this sense, “[...] it is not the puppet that acquires a similarity to the object, but always the object that becomes a puppet” (Plassard, 2011, p. 03)⁵. But there is also another branch that considers that “[...] the theater of objects is one of the most radical forms of puppet theater” (Cara; Cara, 2011, p. 72)⁶. This radicalism rests on the understanding that the object is distinguished from the puppet and assumes itself

as it is, by bringing its constitutive properties (material, size, mobility, etc.) to the foreground.

In both cases the responsibility rests with the actor's work. Christian Carrignon and Kathy Deville, founders of the *Théâtre de Cuisine*, say that the theater of objects is not understood as a technique proper, but “[...] as a result of the relationship that exists between the eyes, the hands, the things and the personal energy that we put into them” (Jurkowski, 2008, p. 188)⁷. This work demands from the actor an extreme bodily engagement, which involves focused attention to attract the spectator's gaze to objects that, originally, would not have any aesthetic appeal. It is the actor's work that repositions the object, and that induces the spectator to see it in a different light. “In the Theater of Objects, the actor plays a role that is sometimes more important than the object itself. The actor must believe in the object, just as a child believes in it, when they take it and animate it” (Vargas, 2010, p. 35).

The proximity to the children's universe is recurrent in this manifestation. However, we may also point out that there are possible procedures for the adult. Some of these procedures may be observed when Vargas (2010) explains that choosing an object to portray a character or an idea must involve the possibility of metaphorical association. This notion is illustrated with a silk scarf that could portray a beautiful woman. Thus, the search for a specific object for a specific purpose could be thought of based on the following categories:

[...] for its shape and color, a plum could be a heart; for its movement, a paper punch might be a frog; for its function, a hammer could be a rude and violent character; due to semantics, a clothespin could be a religious preacher [in Portuguese, the word *pregador* can mean both clothespin and preacher] (Vargas, 2010, p. 34).

In addition to these categories, Vargas (2010) also points to some other relevant ways of approaching the object: the actor's performance and their ability to focus attention on the object; the previous choice of a particular family of objects (such as kitchen utensils, tools or, in a Portuguese-speaking context, feminine or masculine objects); the quality of manipulation in terms of rhythm and movement in order to listen to the object so as

not totally de-characterize it, but rather allow a second idea to be superimposed on it.

We emphasize that Vargas (2010), when elaborating on the tactics of relating to the object, mentioned in the previous paragraph, addresses the expression of a character or an idea. In taking this notion as a possibility, we have already moved decidedly away from mere characterization. However, Vargas' approaches are still based on metaphor, association and the creation of a system of signs. In corroboration, Christian Carrignon also refers to the theater of objects as a theater of signs structured in a poetic language (Cara; Cara, 2011). Plassard adds that the possibility of object metamorphosis derives from language (Plassard, 2011). This points to a direct relationship between object and language. Thinking about the object from this perspective would open up another field to think about the object, involving semiology, which we do not intend to address here. We continue to pursue our objective of examining how our understanding of the object, its uses and characteristics is expanding.

The issues addressed above tell us that, yes, the metaphor is one of the conditions for re-elaborating the object for the scene. A metaphor is generated when the meaning of something is transformed. Mattéoli (2007), however, argues provocatively, as does Vargas (2010), about the end of metaphor in the performance with objects.

Bearing this in mind, we looked at two manifestations that involve more than just distancing the object from the character or proposing the creation of a sequence of movements with the object. We will examine these two manifestations below, as examples of the novel uses of the object we have been observing in recent times.

The first of these manifestations is the work of *Sobrevento*, a theater company from São Paulo. Of the company's quality and varied repertoire, we highlight the piece *Noite* (2018), created from objects and stories collected around the company headquarters' neighborhood, related to the history of household objects. The object is a memory device. The piece's dramaturgy was created based on the object's history, not necessarily on the material properties of the object itself.

The second manifestation is the documentary or post-disaster object, terms created by the Mexican artist and teacher Shaday Larios (2019). The

work that we will cite below was supervised by Miguel Vellinho (adjunct professor at the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro and director of the Companhia Pequod) and written by Vanessa dos Santos Dias (2021). In short, the post-disaster object could be associated with some of Tadeusz Kantor's war-related objects⁸. They are the objects that remain and are found after a serious event, and that carry with them the memory of that event. With these objects it is possible to create works in which manipulation is not necessarily the only form of relationship – or the use of the object itself. In this case, the presence of the object, as it is, whether damaged or not, carries within itself the capacity to catalyze creative processes in different artistic languages and mediums.

These examples, and Mattéoli's (2007) provocation about the end of the metaphor related to the object, allowed us to propose a displacement that results in an expanded understanding of the object that goes beyond a single concept of a theater of objects used as puppets. We observed a diversity of movements and attempts, related to the uses of the object in contemporary pieces, which expand the field of possibilities in different directions, promoting displacements. We sought to identify the point of passage that each displacement risks spotlighting, as pointed out by Foucault (2010). We understand therefore that this point of passage is always the space where the relationship between body and object occurs, and that maintaining a constant movement of positioning and repositioning the body and the object is the endless work of being in the world.

In the path we traced so far, it is already possible to identify some clues to help us forge the idea of docile and proposing objects that we will present below. We find one of these clues in the procedure of distancing the object from the metaphor and observing what happens when it is left to be as it is, with all its characteristics, thus requiring a creative effort to establish the body-object relationship. The metaphor, in this case, is not the starting point, but it may result from the body's relationship with the object's qualities. In this sense, it is not an object to be manipulated, but which requires dealing with its characteristics.

Along this line, we set out to explore the particularities of the docile and proposing objects. We will address them separately for understanding and study purposes; but we emphasize the fact that these qualities can be

found in an intermingled, overlapped and concomitant manner, as the same object can be simultaneously docile and proposing. Thus, when we speak of a docile object, we will be also speaking of the proposing object and vice versa.

The docile object

There is no docile object. No object is docile by nature. It was after much argument and discussion that we decided to keep using this term. Several expressions were suggested – malleable, steerable, flexible, manipulable, adaptable – but none of them seemed to express the intended meaning. We do not yet consider this naming issue settled. Therefore, the object in itself is neither docile nor proposing. This categorization is always a result of the body-object relationship in action, which we referred above as the point of passage of the observed displacements.

In order to describe what an object with such quality is, we need to explain first what we understand as docile. Second, we must focus on the characteristics attributed to docile objects as they are found in some examples and works.

As we found our inspiration in Foucault, it is necessary to clarify our use of the term docile. This term is applied by Foucault to bodies, in which the processes of docility are an engineering of subjectivation related to certain time and place dynamics. Schools, hospitals and asylums are examples given by the author to illustrate the operations carried out to make bodies useful. In this process of subjectivation, the body is both “[...] more obedient and more useful” (Foucault, 1987, p. 119). So, the mechanisms that regulate the body carry out “[...] the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility” (Foucault, 1999, p. 118). For a body to become docile, it must be split, subjected, thus becoming moldable, trainable and obedient (Foucault, 1999).

Therefore, when we employ the notion of docile, we do not intend to cover all the complexity of Foucault’s ideas on the subject. Our operation here is much simpler. We understand, in line with Foucault, that the condition of being docile is not characterized only by the act of giving in, but involves being crossed by lines of force that create a certain type of tension.

We suggest some procedures with objects that sometimes get either closer or more distant from the Foucauldian notion of docility, but always refer to the notion of displacement. A first principle that can be outlined deals with docility as related to the idea of utility. For example, a garment can be considered a docile object. A shirt, a pair of pants, a coat, garments in themselves are designed to fit anatomically a certain part of the body – and that is what is already given about this material. But can clothes be transformed into proposing objects? Yes. It depends on the particular approach to the material. Removing the object from the dimension of utility, looking at it differently and proposing something different is a procedure to discover other possibilities for clothing items. That is, the dimension of utility will still be present, but the action upon the material will open up other possibilities of existence for the object. We observe this fact in the piece *Self Unfinished* (1998), by Xavier Le Roy, who uses articles of clothing, but relieves them from their usefulness to achieve a repositioning of the body (Image 1). The clothing object can, therefore, be both docile and proposing.



Image 1 – Xavier Le Roy: frame from the video *Self Unfinished* (1998). Source: Roy (2009).

Another principle to be considered, in this idea of a docile object that we are articulating, is related to the metaphor. When to an object is attributed a meaning that departs from its original use or conception, we might be constructing a metaphor. In this sense, a chair can be transformed into a shield or a crown. Perhaps this is the principle that seems to get closest to the theater of objects that transforms things into characters. For example, the object *basin* can be considered docile in terms of its previously

established utility. It can also be transformed metaphorically into a character. There are many examples of this type of approach, but we will illustrate it with the staging of Molière's *The Miser* by the Spanish group *Tábola Rassa*. The metaphor created for the play was fruitful, with the miser's treasure represented by the water that was dispensed with a dropper: each drop was counted as if it were a coin. In this way, the attributes of the characters portrayed as faucets varied according to the faucets' characteristics. For example, the girl in the story was portrayed by a golden faucet with delicate finishes. The Miser, shown in Image 2, was portrayed as a more rustic faucet.



Image 2 – Tábola Rassa: El Avaro. Source: FITA (2021).

The metaphorical field that transforms an object into a character requires a manipulation action. In other words, producing a metaphor about something requires manipulating this thing. Thus, the idea of manipulation in its relation to the metaphor mobilizes the notion of *anima*, so dear to the puppet or animation theater. Imparting *anima* to an object means to animate it, a principle already articulated by Kleist (2013, p. 19) as “[...] the path to the soul of the dancer” that promotes a transference of the dancer's center of gravity to the center of the puppet. This is a theater that animates the inanimate, that is, which is based on imparting life, *anima*, to the puppet, a simulacrum of the human (Beltrame, 2002, p. 1).

This procedure, of transforming an object into a character, would be a procedure conducted with a docile object. And it would be docile in the sense that, when one sees the puppet object, there is a previous idea already in place about how to approach this object. If the object is a character, one

can predict that it will be manipulated following a particular sequence of movements. The puppet object, or an object that is transformed into a character, will then yield to this sequence docilely. It is essential to say that, in characterizing this procedure as docile, there is no value judgment, nor are we conducting an analysis of what is technically easier or more difficult. Once again: what is in question is the action of the actor. What we are proposing is just a way of thinking about the approach to the object.

We proceed with another example: the mask. Let us take three types of masks: the masks of the *Commedia dell'arte*, the mask from the Mummenschanz group's piece *Masks*, and the mask from the Olivier de Sagazan's performance *Transfiguration*. Despite all the difficult bodily work required to wear Arlecchino's mask in the *Commedia dell'arte*, we understand this mask as docile because it is an object that the actor wears and attaches to their body, which, in turn, was prepared in advance to wear it. The transformation of the body takes place in wearing the mask. The technique and sophistication required for wearing such a mask are not in question. What we are focusing on is how to approach the object. In this case, this mask brings with it paths already traced leading to it, some of which are extremely ritualistic. In this sense, the mask object can be situated in a captured field, which is already apprehended in terms of the actor's approach and also in relation to its material: fixed and controllable, usually made of wood.

Next, we have Mummenschanz's and Sagazan's masks. At first glance, the difference between these two might seem subtle. Mummenschanz's (Image 3) is made of a material similar to modeling clay that is sculpted and modified by the actor throughout the piece duration. Sagazan's (Image 4), made of clay and some sticks, weighs, falls and obstructs breathing, in short, it is made of a material that cannot be controlled.



Image 3 – Mummenschanz: frame from the video *Masks* (1976). Source: Mummenschanz (2007).



Image 4 – Olivier de Sagazan: *Transfiguration* (1998). Source: Sagazan (1998).

It is noticeable, in formal terms, the differences in material resistance and in quality of movement generated by the moldable mask and the one that is configured as an obstruction and made of a material that is out of the actor's control. In the line of thought we are pursuing here, the Mummenschanz's mask would have a docile characteristic, while the Sagazan's mask would have a proposing quality.

In order to conclude our presentation on the docile object's quality, we can list the points addressed so far: it retains its utility dimension; it is confined to a known territory of movements pre-elaborated for it and, therefore, already expected; it is capable of movements that can be controlled through manipulation; and it is made of a material controllable by the actor.

If we think about the relation of docility-utility, which refers to the control over the material, we see the closeness to some Foucauldian notions. But, even with regard to docile objects, the relations are more complex, and this recognition informs the way we consider a thing's potential to be transformed into another as something derived from creative processes that pursue this type of path.

The proposing object

After expounding on the quality of the docile object, we will turn our focus to outlining the characteristics of the proposing object. This approach is not concerned with manipulating or animating the object. And, even if seemingly contradictory, it is not interested in creating a metaphor either.

Of course, a moving image will be created, but the primary concern is not to create a metaphorical field, which means that, if it does occur, it is only as a consequence of the relation of the actor's body with the controllable and uncontrollable properties of the object. In other words, it is the objects that force us to create other ways to approach them, since, due to their formal and material nature, they cannot be transposed to the same body-object relational field that is established in docility. Objects of this nature do not easily yield to manipulation and are not fully controllable. There is always something that escapes the previously stipulated intentionality. Its functionality is the product of an invented logic of its own, and that invites, or rather demands, the establishment of a bodily investigation. We call this listening to the object, because it imposes its own rules.

The objects characterized as proposing can be thought of as pertaining to two categories: ready-made objects and custom-made objects.

The first category includes ready-made, manufactured objects, which are stripped of their original function for the purpose of conducting an artistic research. Bodily listening, which probes into the qualities and characteristics of the object, such as shape, weight and material, in this case is a fundamental action aimed at approaching the object. In this vein, we have the example of a piece by Susanne Linke: *Im Bade Wannen* (1980).

The second category includes objects created and produced with the intention and purpose of serving as the core that articulates discursive and sensorial meanings for the performance. Once there is a prior understanding that an object can be conceived and made so as not to readily submit to a predetermined intentionality, then we are no longer primarily within the scope of the theater of objects, but rather thinking about the object in all its aspects. That is the difference. This object is, therefore, conceived to resist and to propose to the body, which wishes to relate to it, to establish modes of listening to its constructional and material logic. The procedure will thus be to listen to the object in order to be able to approach it. The proposing object must challenge and not illustrate. This is the case of Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés*, of Élcio Rossini's *Infláveis* (Inflatables) and of Michel Groisman's *Transferência* (Transference).

We understand that the object's proposing quality offers a radical field for experiments, since there are no references to paths already traced. The

process of discovering the path to establish a relation to the object necessarily implies a nonthinking way of positioning oneself. And this is no small feat.

Let us start with the example of the first category of proposing objects, called ready-made or pre-existing objects: Susanne Linke's piece *Im Bade Wannen* (1980). Linke does not make the bathtub look like a character, but approaches the bathtub considering its material properties. Artists such as Suzanne Linke establish a kind of symbiotic play with the chosen object through a process of approximation, recognition and exploration. *Im Bade Wannen* (Image 5) is an example of a methodology that does not restrict itself to impart life to the inert object, nor is it about resignifying it through use. The bathtub object itself restricts this approach – it is possible to manipulate almost anything, but for a person to manipulate a bathtub, it is necessary to deal with the restrictive elements of size, shape and weight. Rather, one must engage in a process aimed at perceiving these constitutive aspects of the object.



Image 5 – Susanne Linke: *Im Bade Wannen* (1980). Photos: Rhidha Zouari, Photomontage: Heidemarie Franz. Source: Linke (2016).

Susanne Linke dances with the bathtub. She does not dance with what the bathtub represents, but with its volume and size, with the possibility of the bathtub containing her body and of her body attempting to move it around the place. In this way, the pre-existing object poses challenges due to its own material constitution.

We will now address the second category of proposing objects, which includes those intentionally created to be proposing objects. A first example

of this category are Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés*. As we saw earlier, clothing is docile, but it can be approached as proposing. It is not possible, however, for the parangolé to be docile. This object's working principle requires a fusion of body and moving object. To this end, Oiticica (1986) puts dance as a structural element of the parangolé. Furthermore, he requests the spectator to participate by wearing the object, carrying it, running or dancing, because any attitude and action become an inseparable part of the work. In the *Parangolés* we find the act of wearing the work, which, according to Oiticica, creates a bodily modification in the spectator due to an approximation between body and object.

The act of wearing already constitutes in itself an experiential totality of the work, because in unfolding it using his own body as central core, the spectator already experiences the spatial transmutation that takes place there: he perceives, in his condition of structural core of the work, the unfolding experience of this intercorporeal space. There is a kind of violation of his being in the world as an individual, differentiated and at the same time collective, in order to participate as a motor core, nucleus, but more than only motor, mainly symbolic, within the structure-work. This work is the true metamorphosis that takes place there in the spectator-work (or participant-work) interrelation (Oiticica, 1986, p. 71).

A kind of symbiosis occurs between body and object, in which the spectator is invited to participate. The act of implicating the spectator in the work encourages us to make an association with the issue of freedom/responsibility, as pointed out by Aurélia Ivan, quoted at the beginning of this article. Inside the parangolé, the body of a participant is both sheltered and impelled to move. From the skin of this body drips the sweat that wets the material of which the parangolé is made, to impregnate it with odors, pulsations, life transmuted into celebration and colors in space. We understand, therefore, the parangolé as proposing because it is an object that only exists in relation to a body and in movement.

A second example of an object purposely made to be proposing are Elcio Rossini's *Infláveis*. The *Infláveis* series consists of objects made of thin and light fabrics; their constructional logic makes them containers that can retain and contain the air stirred by the moving body. To fill them up, the body needs to move through space. Driven by the human body, the object

swallows the air, which, contained within the fabric envelope, generates ephemeral and soft shapes prone to change.

To understand the process of air entering fabric objects, it was necessary to fill them up with air by walking or just with arm movements. Once inflated, the object pulled the volume against the body, the air moved within the limits imposed by the fabric shape. Gradually, the object deflated. Other ways to fill it up were tested, such as varying movement intensity (light or strong). Or filling the object with air and going inside it to see how the internal structure worked, how the air was distributed and how it escaped from inside the object. And again filling, emptying, filling and pushing the volume, filling and entering, observing, devising new cuts, cutting, sewing. Observing the movement of the air entering the object and how the stitching lines responsible for its structure carried the air. I was looking for new ways to fill and enter the object. After entering the object, it was possible to stay there until all the air came out and the fabric object deflated over the body (Rossini, 2005, p. 34).

There is no passivity or absolute surrender in the object. The air that enters obeys the laws of physics and also escapes through the pores of the fabric, generating different movements (Image 6). This is not a material that lends itself to manipulation or control.

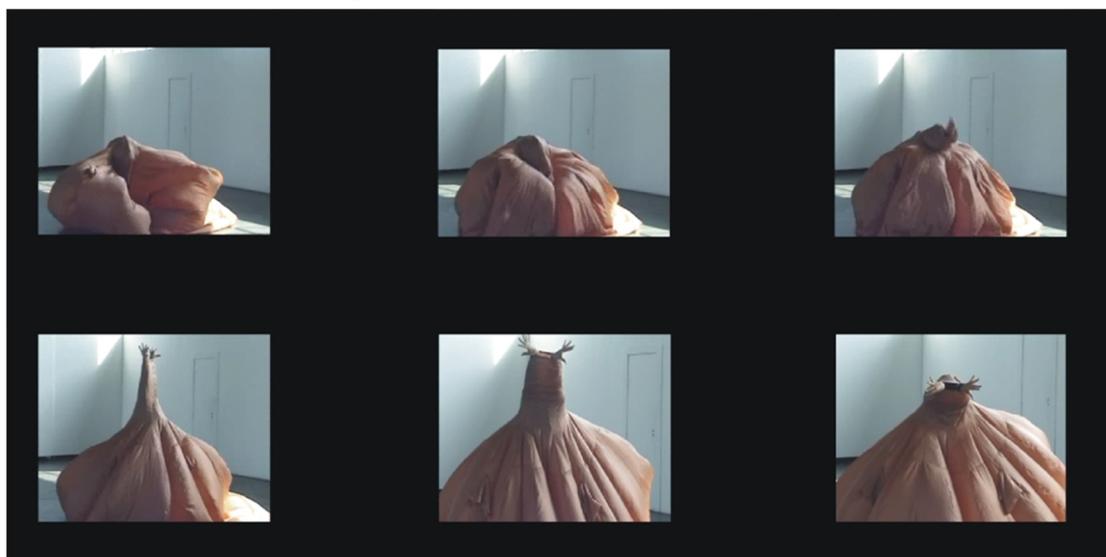


Image 6 – Elcio Rossini: *Inflável*, movement research (2005).
Source: Photo by Elaine Tedesco (Rossini, 2005, cover).

In regard to this process, it is interesting to observe that in describing the research for producing the object action verbs are used: “[...] filling, emptying, filling and pushing the volume, filling and entering, observing,

devising new cuts, cutting, sewing” (Rossini, 2005, p. 34). Moreover, each verb is nuanced by gradations such as light or strong, fast or slow. This use of action verbs is due to the challenge posed by the object.

Finally, we come to the third example of custom-made proposing objects: the work *Transferência*, by the Brazilian artist Michel Groisman. The artist creates a structure connected with his body, a kind of prosthesis fitted with candles attached close to the joints of his body and tubes leading from the artist’s mouth to the candles’ wick. This contraption, connected with the body, allows the performer to transfer and maintain lit a single candle flame in this sort of exoskeleton, to which his body is physically attached. This body-armor transcends the idea of object, having more similarity to a device that the artist uses to produce a choreographic score of movements that obeys a rigorous logical principle, whose objective is to transfer the flame. Such a procedure imposes a unique bodily logic, in which the interdependence between the object and the artist’s body is irrevocable.

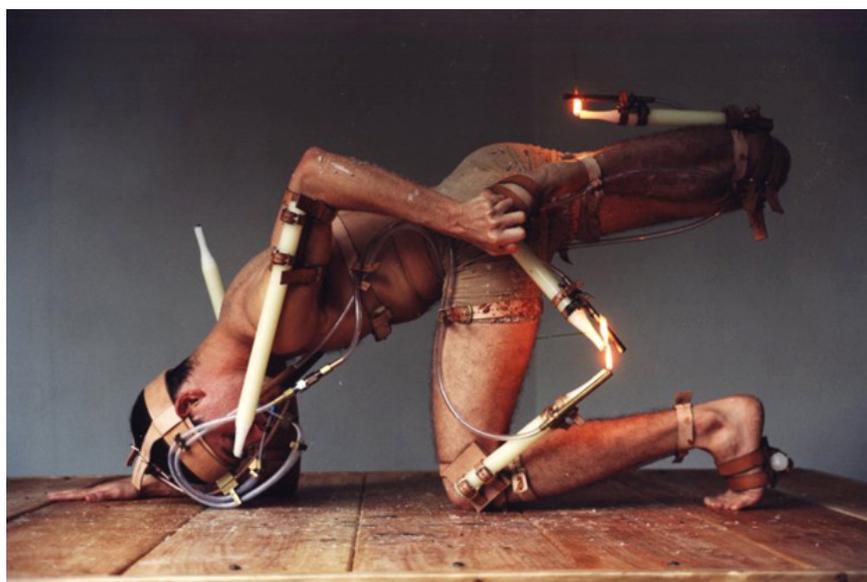


Image 7 – Michel Groisman: *Transferência* (2011). Source: Instituto Pipa (2021).

In the above examples, we observed that, unlike for the docile object, it is not possible to draw up a list of characteristics for proposing objects, as each object presents its own unique challenge. The artist’s effort to listen to the object can be considered the key point in this approach.

More on the displacements of the object

This article aimed to argue that the object's qualities of being docile or proposing are possible approaches to be applied in creative processes in Performing Arts. We formulated this classification when in addressing questions arising from our work with objects we realized that each of these qualities implies specific creation processes. In this sense, it is important to keep in mind that choosing an object is one thing, and choosing how to approach it is another.

We sought to show that there are gradations and characteristics specific to the docile object, such as the utility-docility relation, the permanence in previously known territories, the maintenance of the ability to control and manipulate. Likewise, there are characteristics proper to the proposing object, which may be pre-existing or custom-made for specific purposes of the work in which it will be used. Regardless of these two categories, the basic characteristic of the proposing object is the fact that in itself, in its material or relational constitution, it is a challenging object. In adopting this approach, the actor-performer needs to discover their own logic to deal with each one of them.

Based on the Foucauldian notion of displacement, we understand that the body-object relationship and its implications is the point of passage that we are focusing on here to renew the search for the human, as Vargas suggested (Terceiro Teatro Brasil, 2021). In this sense, the docile object and the proposing object require engaging in different types of play due to their specific qualities. To the extent that it is possible to recognize these qualities, it is also possible to make choices that are more appropriate to the intent of each work. Furthermore, we understand that this classification encourages the creation of objects that might pose challenges not yet conceived of.

With this proposal, we understand that the ways of approaching the object, as structured in the categories of docile and proposing, provide an opportunity to envision new possibilities for the creative process, while also contributing to diversify the uses of the object in scenic performances, as we discussed here procedures that can help to get rid of pre-established ideas and to conceive of other ways of thinking of and creating objects. This

brings the possibility of this exercise reverberating in the spectator, as well as, in dealing with challenges posed by the objects, we can open a space to face the challenge of scrutinizing the human in us in the time in which we live.

Notes

- ¹ Both authors are professors in Program of the Arts and Letters Center's Performing Arts Department at the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM), in addition to teaching the disciplines of Animated Form Theater I and II, Staging Techniques I and II and collaborating in scenography and prop creation for professional shows, such as the show *Amazônia – A look at the forest*, directed by Camila Bauer and produced by Projeto Gompa. Elcio Rossini has more than 20 years of experience as a scenographer, creator of props and teacher in the field of scenic visualities. Rossana Della Costa has been working since 2012 with animated form theater in the educational field and teacher training.
- ² In the original French: “Il y a d’abord une manière d’appréhender les choses, peu importe l’objet: il faut trouver un chemin, une relation à l’objet quel qu’il soit. Je dirais que la mise en œuvre du rapport à l’objet se fait presque toujours de la même manière: c’est une façon de questionner l’objet, sa forme, son potentiel de mouvement.[...] Travailler avec l’objet relève d’un principe de travail. [...] C’est une manière de construire un rapport particulier au réel” (Schoëvaërt-Brossault; Lelièvre, 2011, p. 2).
- ³ In the original French: “L’ objet oblige le sujet à se positionner” (Enjalbert, 2014, p. 188).
- ⁴ In the original French: “[...] d’objets ordinaires, le plus souvent non transformés, d’ustensiles dont on se sert dans la vie quotidienne, de jouets ou de toutes sortes de choses qui subissent un détournement d’usage” (Plassard, 2011, p. 02).
- ⁵ In the original French: “[...] ce n’est pas la marionnette qui se rapproche de l’objet, mais toujours l’objet qui devient marionnette” (Plassard, 2011, p. 03).
- ⁶ In the original French: “[...] le théâtre d’objet(s) est une des formes les plus radicales du théâtre de marionnettes” (Cara; Cara, 2011, p.72).

- ⁷ In the original French: “[...] comme étant le résultat de la relation qui existe entre les yeux, les mains, les choses et l’énergie personnelle qu’on y met” (Jurkowski, 2008, p. 188).
- ⁸ Beginning in 1944, Tadeusz Kantor started to use ordinary objects – which were not made just to perform a representational function in the staging. Kantor would find his objects in everyday life, choosing those *poor* objects that were about to be discarded or already abandoned. Objects that have lost the vivacity of the new, worn out by time and use, affected by possession and impregnated with memories, deprived of their vital and protective function. Kantor's particular way of using objects in his staging left an important legacy for our poetic view of their stage presence and possibilities. Certainly Kantor's approach to objects are the result of his transits between the visual arts and the theater. The importance that objects acquired in his work cannot be dissociated from his training at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow (1934-1939) and his experience as a painter, scenographer and director and his knowledge of modern art.

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