

ability to resist and dismantle the somato-semiotic norm and to invent collectively new technologies of the production of subject.

### THE DRAG KING PLAN OF ACTION

The first time I take part in a drag king workshop is in 1998 at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center on West Thirteenth Street in New York. I sign up for the workshop with a mixture of voracious curiosity and confusion, characteristic of someone who comes from post-Franco Spain. I also participate in some lesbian sadomasochism workshops for fist-fucking, public sex, and coming out via writing; some workshops for pre-op and non-op transsexuals and NOHOs (those who take no hormones) and their partners; and some workshops to promote the visibility of sexual minorities. During the years when I inhabited the city of the living dead, I turned, in my struggle against an endemic loneliness, to a system for that training and construction of identity techniques developed by queer and trans micropolitics that, I am now convinced, not only helped me overcome the depression common to metropolises but also ended up as elements of a discipline of the mind, replacing the *exercises* of Saint Ignatius de Loyola from my Catholic childhood. This technique of the self is what would next allow me to resist being disappointed in politics, to resist succumbing completely to disenchantment and to your death.

My first drag king workshop is an initiatory exercise, the first step in an open process of mutation. There are a dozen of us cis-females, assigned the female gender at birth; each of us gives her name and explains where she comes from and what her experience with gender and sexual norms has been. The organizer is a butch woman with short hair who is wearing leather pants, with the face of a young boy and a soft voice. She listens attentively to our stories, but without awarding them too much psychological weight. Although we are in the LGBT Community Center, not all of us identify as being lesbian, butch, or bisexual. There are also some cis-females who go out with transsexual men and a heterosexual actress who has come for theatrical training on how to construct a male role. Going around the group twice produces enough talk to verify the fact that dealing with cultural and political codes of femininity and masculinity is not exclusively a lesbian or transsexual matter. The group members speak about their first time, rape, abortion, incest, the difficulties of having to feel different from other girls, the shame experienced at being pointed at in school for being a tomboy, or having too large a chest, or not having enough of one, or having one too early or too late, about not being able to sit the way they want or where they want, about not being able to spit or shout or hit back when others hit. I talk about never having felt like a woman, about thinking at the age of seven that I'd travel from Spain to Sweden like Christine Jorgensen with my first savings and get a penis grafted on, then about the operation on my chin when I was eighteen, about the feeling of not recognizing my body or

my face. Little by little, a denser and denser fabric of voices is created; it surrounds us and allows us to cover ourselves with shared words, creating a collective second skin. Under that protective membrane, through a political magnifying glass, we can see that femininity and masculinity are the gears of a larger system in which every single person participates structurally. Knowledge liberates. It produces a certain political joy that I have never experienced before.

This first part of the workshop could be defined as a collective induction into *gender suspicion*, in reference to the hermeneutics of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as described by Paul Ricoeur.<sup>36</sup> It encourages us to examine what we assume are stable foundations of our identity (sex, gender, and sexuality) and see them as the opaque effects of cultural and political constructions and, consequently, as potential objects for a process of intentional, critical, and insubordinate intervention. This shared gender suspicion provokes a subjective shift that Teresa de Lauretis and José Muñoz have called "disidentification."<sup>37</sup> The drag king workshop doesn't begin with dressing or making up our face to look like a man, but in becoming aware of the cultural orthopedics that construct everyday femininity, and by disidentifying from the normative nature of politically assigned gender.

Transformed by this knowledge, we put on men's clothing and learn how to fashion a *packing* with condoms filled

36. Paul Ricoeur, *De l'Interprétation: Essai sur Freud* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1965), and Paul Ricoeur and Olivier Mongin, *Le Conflit des interprétations: Essais d'herméneutique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1969), 149–50.

37. On disidentification, see José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Women Talking  
Men

making unfamiliar

with cotton and how to bind our chest. By flattening the chest and making the pelvis bigger, you can modify the axis of the body and the balance of proportion between the shoulders, arms, and legs. Thus, the body's center of gravity—culturally located in cis-females at the level of the breasts (the sexualizing site par excellence and focal point of the hetero-male gaze)—is displaced to the pelvis. The legs are slightly spread, thus changing the distance between the feet and providing a more stable support for walking. Once verticality has been reinforced, freedom of movement of the trunk and extension of the arms is increased.

Following the instructions of our drag king orchestrator, I clip off a lock of hair and cut it into smaller pieces, then rearrange it on a sheet of creased white paper so that the hairs are aligned in the fold. I create my first beard. At first, I don't know exactly what kind of beard I want or which kind suits me, the one that goes the best with my face or with the type of drag king that I am. It will be the same thing with testosterone later on; the transfer of the hair pertains to illicit trafficking, to the smuggling of a political signifier. Subject fiction in a flash: these hairs applied to the face of a cis-female offer a glimpse of the possibility of another life. It's a certainty that wearing a beard provides an accelerated image of what the administration of testosterone produces in a cis-female's body after four to six months. Such artifice is therefore not merely a masquerade, a disguise, pure exteriority, but a revelation of a pharmacopornographic possibility already existing in my genes, and it has the ability to take on a cultural and political signification. On my face I outline the shape into which the beard will need to fit: a

Mexican-style mustache that descends from the corners of the mouth to the edge of the chin. I think of Pancho Villa, of Walter Benjamin. I think of you. Suddenly I see it in the mirror out of the corner of my eye: Bob. No mystery to that; it's just me, but it's also a man. I'm not inventing it; he's not a stage character; he is emerging out of what I am, the way I've always seen myself. The difference between now and before is that from now on it's visible to others. I'm not hiding any longer behind the name that was given to me, or the weighty supposition that I am or ought to be a woman.

The important thing is not to be dressed as a man—anyone at all can do that in his or her private space—but to have had the *collective experience* of the arbitrary and constructed dimensions of our gender. During the first drag king workshop, we're not trying to produce a theatrical effect or a caricatured stereotype of gender, but to construct a commonplace, all-purpose form of masculinity. Surprisingly, from this perspective, a minimal transformation produces an effect of maximum realism. Obviously, it's possible to think about the varieties of kitsch or camp in a drag king performance, in which the goal is to bring out the constructed dimensions of masculinity with hyperbolic style, as would be the case in drag king incarnations of Elvis Presley, the over-the-hill skirt chaser, the vulgar macho guy, or the cliché of a plumber in porn. In any case, the drag king destiny of each participant is an insoluble enigma until the moment when the transformation is produced. The process evolves in the course of performative exercises in the workshop and often extends into daily life. What struck me about that first experience was the power of the work-

shop as a collective plan of action for the reprogramming of gender, its potential to function as a political laboratory, its denseness in its capacity as public space. I immediately knew that I wanted to do it with others, reproduce this plan of action, and that a single time wasn't enough for me. There is a ritual dimension, a psychopolitical magic in the drag king workshop and its performative process of becoming, something that I cannot shirk, that intrigued me from the beginning, and that led me with the passage of time to become the drag king MC.

This is how I was given access to a culture of resistance against the normalization of gender organized around an array of drag king micropolitics that generated platforms to create and distribute knowledge. Drag king culture made its appearance in New York and San Francisco in the mid-1980s, in the workshops of Diane Torr, Annie Sprinkle, and Jack Armstrong;<sup>38</sup> the performances of Moby Dick, Dred, Split Britches, and the Five Lesbian Brothers; and the photographic work of Del LaGrace Volcano.<sup>39</sup> This culture hasn't found its niche in universities or archives; it has spread through a network of bars, clubs, and organizations that today reaches from San Francisco to Istanbul.

Drag king practices create a space of visibility peculiar to fag, dyke, and trans culture by recycling and by parodic declension and deconstruction of models of masculinity coming from dominant popular culture. Man and woman, masculine and feminine, and also homosexual and hetero-

38. Sprinkle, *Post-Porn Modernist*, 131.

39. See Del LaGrace Volcano and Judith "Jack" Halberstam, *The Drag King Book* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999).

sexual seem to be insufficient codes and identity locations for describing the contemporary production of the queer, trans, and crip body. Performative politics will become a field for experimentation, a place for the production of new subjectivities, and, as a result, a true alternative to traditional ways of doing politics that surpasses resignifying or resisting normalization.

2000. I spend six months at Princeton University and six months at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in France. Drag king practices are nearly nonexistent in France, Spain, and Italy; I decide to start organizing workshops. Obviously, this takes me to the heart of the drag king mafia: Diane Torr and Del LaGrace will become my first mentors. When I do a workshop with Diane Torr in France or in Spain, I'm the one who takes care of the commissions and acts as translator, the kid who picks up the cigarette butts and shines the shoes; and Danny King becomes the "master." I'm there to learn from the boss and, according to the ethic of "drag king *oblige*," to make him feel that he is the boss. In my workshops, obviously, I'm the boss. And this power is not to be shared; if you share it with another person or several others, you've lost your cachet as a *king*. This is one of the first lessons about masculinity—everything depends on the way power is managed: making another person believe that he has the power, even if, in reality, the person has it only because you've conceded it to him. Or else making the other believe that power, as something natural and nontransferable, is yours, and that

you and only you will be able to endow him with the status of masculinity, which he needs to belong to the dominant class. Foucault put it best when talking about sovereignty: power doesn't exist beyond the techniques involved in its theatricalization. Masculinity, an old biopolitical fiction constructed within the sovereign society before the eighteenth century, depends on an orchestration of power and body techniques, on a system in which power circulates through shared performative codes that are transmitted from body to body via semiotic signs and material rituals.

Diane Torr's technique of the deconstruction of femininity and apprenticeship in masculinity depends on a theatrical analytic method, on the breaking down of learned body gestures (a way of walking, speaking, sitting, getting up, looking, smoking, eating, smiling) into basic units (distance between the legs, opening of the eyes, movement of the eyebrows, speed of the arms, fullness of the smile, etc.) and examining them in their capacity as cultural signs for the construction of gender. In a second synthetic moment, different cultural codes are rearranged to construct a different gender fiction.<sup>40</sup> The goal of Diane's workshops is to experiment physically and theatrically with the ways in which masculinity is produced by an array of performative cultural codes learned and incorporated through what Judith Butler has called "regularized and constrained repetition of norms."<sup>41</sup>

40. See Diane Torr and Stephen Bottoms, *Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010).

41. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 95.



In order to construct my own workshops, I have learned from Diane's performative analysis of action, combined with a psychopolitical method that is closer to posttraumatic reeducation of the body and to the training of political minorities for survival, starting with *gender suspicion* and the elaboration of a collective narrative. There is no anatomical truth independent of the cultural and political practices of constrained repetition that lead us toward being men or women. From this perspective, which I would call postqueer—because it has experienced Butler's performative theories but also AIDS, Dolly the sheep, and the intentional consumption of hormones—desire, sexuality, and erotic and political pleasure reside precisely in *having access* to these performative biocodes. I suppose it's a matter of my generation and the fact that I've had it up to here with the dominant feminist politics and their restrictions: prohibitions about using dildos, prohibitions about watching pornography, prohibitions about fucking with everything, prohibitions about wanting money and power, prohibitions about succeeding, prohibitions about amusing yourself at the expense of those close to you, prohibitions about destroying the house of the master with the tools of the master. For me, being a drag king is inhabiting the potential that it is my prerogative not to deny, without apologizing, and fulfilling my sexual and political desire to be the master, to incorporate those performative codes, to attain this type of specialization of power, to experiment with the city, the body, sex, public speech the way a cis-male would. Without excuses. Without naturalization.

Once the initial construction of a drag king imperson-

ation is over, a performative practice guided by exercises of self-observation, recodification, and improvisation can begin. Becoming a drag king is a process that could be called a gender "chance operation," using the well-known technique developed by Merce Cunningham: finding a way between norm and improvisation, between repetition and invention. When the participants have succeeded in constructing a masculine fiction that is sufficiently convincing and commonplace, they can confront the "naturalistic" gender ecology in the outside world. One of the most intense and transformative workshop techniques is experienced when you explore the city as a drag king. Walking around, getting a coffee, going down to the subway, hailing a taxi, sitting on a bench, smoking a cigarette leaning against a school wall . . . A new cartography of the city takes shape; for the first time you can enjoy the pleasure of the public space of the male flaneur, nonexistent for a body culturally encoded as female until that moment.

Once the drag king virus has been triggered in each participant, the hermeneutics of gender suspicion extend beyond the workshop and spread to the rest of daily life, causing modifications within social interactions. Drag king knowledge isn't the awareness of being an imitator of masculinity surrounded by anonymous male and female bodies, businesspeople and mail carriers, mothers pushing baby carriages, young guys mainlining next to garbage cans; rather, it resides in the fact of perceiving others—all others, including oneself—for the first time, as more or less realistic biofictions of performative gender and sexual norms that are decodable as male or female. In strolling

around among these anonymous bodies, all these masculinities and femininities (including one's own) appear like caricatures that, thanks to a tacit convention, are seemingly unconscious of being so. There is no ontological difference between these embodiments of gender and mine. All of them are performative products to which different frames of cultural intelligibility confer various degrees of legitimacy. The difference is found in the degree of self-reflection, of consciousness, of compulsion, of the performative dimension of these roles. Becoming a drag king is seeing through the matrix of gender, noticing that men and women are performative and somatic fictions, convinced of their natural reality. This vision of the world makes you laugh, blows a current of buoyant air under your feet, makes you float—political ecstasy.

With time, from one workshop to another, my other drag king egos appear: Bruno (the name I gave myself when I was a kid to get into a boxing club with my father), Miguel, Alex. But it is Pedro Lemebel who gives me my drag king name, while I am organizing a workshop in Santiago, Chile, in 2004. Pedro Lemebel had organized a party at his house to welcome me. He received me wearing a long black dress and a strand of blue plastic beads around his neck; he was bare-chested on a winter day with a red turban on his head, à la Simone de Beauvoir. "I burned my head trying to rid it of boldness," he said me. I had never seen anyone like him. He kissed me and told me, "*Ya llegó la niña revolucionaria.*"<sup>42</sup> I loved him from the first moment I saw him. "Lemebel

42. Translates to "Here comes..."

doesn't need to write poetry to be the best living poet of my generation,"<sup>43</sup> said Roberto Bolaño. He is not only the best poet but also the most radical political queer performer of his generation—you have to be a brave poet to face Pinochet's police naked and riding a white horse.<sup>44</sup> Pedro called me Beto: his will be done. As if the phantom of Bolaño was speaking through him. These are my names: Roberto, Bob, Beto, Beatrizo, algebraic variations of a phonetic constellation. We organize the workshop at MUMS (Movimiento Chileno Unido de Minorías Sexuales) with the Queer MC, the first French drag king hip-hop group, who have come with us to Chile.

Chile has barely come out of its period of military dictatorship and has been undergoing the most radical neoliberal transformation, which was imposed by the Chicago School during the mid-1970s and 1980s and which has brought hyperinflation, free trade, the privatization of social services, and growing social inequalities. The country has gone from being a playground for Spanish colonialism and caciquism into becoming a lab for Milton Friedman's fundamentalist capitalism. The idea of a conference, a seminar, or a workshop in that context has a special intensity; but I am white and Spanish, have earned a PhD at Princeton University, and talk about dildos, testosterone, and trans and queer politics. During my first talk at the University of Chile, a group of Chilean feminists come to my conference to accuse me of being a "representative of the

43. Roberto Bolaño, *Entre paréntesis* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2004), 65.

44. I refer here to the performances of the group "Yegüas del Apocalipsis," formed by Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas between 1987 and 1995.

hetero-patriarchal and colonial order." But the accusation slowly transforms into debate and the debate into dialogue. Finally, thirty-five women appear at the workshop on the winter day of August 27. They are militant mothers from the feminist Left of the Allende period, and with them are their grandmothers, daughters, and nieces, some sixteen-year-olds, some elderly lesbian couples, some working-poor women who will never leave the country and some girls from the bourgeoisie who will one day go to study in an American university. The Andean cold is freezing on our backs as we have our discussions; we dress and work on the unheated premises of MUMS, which is in a Santiago neighborhood behind which flow the polluted waters of the Mapocho. Thirty voices come forth, forging links to the point of creating a narrative of survival. The story that emerges from all these words isn't about male domination or female submission but about resistance to domination, about refusal to surrender. Making each of them a drag king is a rite of investiture that the Queer MC and I carry out with more devotion and respect than ever. We prepare beards and mustaches, slick back hair, bind chests, and size up sports jackets. In most cases, there's not much to do; these women *are* kings. They've never bowed their heads to anyone, they haven't been afraid of torture or death, and they could face any little cock of the walk. There isn't much to teach them, and I'm the one who learns from them, about living with pride and believing in gender revolution in a country where all revolutions have been violently crushed. That night, after eight hours of workshop, we go out in a group of forty

drag kings, as if we were in a postqueer remake of *Mad Max*, and walk through the streets of Santiago toward one of the rare gay bars in the capital. Pedro Lamebel is waiting for us there with his fag and trans pals. The Queer MC sing a Spanish version of one of their hip-hop pieces, "A New Gender Has Come." A small pack of drag kings and their friends invade the stage while the fags cruise the unattached drag kings. In the disco, we're breathing in so much coke that there is no need to snort it. Around four in the morning, the police arrive, we start keeping a low profile, and no one notices that there are cis-females in king drag in the room. The party lasts until the wee hours. I wake up in a bar with whores, fags, and trannies, and I'm in Pedro's arms.

In the face of the upsurge of corporate production and distribution of biocodes of heterosexual masculinity and femininity and gender violence, it is urgent to work to proliferate drag king workshops as spaces for the creation of urban brigades that, in their turn, will set off more workshops, decode the dominant gender grammar, invent new languages. Creating *global* counterhegemonic networks for reprogramming gender. No genuine drag king knowledge can be obtained from merely reading about a model for a workshop. Following the principle of the auto-guinea pig, it is necessary to take the risk of giving corporal and collective practices their chance. Such an experimental form of the production of knowledge and subjectivity renders obsolete the figure of the "professional" drag king guru going from place to place to initiate the process of the denaturalization of gender. The best organizer of a drag king work-

shop is the person who has participated in another drag king workshop and has decided to continue the experiment with a group of people within his own local context.

After having experienced a variety of psychoanalytical or psychodynamic therapies, I have come to understand the drag king workshop as a new practice of political therapy, part of an array of techniques of criticism, reprogramming, and psychopolitical care that we might call *queeranalysis*. The Brazilian Guattarian psychoanalyst and art critic Suely Rolnik has taught us to consider modern clinical practices—those of psychiatry starting in the eighteenth century and psychoanalysis at the beginning of the twentieth—as techniques that arose precisely for the management of “the collateral effects of this mode of historically dated subjectification that is characterized by the reduction of subjectivity to its psychological dimension and the proscription of its aesthetic dimension.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, we could say that the problem of contemporary clinical opinions has to do with the reduction of gender to individual psychology. Psychoanalytical or psychodynamic therapy often attempts to reduce the processes of the construction of political subjectivity to a psychological account. Psychology and psychoanalytical institutions use a colonial and Western epistemology, based on strongly racialized and heterocentric accounts of the Oedipal complex, castration, or penis envy as syndromes and pathologies, in order to diagnose and treat the frustrations generated by resistance or submission to the political imposition of gender, sex, and race

45. Suely Rolnik, “El arte cura?,” *Quaderns Portàtils 2* (Barcelona: MACBA, 2006).

norms. Moreover, during the Cold War psychology became the discursive support of the pharmacopornographic industry, providing scientific legitimacy to the normative production and distribution of chemical prostheses. It is imperative to understand our sexual identities as the traumatic effects of a violent biopolitical system of sex, gender, sexuality, and race and to work out new myths that will allow us to interpret psychopolitical harm and give us the courage needed for collective transformation.<sup>46</sup> Critical accounts of the hormonal and surgical treatment of “intersexual” babies should be substituted today for the myth of the Oedipal complex, just as a drag king workshop, in its capacity as a corporal, collective, and political laboratory of production of genders (an ensemble of techniques that we could describe—in opposition to the clinic—as depsychologizing gender) would be a more effective place than the psychoanalyst’s couch to work on identity. Queeranalysis isn’t against psychoanalysis, but it goes beyond it by politicizing it, triggering an anticolonial and trans-feminist critical reading of its analytical narratives and therapeutic techniques. Queeranalysis develops the insights of Franz Fanon and Francois Tosquelles, of Jean Oury and Félix Guattari at La Borde. Queeranalysis is a practice that, instead of conceptualizing gender and sexual dissent through a lens of psychological pathology and identity dysphoria, would conceive of normalization and its effects as biopolitical

46. Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Butler, for example, in reinterpreting the discourses of psychoanalysis and legislation, has suggested the irreverent and suicidal Antigone—a child of incest who is more faithful to her brother than to the State—as a political figure that epitomizes the contradictions of heterosexual filiation.



apparatuses and forms of political violence. Queeranalysis does not reject all techniques of the production of subjectivity derived from Freudian psychology or from neurolinguistic programming—the analysis of dreams, the talking cure, hypnosis, and so on—but it attacks their model of “subject” as well as the rhetoric of gender, sex, race, disability, and class at work in these psychotherapeutic practices and their complicity in the pharmacopornographic regime. Finally, queeranalysis calls for a collective reappropriation of “common” biocodes (discursive, endocrinological, chemical, visual, etc.) for the production of subjectivity.<sup>47</sup>

## GENDER BIOTERRORISM

### The Techno-Lamb Model

In October 1958, a young woman of nineteen comes to the department of psychiatry at the University of California at Los Angeles. She's seen by a team composed of Robert Stoller, Harold Garfinkel, and Alexander Rosen, a psychiatrist, sociologist, and psychologist, respectively, who are researching sexual identity. The medical register describes her as “a white female working as a secretary in an insurance company.”<sup>48</sup> The report adds, “Her appearance is convincing. She is tall, slender and shaped like a woman. . . . Her body displays male genital organs and a normally

47. Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 102.

48. Report of Robert Stoller, et al.,