ENGAGED
ART EDUCATION
Research and Praxis for Social Engaged Arts Education in Southern Europe, Balkan and Mediterranean countries

Introduction

Why did we start InSEA seminars and how did it work?

The world of art education has been concerned with the ongoing global issues such as poverty, climate change, cultural diversity, inclusion, migration, political radicalization, marginalization, artificial intelligence, digitalization, posthumanism, eco-justice and post-colonialism. Although the field has been established as important subjects of school curriculum, the advocacy endeavors continue to take place all over the world. The advocacy attempts stem from the global financial crisis that threatens the funding for education, as well as the accountability that is connected with the market jeopardize the significance of the skills that an individual may develop when they engage in art practices. Eventually along with the advocacy attempts, a new interest arises for the usage of arts as a therapeutic and integration tool in marginalized communities (e.g. poor, immigrants, refugee communities). Also, an increased need rises about how education and arts education may support the cohesion of the society over the political radicalization.

Therefore art educators and other cultural workers are seeking for alternative modes of critique and collective action through the arts. This publication is an outcome of the InSEA seminar held during 16-18 July 2018 at the School of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece. The roots for this seminar can be traced in events and actions created by art educators, artists and researchers from countries in the peripheral western south coast of Europe: The Iberian Peninsula, where the survival kit for art education was created by the members of the activist art education group C3. The group C3, coordinated by Cristina Trigo and Mª Jesús Agra-Pardiñas is an educational and artistic resistance cell proposing alternative ways for research and praxis in art education. The survival kit presented in the European InSEA congress in Lisbon 2015 suggested a slow pace way of living, promoting pauses and the creation of spaces to think/feel, to slow down, to restrain, and to make. The idea to start InSEA seminars followed the same logic: we wanted to create a possibility for encounters where art educators can be together, share their practices, inspire each other, and initiate conversations by making things together. Spaciousness was the main flavor of the event - we tried to offer not only counter-narrative to linear and goal oriented passes of time, but to create fertile intervals that sometimes provoke confusion, but also can be a potential for play, creation and learning.

Furthermore, it became a common sense to claim that knowledge production is certainly not neutral - the process is instilled with norms and values, which are being passed on through academic action. It is based on epistemologies that seek to confirm western hegemonic structures (Thielsch, 2019). Within the European framework, knowledge production is taking place in the “centres of Europe” reflecting the existing imbalance of power between East and West, North and South. What is considered to be socially engaged art education among scholars is often based on Western European concepts such as relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) which is considered as a door-opener for community participation, collaboration and collective actions. The purposes of such efforts mirror the main European
values – participation, diversity, civic engagement and democracy, and socially engaged artistic practices are seeing as a possible catalyst for change, although sometimes being very costly and elitist projects. Furthermore, different events within the academic context are happening inside the logic of hegemonic knowledge production, and often they reproduce inequalities and confirm imaginary differences between European center and periphery. Not forgetting the relevance of symbolic realm, this is also a consequence of the huge disparity in available resources and support that academics and students receive within their context. Certainly, there are efforts to transcend those divisions by suggesting different conference fees for different countries depending on their GDPs, or offering bursaries for PhD students. Still, these measures did not manage to overcome inequalities and those events where discourses are produced and reproduced are still dominated by Western European institutions. As the organizations of the academic conferences is a very expensive endeavor, big events often take place in developed countries, making it even more unattainable to “the periphery”.

After the financial crisis hit Europe, austerity measures were introduced to Southern countries and their image was constructed as a kind of a teenager who was incapable of taking good care of the future, recklessly spending money guided by the principle of instant gratification. These European children were seen as “unable to organize their lives democratically without guidance from another” (Buden [2009] in Petrović, 2014, p. 10). The somewhat infantilized representational position, transforms these geographical areas into objects of knowledge production. “The role of the periphery is to supply data, and later to apply knowledge in the form of technology and method. The role of the metropole, as well as producing data, is to collate and process data, producing theory (including methodology) and developing applications which are later exported to the periphery” (Connell, 2014, p. 211). The Balkan region specifically is constructed as a field of study: Yugoslav studies, post-communist studies, post-conflict etc., thus making a geographical area into a research one without agency.

Other European countries can also be part of the peripheral map, specially when we talk about art education. Models of cultural agency, education and art education coming from North Europe and North America had been a great influence upon curriculum development, teacher training and research in art education. The global art education landscape is characterized by the centrality and certain invisibility of geographically marginal practices and knowledge mainly because of the dissemination of academic publications in English language in journals with high impact factor, texts that are largely distributed in universities. A rush for number of quotations and publications with ‘impact factor’ is undermining the universities; carrying out a multinational business model of distributing information. Maybe is time to start to react against the model.

Another interesting factor is related to the places and types of congresses and conferences art education researchers use to attend. Normally in universities of Northern countries with very traditional formats of displaying information such as lectures by keynote speakers, presentations by participants and some workshops. Even if in the InSEA European congresses from the last eight years we can observe a move to more dialogic formats, we still need to enlarge the focus, the scope and the places.

We urge to consider how academic praxis and intellectual work produces place and what kind of critical-creative endeavor is needed as a counter action. Therefore, we see the seminar Research and practice of socially engaged art education as a proactive response to hegemonic knowledge production as we tried to take into account social, political and geographical context of knowledge making, talking, and writing. The seminar took place in Thessaloniki with the
attempt to create space for gathering and sharing that was organized beyond regular conference logic that follows rigid structure. The model of the seminar was dialogical and non-hierarchical, including interactive sessions where everyone had an active role, workshops and performances reminded us the crucial role of the body interaction in communication. Making things together, walking together, performing together removed participants from their comfort zones of written and spoken languages creating spaces for emotional conversations. Due to the small size of the seminar the dialogue was fruitful and everyone got connected overcoming linguistic difficulties and cultural differences. In the difference we reached connections and constructed links. We were able to be attentive to the small details, to perceive the subtle varieties of art education in its many forms and contexts, without judging from the academic gaze, but trying to understand through the slow pace of making together the small nodes of collective actions.

‘As long Thessaloniki exists; everyone will have a homeland’ wrote the Byzantine scholar Nikiphoros Choumnos in 14th century. The majority of the participants came from Balkan and Mediterranean regions, but the seminar in Thessaloniki also welcomed people from some Northern European countries, Brazil and Japan. The InSEA seminar took place at a crossroads of social transformation throughout history. Since ancient time Thessaloniki invited and offered shelter to many different groups and communities that eventually flourished. As a consequence these circumstances gave prominence to the significance of its location. In our days, Thessaloniki is still a solidarity center even if it has suffered from the contemporary financial crisis. The topic and content of the seminar was a response to a contemporary need for collaboration and creative exchange in Balkan and Southern Europe in order to foster interdependence of the several communities and prevent hostility.

Why socially engaged art education?

Contemporary artists have been eliminating the boundaries between the arts and the audience, creating relational forms for human communication and knowledge construction. They opened up completely different perspectives on levels of interaction between things and people proposing diverse roles for the arts in the society and providing tools that can be most useful in educational settings involving image, sound and movement as ways of knowing and interconnecting people. Globalization phenomenon caused a sense of fragmentation, loss of social bonds and alienation in many population groups in the world. Engaged artists believe that close working relationships among artists, arts organizations, and the broader community enable better living conditions for all and create a more sustainable environment for the arts, claiming a return to a social function of the arts and a non compromised role of the artist in the society. Some cultural workers point out the need to merge art in collective experiences often performative and political. Activist movements are growing in all the continents, raising critical interventions, provoking situations and creating collective situations to raise urgent issues and polemical questions that are often hidden by the hegemonic media discourses. In its many variations, such as “relational art,” “participatory art,” “community art,” or “socially engaged art,” these manifestations often facilitate collective situations and promote greater participation and cultural agency (Emmelhainz, 2016).

Socially engaged arts education (SEAE) began as a pedagogical direction which purposes the civil engagement of participants. Whether it takes place in educational institutions or in the community, the evaluation of the projects depends on the ethical responsibility on the social concerns that the members of the action undertaken. In educational settings and especially in
public schools the aim is to shape the students’ civic role. Arts are seen as a means to enrich the experience of the participants with playful and creative ways. Yet, the interdisciplinary character of the SEAE is obvious in order to foster a dialogue and a direct social change. Whether this is only a short-term change, marking the difference with the goals of traditional politicized art, or a more enduring and influencing process, time will tell (Emmelhainz, 2013). The processes usually include collaborative and interdependent activities that make visible the individual perspectives and how the location affects the critical responses and thinking. As a consequence a sense of “community” is created through the elimination of conflicts that the SEAE evoked. Further, SEAE evokes a radical reappraisal of the modes, purposes and context of arts education. Schlemmer (2017) draws the pedagogical implications of Socially Engaged Art practice that foster a hybridized space beyond formal instructions. Art practice is encountered as an educational experience and vice versa. The critical and reflective actions as perquisites of an educational space become traits of art practices that are formed through an aesthetic process.

The participants

The seminar attracted many valuable contributions, also from other regions than the Balkan and the Mediterranean regions, but the majority of the articles submitted for this publication were from the latter. The focus on the Balkan and Southern European countries in this seminar gave space to certain topics to appear in the fertile intervals. Some might also appear in other places, others are site-specific.

Public space is seized by art education, stimulating energies and possibilities that sprout from the locations and, if needed, giving people alternatives to respond to a dominant way in which space is organized. In Czech Republic the grassroot art association Trafalga (2006-2014) initiated street art activities for young people and worked together with teachers to pass on techniques. This led to the new concept of ‘Public Pedagogy’, as noticed by Kamila Karagavrilidisová. In Serbia installations in the form of windows or portals were put in public space inviting people to paint their vision. Jelena Joksimovic explains that the aim is to express and then combine different feelings and understandings of educational practices. Vanja Zarić and other students of adult education at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade reveal that socially engaged art in liminal spaces has a great potential to initiate the transformation of individuals through the processes of participation and learning, as well as social practice and reality itself.

The senses play traditionally an important role in art education and in the Thessaloniki seminar the use of senses was stimulated in a specific way. They caused individuals to be more aware of the body and its surroundings. Antonio Félix Vico Prieto presents the idea of “turning vision into sound” which involves a technique of recording audio that reproduces the real conditions of human hearing, to show how a visual image may be transformed into a soundscape. María Lorena Cueva Ramírez presents ‘My hands tell you’, a practical proposal to work with hands, gestures and paint to get the message across. Her workshop has benefit from the cultural and linguistic diversity of the participants. Without oral language they are able to communicate messages, concepts or sensations to other people only using colors and hands. Another way of communicating without speech was developed by María-Isabel Moreno-Montoro, María Martinez-Morales and Nuria López-Pérez, in a system of body expressions. Ideograms that represent concepts are proposed in a performative act with a technical basis of action and documentary recording. Also Katia Pangrazi shows art as a common language in the project ‘Art
Lab x Kids’. The project was developed in Italy but the aim is to create a "travelling place" of creativity and knowledge, experimentation, discovery and learning through play. It is a place for educational meetings, training and collaboration. A space to develop the ability to observe with eyes and hands and to learn to experience reality with all the senses.

Myriam Romero Sánchez, reviews the dualism of standardized and real beauty and explores its socio-cultural consequences. She makes a distinction between divergent bodies and convergent bodies and then she explores those typologies with a large installation with an empty face in which the participants may temporarily transform. Melissa Lima Caminha uses embodied inquiry that is based on feminist and queer theories in order to uncover perspectives of the social construction of gender and sexuality. Combining video and photography with drawing made it possible for María de la Paz Barrios Mudarra to carry out artistic investigation of daily experience. With those means, sensations you have while doing routine actions in your house can be intensified as in the work ‘Invisible Woman’ is shown.

The artistic, nature, ecology and the social came together in new projects in Spain and Brazil. Carmen Andreu-Lara, and Rocío Arregui-Pradas describe a new Masters degree of Art at the University of Seville intertwining ecology, art and social contexts, as in the concept of ‘ecosophy’ by Guattari. The authors acknowledged the connections created by Spanish, Moroccan and Latin-American students in their curriculum. In Brazil Rosana Gonçalves da Silva also involves ecology in social contexts of learning - a tripolar process of self-learning, learning from others and learning from the earth expressed in Poetic language to raise the principles of the Earth Charter. In a public elementary school located in Brasília she developed an experience of artistic ecoeducation/ecoformation and sensitive experience in school routine.

In Cyprus and Greece, socially engaged art education is also about war and refugees.

Spyros Koutis started his artistic research dealing with war from a personal question: what is my responsibility as an artist in regard to war? With use of ‘Agnostic arts practice’, a form of arts based research, which explores the potential of art to have political impact through process of disruption, subversion, and participation, he developed socially engaged art projects-workshops related to Syrian war and refugees. He carried out the projects with children at a primary school and with young adults at the Birmingham City University.

Martha Christopoulou describes the project “depictions of a refugee’s journey” which aimed at (i) enabling primary school students to critically assess information provided by the mass media (ii) enhancing their understanding of empathy and (iii) increasing compassion and empathic behaviour towards distant strangers who face extreme circumstances in their lives. All the students that participated in this project managed to locate, identify and label the different facets of migrant-refugee crisis, in a way that was meaningful for them.

Cultural regional traditions often are defended in war contexts with different population groups. In this seminar very interesting art educational projects were organized concerning local community and cultural traditions. Maria Letsiou describes socially engaged art education (SEAE) in which the primary goal of art learning is students' involvement with the community's concerns and issues. She delineates how studio-oriented learning is enriched by the collaborative learning experience and by students' meaningful participation in the process and content of learning. Antonia Batzoglou describes practical applications of the praxis of Mythagogia: an interdisciplinary praxis that draws from mythology, the educational art of psychagogia, as defined by Socrates, and the therapeutic and reflective qualities of performative storytelling. Socrates describes psychagogia as the educational art of leading the psyche towards dialectical examination of the good. In mythagogia, myths are the tools that
enable an embodied experience and dialectical reflection of social and personal themes. Ismini Sakellariadi presents the results of a project carried out by 15-year old students of the Experimental School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, who used art to research and communicate a new understanding of their cultural identity and history. They looked at the way the past permeates the present in various ways, studied the multicultural past of their city and discovered untold stories. They then proceeded to communicate their artwork and their findings with the wider community, hoping to help bring about change in attitudes and beliefs regarding history, identity, minorities, multicultural symbiosis, human rights and social justice.

Conclusions and recommendations

Some of the topics, or parts of them, that appeared in this seminar, could also be discussed in Western-European conferences. But the focus on Balkan and Southern-European countries shed a light to different aspects. This publication brings up so many voices, different tunes, different colors but the same concern: education through art, an approach to arts in education that although old - Herbert Read seminal book ‘Education Through Art’ was published in 1943 - is still relevant. More than ever we need to believe in the power of the arts as a tool for making collective actions, as a pedagogical strategy to enable cultural participatory skills. Maybe we are witnessing a recession of arts in schools, we see that art education is not as valued as it was in the twenty century. But through the voices and stories of this book we can look further and embrace the different places where education may be art and art may became education.

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Old Dick Donald and Drag King Delicious Melicious:
Embodied inquiry through an arts-based research on woman clown transvestism.

Abstract: This paper aims to share some topics on the arts based research in which I have been engaged in the construction of two characters in the Cunt Clown Show: Old Dick Donald and Drag King Delicious Melicious. This embodied inquiry originates from interdisciplinary artistic practices and theories. Feminist and queer performances and theories work as a base for the creative and artistic production, which aims to engage audiences in a dialogue about the materiality and social constructions of femininity and masculinity, gender and sexuality. At the same time, it also intends to work as a critical tool for the clown community that I belong to. Since the show’s proposal is to walk through different comic and laughing territories, it also tries to demystify and deconstruct clowning as a main symbol and archetype of comedy and laughter. Therefore, this paper seeks to contribute to the opening of the “clown world” to different comic performances and traditions, foster interdisciplinary conversations, and promote a policy of artistic dialogue between artistic practices and communities.

Key words: women clowns – transvestism – arts based research – feminist art – queer theory.
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1. Introduction

This paper explores the construction of two male and masculine characters that I developed in a feminist-clown-queer spectacle: the Cunt Clown Show. It consists of an artistic practical research inside a broader arts-based inquiry into clowning and gender. The show is the result of an interdisciplinary investigation through which I developed both theoretical outputs and art work creation.

Old Dick Donald and Drag King Delicious Melicious are two of the characters that I perform in the show. They are inspired by female transvestism in both clowning and drag king theatre, as well as feminist and queer artists and theorists. Specially the works on female masculinity, by Judith Halberstam (1998); nomadism and posthumanism, by Rosi Braidotti (2002, 2013); cunt’s representations, by Tee Corinne (1975) and Judy Chicago (2006); gender identity subversion, by Judith Butler (2001); are addressed as main inspirations for the Cunt Clown Show and the characters that I explore in this paper.

Before explaining the Dick Donald and Delicious Melicious composition and representation, it is important to make a brief overview of female clowning in theatre and circus, pointing out how transvestism and cross-dressing female to male (FTM) were fundamental strategies for women to start clowning. Even though performances of masculinity have always been present in female clowning, the actual movement that women clowns have been developing in the past decades is marked by its emphasis on femininity, both in artistic performances and political discourses of visibility and empowerment.

This work aims to queer the clown world, by performing gender deconstruction and fostering transdisciplinary dialogues that can enrich artistic practices, political actions and art communities’ synergies.
2. Women clowns: issues on transvestism and cross-dressing

Female clowning is a recent appearance in the history of circus and theatre. In the genealogy of clowns, we can find few references to women, like Amelia Butler, Peggy Williams and Amelia Adler (United States), Lulu Crastor (England), Lonny Olchansky (Germany), Miss Loulou and Yvette Spessardi (France).

Even though women have always performed in circus, their sketches, performances and costumes used to follow strict gender social norms and roles. Besides participation in freak shows of modern circus, which used to expose men, women and kids in a voyeuristic, colonial and anthropological manner, women would normally appear as equilibrists, dancers or assistants of magicians and clown performers (Caminha, 2016; Dos Santos, 2014; Nascimento, 2014; Junqueira, 2012; Kasper, 2004; Cézard, n/d; Cosnier-Héléard, 1999).

Some women circus clowns, like Yvette Spessardi, from the French trio Leónard, started working dressed as august, the traditional modern circus counterpart of the white face. That was so because the audience could not recognize it was a woman performing grotesque actions in a grotesque costume. French circus historian Tristan Rémy (2002) explains that women did achieve success as clowns when disguised as augusts, because their femininity could be well hidden from the audience, which could not realize that what they were watching under the grotesque costume was actually a woman. According to Rémy, the public was not prepared to watch a female perform slapsticks without having a fit or showing their disapproval. “Dressed as eccentric and no longer just as clowns, clownesses have never proved inferior to men […] Masculinized by their travestis, they were considered by the spectators as good as all clowns” (Rémy, 2002: 440).

Some women in circus started clowning to merely substitute the male clown, when the last one was sick or absent. As part of a circus family or dynasty, one did not have so many options to choose from. And women, especially, should obey commands from men. The moral imperative that denied the comic perception in the female body contributed to the non-recognition of women as comic subjects. The only way that some women could possible act as comic subjects was by dressing as a man, under male clown costumes of an august character. Something that women probably had not done so much for vocation or personal comic willing, as they do now; instead, they probably made it for survival or imposition. That

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1 Free translation to English, by the author, from the original in French: « Habillées en excentrique et non plus en clown, les clownesses ne se sont alors jamais révélées inférieures aux hommes […]. Masculinisées par leurs travestis, elles furent considérées par les spectateurs à la mesure de tous les clowns » (Rémy, 2002: 440).
is what some women clowns and French researchers suggest (Cézard, n/d; Cosnier-Hélard: 1999).

It was only from the 80s on that women would come to consolidate themselves as professional clowns, with creative autonomy, dedicated to the spectacle, pedagogical activities and works of social intervention. This process was possible due to several reasons. One of which was the crisis of the modern circus of the 19th century, and the new possibilities that women started to have in clown training in the new circus and theater schools.

Women clowns like Annie Fratelinni (France), Gardi Hutter (Switzerland), Nola Rae (Australia and England), Pepa Plana and Virgínia Imaz (Catalonia and País Basco / Spain), Angela de Castro and Ana Luísa Cardoso (Brazil), Laura Herts and Hillary Chaplain (USA), Francine Côté (Canada), are some of the women who began to professionalize themselves as clowns in the fields of theatre and circus.

It seems that it is with the Festival de Pallasses de Andorra, that took place for the first time in 2011 that a collective women gender consciousness in the field of clowning begins. Starting a process of differentiation of the comic canon and of what was seen as a masculine comedy; women clowns began to build themselves as laughing and laughable subjects, reclaiming a comic space historically dominated by men: clownery.

After the first festival in Andorra, women clowns from several countries have given continuity to the circuit of female clowns festivals and gatherings, promoting and fostering women’s humor, laughter and comedy through a particular clown style and language.

In this process of differentiation of the comic clown canon and patriarchal tradition, women suggested the creation of an interesting category: “feminine comicality”, as I have already explained in previous works (Caminha, 2016, 2017).

Feminine comicality puts femininity at the center of female clowns’ political actions, discourses and performances. Femininity has even been highlighted in the titles of festivals, gatherings, courses and researches about women clowns. But the emphasis on femininity leaves the transvestism and masculinity of women in clowning unproblematized.

Transvestism of women in clowning has been explained as a strategy to replace a male clown in circus, when he is sick, absent or dead. As mentioned previously, this is even the main explanation for the historical emergence of female clowns in circus. Transvestism is also comprehended as inheritance of a clowny art which, historically, has only provided male references (Dos Santos, 2014; Junqueira, 2012).

Some authors and artists, like Annie Fratellini (1989), addresses an alleged neutrality and / or asexuality attributed to the figure of the clown. This conception is a bit problematic, because, as Susan Horowitz reminds us, “Among many anthologies and studies of
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comedians, women are significantly missing or minimized. The norm is not neutral. It is male." (Horowitz, 2005: ix).

Another explanation for female clowns’ cross-dressing is that women clowns’ transvestism works as a natural and / or similar counterpoint to an analogous phenomenon: dragging and cross-dressing of male clowns (Junqueira, 2012). The few and undeveloped mentions to this analogy do not take into account that male to female (MTF) impersonation has been historically more frequent than female to male (FTM) cross-dressing, both as social and artistic practices, for diverse reasons. (Halberstam, 1998, 1999; Davis, 1978).

Some artists and intellectuals, like Franca Rame, wife of Italian Nobel Prize winner and comic Dario Fo, believes that comic effects work in men’s transvestism performances, but it is not possible in women’s transvestism, therefore women must construct their clowns based on their alleged natural femininity (Rame in Fo, 2004). Rame radicalizes the need of feminine expression in the creation of a character by female comics. And she also harshly criticizes the “asexual” tendency of mime masters such as Marcel Marceau, concluding:

Something worse than that, only when a woman represents one of those pierrots. A man without sex is still acceptable, but a woman without sex, never! (...) An actress must play feminine roles. An actor is able to perform the role of a transvestite admirably, managing to find, through a caricatured sense, pleasant modulations. A woman “transvestite” has no meaning whatsoever, unless that in the context of scenic fiction it is not an explicit transvestism, expressed in an evident and crystalline way. Definitely, there should be no question that the character is playing a game. This patent transvestism was one of the spectacular features of Commedia dell’Arte. And it only worked because the actress, by means of her charm, of her forms (particularly by the bulge of her breasts) and mainly by her elegance and grace, had already proved her feminine condition to the public. Only then could the actress allow her transvestism (Rame in Fo, 2004: 345-346).

In her analysis, Franca Rame seems to advocate for a feminine comicality as the only possibility of success in the performances of women clowns. Her words reflect a strong

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2 Free translation to English, by the author, from the Brazilian edition in Portuguese: « Algo pior que isso, só quando uma mulher representa um desses pierrots. Um homem sem sexo ainda é aceitável, mas uma mulher sem sexo, jamais! (...) Uma atriz deve interpretar papéis femininos. Um ator é capaz de fazer admiravelmente o papel do travesti, logrando encontrar, através do sentido caricaturesco, modulações bastante agradáveis. Uma mulher “travesti” não tem o menor significado, ao menos que no contexto da ficção cênico não seja um travesti explícito, expresso de maneira evidente e cristalina. Decididamente, não há que haver qualquer dúvida de que o personagem está executando um jogo. Esse travesti patente era um dos recursos espetaculares da Commedia dell’Arte. E só funcionava porque a atriz, por meio de seu encontro, se suas formas (particularmente pela protuberância dos seus seios) e principalmente por sua elegância e graça, já havia provado ao público sua condição feminina. Só então a atriz podia se permitir o travesti” (Rame, in Fo, 2004: 345-346).
patriarchal and essentialist position, because it does not consider that there is room for laughter within “female masculinity” (Halberstam, 1998). For Rame, the drag strategy, when used by women, only arouses laughter when the performer exposes, at the same time, her hyperfemininity traits, such as the breast marks. This position predicates that women in drag do not arouse laughter because the masculine is taken as a neutral attribute, which, by its natural quality, cannot be ridiculed and parodied, and does not have the power to make fun of anything.

The explanations displayed in this topic do not take into account the historical, social and cultural complexity inherent in transvestism practices, as well as the importance of these practices in the representation of women, as well as the formation of the artist’s subjectivity and the construction of clowns’ community identity.

3. Cunt Clown Show: artistic practice and arts-based research

The Cunt Clown Show was born during my PhD research, that I developed in the Arts and Education postgraduate program in the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Barcelona. The first script is part of my PhD thesis, defended in January, 2016. Right now, I am still working on it, with the direction and assistant direction of clowns Jango Edwards and Cristi Garbo, respectively.

The show is inspired by the "cunt art", developed by several women and feminist artists in the 60s and 70s, which is still present today in many collectives of artists and performers around the world. A show that has as its starting point the genre, but goes further to address, through poetry and parody, our monstrous humanity.

My clown, Lavandinha, along with her cunt flower, travels through various territories of laughter and comedy, such as clowning, buffoonery and drag King performance. A science fiction trip in which the female clown meets different characters: a bee, an angel, Old Dick Donald and Drag King Delicious Melicious. A journey that ends with pregnancy and the birth of BeeBaby, a monstrous hybrid being, half animal, half huuwman, a result of the adventures of the female clown in her fantastic journey.

Cunt Clown is a show that seeks to walk through territories not yet deeply developed in women’s clowning, such as the sexual, obscene and visceral exploration of the “lower bodily stratum”, as it has been developed by Bakhtin (2002) when dealing with grotesque realism. Also, drag King performances, which play with parody and cross-dressing FTM (Female to Male), have not yet been properly addressed in clowning practices and theories.

The artistic project has sought to contemplate, from the beginning, various contributions of the theoretical framework of the research. Diverse were the feminist and queer artists and theorists that have inspired the project, such as Judy Chicago, Tee
Corinne, Judith Halberstam, among several actresses, performers, visual artists and women clowns.

This project is located in an arts-based research framework (ABR), which seeks to establish a dense and balanced play between theory and artistic practice, putting reflexivity at the center of artistic creation and production. The artistic research focuses more on the creative processes derived from my practice of training, rehearsals and presentations to the public. The ABR is drawn in a wider circle, integrating all the research, in a process that accounts for how data and performances have been manufactured and modeled as knowledge resulting from an intense process of interplay between theory and practice, text and performance. As explained by Riddett-Moore and Siegesmund (2012):

"Arts-based data is valid when the artist/researcher/teacher creates art with the same theoretical basis as other written forms of data. Theory can take many forms; however, the theory must guide the data creation or collection, and reciprocally the data will help inform the theory. The work of art, or poem, or performance must say something more or different than writing alone. Art does not illustrate data; it should illuminate and transform" (Riddett-Moore and Siegesmund, 2012: 112).

3.1. Cunt Clown Show, a brief script

Before entering on a more detailed description and analysis of the two masculine types I have been working on, I should first present a brief script of the Cunt Clown Show, to contextualize Old Dick Donald and Drag King Delicious Melicious.

The first character, Lavandinha, is my starting point. She was my first clown character, a feminine female one. In the first scene, the clown Lavandinha wants to commit suicide. But she gives up when she sees a flower that is worse off than her. The clown tries to save the flower in different ways. After some failed attempts, she finally manages to bring the flower to life with her tears of love and warmth. Seeing the miracle, the clown gets excited and happy, dedicating a great dance to the flower. Attracted by the smell of honey and partying, a very hungry and naughty little bee arrives. After fighting, bee and clown celebrate peace and make love.

After waking up from her night of love, Lavandinha realizes that her lover bee has gone. The little bee has left her a farewell letter, explaining why she left. Her lover bee departed on an important mission to save her bee community from agro toxic extermination. While reading it, Lavandinha experiences various feelings: sadness, admiration, anger and frustration. But quickly she becomes strong, proud and empowered. After proclaiming a
powerful speech of independence, she decides to marry herself, celebrating her own wedding. After the celebration, Lavandinha leaves on a honeymoon with herself.

Lavandinha departs on an interplanetary space trip. A great science fiction adventure full of emotions and discoveries. The honeymoon tour includes a visit to three different planets: Planet Paradise, Planet CEO and Planet Xoxo (CunTree). In each of them, Lavandinha meets or transforms herself into different characters: the Angel, great inspiring light and pleasure donor. Old Dick Donald, big executive director of the planet and holder of the monopoly of all its riches. And Drag King Delicious Melicious, gothic king of the CunTree, promter of love and peace somewhere beyond the rainbow.

Back to her home on Earth, Lavandinha wakes up pregnant. In her great dream and adventure, she has generated a baby that does not recognize the limits of humanity. After a hard labor, the clown gives birth to her monstrous baby, a mixture of clown and bee, the result of a series of adventures and love without borders. Together, mama clown and baby bee celebrate life and the utopia of a creative, plastic and colorful world.

4. Old Dick Donald and Drag King Delicious Melicious: performing masculinities, strategic essentialism and new materialism.

When Lavandinha arrives at the CEO Planet, she meets Old Dick Donald, an impersonation of toxic and infamous masculinity. Old Dick Donald is a mix of Donald Trump and Mr. Monopoly (Rich Uncle Pennybags, aka the Monopoly man). It represents patriarchy and its family: capitalism, monopolism, anthropocentrism, xenophobia, sexism and racism. The character construction plays with Trump's political discourses and actions, and adopts Mr. Monopoly's costumes and props.

Dick Donald enters the stage dancing and singing a kid's song. The lyrics are about his strategies and plans to control money worldwide. After the song, Dick Donald makes his Trump political and populist discourse, full of misogynist and racist sentences. After that, he plays Monopoly – Planet Earth, wins the game and leaves the stage with his monopoly bag full of money. Lavandinha returns to fight against Dick Donald. She puts a bomb on the game board and explodes the CEO board game.

Old Dick Donald explores women travestism from a buffoonish perspective. Old Dick Donald is a satirical impersonation of manhood, and the capitalist anthropocentric masculinity that exercises a negative power over the rest of the world: women, poor people, immigrants, LGBTQ+, non-white people, nature, animals and kids.

After leaving the CEO planet, Lavandinha continues her honeymoon trip. Now she visits planet CunTree. In this scene, Drag King Delicious Melicious enters the stage with British national anthem God Saves the Queen. After the anthem is finished, the king
proclaims his beautiful discourse, an adapted speech from Charlie Chaplin's movie *The Great Dictator*. But King Delicious Melicious inserts in his speech feminist and queer proposals, quotes and expressions.

After the speech, Delicious Melicious conducts the millennial traditional of his kingdom: the selection of a Cinderfella, and Cunt of the CunTree. He looks for her wife in the audience, and finds her by testing a gothic high heel on her foot. His wife is a man, who King Delicious Melicious transforms into a Drag Queen, by using feminine props, clothes and a queen crown. After the Drag Queen coronation, the king offers the king's concert to his beloved wife, and now Cunt of the CunTree. King Delicious Melicious parodies Elvis Presley through a lip sync of his song *Can't Help Falling in Love*, and seals his love with a revealing striptease that shows her breast and cunt flower.

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Old Dick Donald parodies a toxic masculinity, trying to make the tricks and poses of powerful and rich men visible. At the same time, it reveals the links between masculinity, patriarchy and capitalism. It is a simple character, and represents a hegemonic view of
masculinity and its relation with money, power and sex. While the character itself is a stereotype of a powerful man, it also reveals the artificiality of its construction, and the false natural appearance that masculinity tries to forge in contrast with femininity.

Drag King Delicious Melicious, in turn, is a complex character. It works, in the first moment, also creating a relation between masculinity and power. But masculinity here is not a monolithic and natural attribute. It is obviously fluid, and it addresses another power. It advocates for sharing and participative democracy. It is a woman in drag. The figure of the Drag King is on top, so it plays with the category of “woman on top”, that Natalie Zemon Davis (1978) and other authors explore when studying comedy and the reversible world. With Delicious Melicious, Drag Queen pop scene, culture and politics is challenged by the “Drag King on top”, who reclaims visibility, power and equal politics for both drag queen and drag king scenes.

Judith Halberstam (1998, 1999), in studying drag king theatre, explores issues of performance and performativity of female masculinity. While Judith Butler (2001) focuses on drag queens to evidence the construction of gender through laughter and parody. Halberstam does the same by addressing drag king culture and lesbian community. According to Halberstam and Volcano (1999), not just femininity is an artificial attribute that can be parodied and deconstructed, but also masculinity.

*If the drag queen takes what is artificial about femininity (or what has been culturally constructed as artificial) and plays it to the hilt, the Drag King takes what is so-called natural about masculinity and reveals its mechanisms – the tricks and poses, the speech patterns and attitudes that have been seamlessly assimilated into a performance of realness* (Halberstam and Volcano, 1999: 62).

Besides revealing the false naturalness and non-performative quality of masculinity, Halberstam (1998) also denounces the invisibility and prejudice against drag kings, both in pop culture and academic debates. This invisibility is related to the prejudice that women are not funny, that lesbians are not funny, that femininity is funny because is artificial, and masculinity is not funny because is real, non-performative. This is an old misogynist strategy of silencing women’s laughter, of denying the power of women to be the subject of laughter and comedy.

The gay and lesbian comic cultures are addressed and displayed in a female clown show, not with the pretention and arrogance of trying to embody and represent certain minorities and queer subjects, but as an intent to challenge the heterosexual and patriarchal clown and comedy scene that I belong to. It also tries to bring light onto feminist and queer inquiries on comedy and the performances and performativities of laughter.
The Drag Queen is called Cunt, the Cunt of the CunTree, insufflating and displacing the meaning in different directions. The word cunt, normally used as an insult, is resignified to be a Drag Queen positive symbol and power. But it is a female drag king who has the power to resignify it, and who is, by the end, the real owner of vagina’s pussy cunt power.

Drag King Delicious Melicious shows the artificiality of all genders, but at the same time, reclaims body differentiation, using the final drag strip tease strategy to reveal the female body under the costume. Here I make use of “strategic essentialism” and the “transcendental sensible” of Irigaray (Braidotti, 2002), categories that I operate through the final striptease. My clown Lavandinha transcends gender with her Drag King sister persona, but returns to her body differentiation with the striptease. By the end, both drag kings and queens reclaim the cunt and queer power of going beyond gender and the material body, without denying it.

Rosi Braidotti (2002), in building on her philosophy of nomadism and new materialism, explains the importance to transcend the body and the material without not necessarily going against it. Drinking both from Deleuze and feminists of sexual difference, Braidotti explains:

The “sensible transcendental” of Irigaray is fully inscribed and incarnated. As Goicoechea has argued, this “transcendental sensorial” is based on “the porosity and mucosity of a female desire that can initiate a desire and a rediscovery between the sexes.” In this sense, it marks a positive and happy terrain to meet the other. Goicoechea establishes a positive comparison between Irigaray and Deleuze’s rhizomatics, emphasizing that the mucosity / porosity desire dynamic of the former is not monodirectional and, consequently, is not incompatible with nomadic desire. The “virtual feminine” of Irigaray is also an open multiplicity, an immanent bodily singularity constitutively linked to the collectivity” (Braidotti, 2002: 143).³

³ Free translation to English, by the author, from the Spanish edition: “Trascendental sensibles de Irigaray está íntegramente inscrito y encarnado. Tal y como ha argumentado Goicoechea, este ‘transcendental sensorial’, se basa en la porosidad y mucosidad de un deseo femenino que puede iniciar un deseo y un redescubrimiento entre los sexos”. En este sentido, marca un terreno positivo y alegre para encontrarse con lo otro. Goicoechea establece una comparación positiva entre Irigaray y la rizomática de Deleuze, haciendo hincapié en que la dinámica del deseo mucosidad/porosidad de la primera no es monodireccional y, consecuentemente, no es incompatible con el deseo nómada. Lo ‘femenino virtual’ de Irigaray es también una multiplicidad abierta, una singularidad corporal inmanente ligada constitutivamente a la colectividad.
5. Conclusions_Queering the “clown world”: an invitation to foster political alliances, nomadic reflections and artistic dialogues

Considering the queer contributions on gender deconstruction and drag performances, I propose an artistic and theoretical collaboration that can broaden up women clowns’ performances and inquiries, so to renew female clowns’ movement and its ongoing contributions to Comedy, Theater, Circus, Performing Arts, Performance Studies, Arts and Education. Some of these inquiries are synthetized in the following questions, which I share with women clowns to reflect on them:

To what extent does female clowns make use of parody to deconstruct femininity as masquerade and artifice?

Wouldn’t “feminine comicality” be a category that tends to reinforce femininity on female clowning - from a celebratory perspective of an authentic female identity – more than to parody an alleged biological essence?

Do masculine female clowns - or women clowns with a male character -, use parody to reveal masculinity as a performatve gender attribute? Or rather, do they understand their masculinity from an alleged neutrality and non-performativity quality?

Can gender deconstruction through drag principles and techniques help modern white clowns, both female and male, go beyond an essentialist view of a substantial innerself conception of character construction?

When drawing this approach, between the transvestism of women clowns and drag king theater, my attempt is to bring to debate the production of masculinity also performed by female clowns. In both artistic practices, hegemonic masculinity is denatured through laughter and humor. And although the parody of gender in clownery may not be as explicit and consciously intended as it is in some drag king performances, this might also occur, for example, when the sexual identity of the performer is not completely identified by the audience. Many women clowns state, for example, that the public often thinks that they are male clowns, even when they are wearing feminine props and clothes. The natural assignment of the masculine genre, on the part of the public, to female clowns, is also a proof that there are diverse masculinities being produced by women in clownery. Alternative masculinities that dynamite patriarchal comedy.
proof that there are diverse masculinities being produced by women in clownery. Alternative masculinities that dynamite patriarchal comedy.

According to Judith Halberstam, the diverse female masculinities destabilize not only the genre, but also break the monopoly of a dominant and hegemonic masculinity. Drag King alternative masculinities, as well as female clown masculinities, contribute to break the naturalization of masculinity and indicate its various performatives. After all, despite the limitations of each drag performance, Judith ends up believing in its potential to destabilize heteronormative culture, functioning as, therefore, what I call “performance of laughter_resistance” – performance de resistencia.

References


