

Our Lady of Flowers or the Requiem for Certainties

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This piece, a milestone in the European and Portuguese Contemporary Dance, is presented again, twenty years after its première in 1993 and after forty presentations in different theaters and festivals in Europe and South America. This is a work that allows not only a reinvention of the act of dancing, but could also be seen as an essay (in a choreographic form) where the particular conditions of gender subjection can be observed. With the eyes closed.

Contemporary in terms of creation, with the fertile period of the 90s when Judith Butler came up with her theories about the performativity of gender, the piece was presented in the same year of publication of *"Bodies That Matter"*. Unknowingly, at that time, of these intellectual developments, Francisco Camacho makes us experience the way by which we are called into being a gender, one gender, creating a performance based on a critical ambivalence towards gender constancy.

"Our Lady of Flowers" shares the title with Jean Genet's piece, but just the title. This creation is a glimpse - in the dark - about the inauguration of subjectivity that is, and always has been, gendered. With a dress that can also be a religious habit, heavy, thick (despite the flowerings), the figure that Camacho inhabits or that inhabits him (this information is not confirmed during the piece) is an ambiguous one. Sometimes, it can be even read as object. With the eyes closed, that figure is born, reborn and gets done/undone several times. This piece is based on multiple becomings: a figure that becomes a man, a woman, a child perhaps, through an ongoing performance of gender. However, the relationship with the grapes, the gown in which the figure inhabits, allow understanding this piece through a critical reading based on ambivalence. A mark of suspicion seems to be inscribed in this

performance.

"Our Lady of Flowers" is a piece that, in the next minute, becomes another piece. Fragile, the figure returns our gaze back to us. But, with his/her/its eyes closed, we are being closely examined without being seen.

The act through which we became gendered is codified, normalized, also through objects, clothes and other artifacts. In this piece this codification takes place, through the use of the outstanding costume designed by Carlota Lagido who read in this piece its eminent ambiguity. These acts/performance show gender in its unabashed certainty and ambiguity. In a sense, this piece can be thought as a requiem for the belief of naturalness in gender. It's not natural and it never was, rather we were tamed to believe in it. Francisco Camacho shows us such becomings on stage. In this piece, the music takes us back to times that seemed full of certainties, the old days, but contemporary historiography also proves those certainties were not that solid.

When I saw this piece for the very first time, I remembered Marx "*Everything that is solid, melts into air*". "Our Lady of Flowers", through its critical ambivalence, opens up possibilities to interrogate the world, but without leading us to a mandatory questions and remaining silent concerning the answers. Enigmatically, Camacho says little about this piece and he doesn't write about it. I don't think he can actually do it, immersed in the act of doing it. The piece is an act of resistance towards the imposed intelligibilities and, therefore, allows multiple meanings. As in other creations, Francisco Camacho offers us a mirror in which we only can project and speculate. As a result, there is much more about this gendered condition in our own gaze at it, rather than on stage.

It's a piece that brings us back to the psychic inaugurations of the subject, from which everything we have is a foreclosed memory of the imitation of an original that can hardly be discovered and we cannot even say it exists, as Butler would say about gender. Gender is like this piece. Unconscious,

stopped and continuously changing... This piece is a permanent questioning.
By remembering a condition that we know: the permanent mystery of our own
condition. With the eyes closed, feeling it's profuse ambivalence.