

# We're all born naked and the rest is drag: performativity of the bodies constructed in social media

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## Abstract

The article analyses the ways in which the RuPaul's Drag Race programme unfolds through digital platforms aimed at understanding the performances of self and, consequently, of genres that are triggered in those processes marked by convergence and spreadable media. Through an experimental use of the analysis of sense construction in digital media, inferences are made about the comments of the official page of the programme and the page created by Brazilian fans RuPaula – both from Facebook. The first part of the text problematizes notions of performance, self and performativity of sex/gender, intuiting the ways in the media context such processualities have their intensified semiotic potential being able to break with (hetero)normative frames. In the second part, the analysed materials allow us to visualize a set of performances that make us think of a pretended semiodiversity that is established in specific networks mobilized by reality show.

**Keywords:** RuPaul's Drag Race. Digital Networks. Performativity. Queer. Gender.

## Introduction

The cultural and post-colonial studies exploded the essentialist notion of identity by introducing the idea of multifaceted subjects who articulate themselves from various matrices and generate changing possibilities of formation, both of the self and the cultures. The canons that come from a white, male, sexist and heteronormative matrix are thus tensioned in its hegemonic drive in cultural processes of different textures. From another

place, authors like Taylor (1989) and Goffman (1973) understand that the self is constituted in the interactions subjects establish with the many social discourses. Frames of reference are organized, simultaneously changeable and fluid, which are triggered so people can give a sense to themselves and to things. At the same time, faced with a multiplicity of references, subjects invent themselves publicly through specific performances. Butler (1990), inspired by the philosophy of language, designed the concept of performativity to speak of the gender constructions that deconstruct binary and reductionist perspectives, especially when it comes to the relationship between man/woman. A drag queen who, apparently, is more performatized, only exacerbates something that is implicated in the perception of gender in a general way: it is not absolute, natural, but the result of a performative construction.

This set of concepts has in common the idea of performativity as the propelling element in the construction of identities and gender. If there are performances in the writings we bring to our body through gestures, postures, designs, tattoos, vocalization, among so many others, when they migrate to the media environment, which work as enunciation devices (RODRIGUES, 2009), their semiotic potencies are triggered. With the advent of the digital culture and the more active action of the publics on appropriations and productions of content (JENKINS, 1992, 2006), performativities have intensified in a prodigious mosaic of constant inventions of the self. In this scenario, the reality show RPDC brings elements that are rich with possibilities for thinking of such a dynamic moment in contemporary culture, when symbolic disputes get fiercer.

The TV show, broadcasted since 2009, consists of a Drag Queens dispute for the title of “America’s Next Drag Superstar”. The attraction, split into 45-minute episodes on average, is run by iconic Drag Queen RuPaul and has had eleven seasons and a four-season derivative series (*RuPaul’s Drag Race: All Stars*). The program in the United States is shown on the Logo Channel. In Brazil, it has already been broadcasted by VH1 and Multishow. The Netflix streaming service also has eleven full seasons.

This paper intends to analyze the ways in which the show, originally aired on television, unfolded into digital platforms. Also, we will analyze which performativities of the self and, at the same time, of genders, emerge in processes branded by convergence and spreadable media. Our analysis will be focused on materials published on the official page of the show on Facebook and on the comments they generate; and on the Brazilian Facebook page, created by fans, called Ru Paula, in which singular appropriations of the show are produced. As a methodology, we adopted experimental procedures that we called construction of meanings in digital networks<sup>1</sup>.

On the first part of this chapter we will bring the theories used by us. Thus, we work with the concept of performance, inspired by the notions of construction of the self,

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1 The methodologic process integrates experimentations developed in a set of studies developed by the LIC - Research Laboratory of the Cyberevent (PPGCCOM/Unisinos, Brasil), which monitors and analyzes contents published on social networks and news websites. We also notice that the show creates what can be seen, according to Lotman (1999), as an explosion in a specific semiosphere because of the nature of the tools that, because of distinct appropriations, become producers of meanings.

proposed by Mead (1934), Taylor (1989) and Colapietro (1989). These contributions will be complemented by Butler's (1990, 1993) proposal, when she suggested that gender be faced as a performance, a stylization that is repeated on the body and then assumed the character of that which, being natural, becomes intelligible. This performativity, when transferred to the context of media, especially of narratives spread throughout social networks, intensifies its semiotic possibilities. That is, they are performances of the self that, in this context, can break with a scenario of pretend normativity. The body thus constructed becomes a sign for the self (SANTAELLA, 2006).

On the second part we present a description of the materials selected and their respective analysis. Specificities of the media devices at play (television and social networks) will be taken into account, with the understanding that they create environments where performativities are not just intensified, they create a fluctuating, multiple narrativity which even when inscribed by the convergence tools can behave in a conflictive manner. There is an intense semiosis (PEIRCE, 2002) that makes the contemporary semiosphere dynamic (LOTMAN, 1999), which can cause explosive cultural processes.

## **Self, Body, Performance and Media**

The self is different from the physiological organism. That is, it is something that develops relatively autonomously (even if enabled by conditions of the organism). It is not something that is present at birth, as something given by nature, but emerges with experience and social activity. That is, it develops in a certain individual as a result of their relationships with this process as a whole and with other individuals inside the process. This pioneer teaching by Mead (1934) helps us understand the media processes where the constructions of the self are not only evidenced, but also bring charges of meaning that destabilize established frames. Conversely, we think that if the self is the result of a socially articulated construction, this process can generate riveting noises on the borders of the given social organizations. Extracts from what is understood as "subcultures" (GELDER; THORTON, 1997, AMARAL, 2006) can rise to new positions inside the hegemonic system. The Russian semiotician Lotman (1999) calls this phenomenon semiosphere explosion, which we understand as performances of the self that can produce tensions of meaning

Goffman (1973) accentuates more decidedly this connection between self and performance when using the metaphor of theatrical representation to categorize the elements of the process. In his perspective, individuals play parts just like actors on scene: a type of invention of oneself in engendered, with a dynamic that is triggered in accordance with the social parts that must be played. According to Goffman (1973), it is exactly this ability of interpretation of the existential subject that defines the self as authentic dramatic effect, resulting from the context of social interaction (FAIA, 2005). There is a game between the self that shows itself simultaneously in concrete representations, in what is in the ideal plan of the projection individuals make of themselves, of how this self is apprehended by others

in recognition, anyway, of the dynamics. Because of that, the individual personality of the existential subject is the product of the retroactive effect of communication. The actor sees the personality he says he possesses recognized by others. This is the moment when the ideal self and the real self coincide. We are what we think we are and, sometimes, what we pretend to be.

Charles Taylor (1989) sees the construction of personal identities as related to social practices, through frames which are contemporarily fluid or volatile and are triggered so people can give meanings to themselves and to things. There are articulated individual specificities and socio-cultural specificities. This behavior implicates the possibility of multiple manifestations of the self. The identity as multiplicity is not only a form of self-expression and experimentation of the self, that unfolds into a set of virtual masks, but also of learning and living other experiences “This perspective presupposes the existence of a flexible and self-conscious self, immerse in the process of self-discovery and self-transformation, an existential subject in a perpetual state of deconstruction” (FAIA, 2005, p. 37).

There is interdependency between the singular transformations of the self and the mutation of shapes and functions of the social institutions. Because of that, personal identity leaves the sphere of substance and emerges as plastic and flexible. With these perspectives, the concept of identity becomes inseparable from the concept of otherness.

In terms of language, which is the raw material for the performances of the self, the referential and dynamic dimensions need to include the interactive dimension. Through it the interlocutor can not only designate and signify the reality, but also construct new meanings. Austin (1962) defends the idea that speaking is no more than performing acts, performances, that when producing performances on people and the world have the ability to transform them. To speak is to act, and language has this property of interfering in the world and altering the meaning of things.

As of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Peirce (2002) taught that semiosis (or the process of producing meanings from the actions of signs) only exists in the interaction between minds. It is because of this that Colapietro (1989) understood the individual self not as a private sphere, but as belonging to a communicative network. The self, as emphasized by Santaella (2006), is above all a sign, that is, semiosis, and, as such, it is permanently in a process of growth and development. As Deleuze (1998) would say, a flow of paradoxes in a constant state of becoming. It does not dialogue only with itself, but this intra-personal dialogue is potentially part of a bigger context, that of the inter-personal dialogue. It is because of that that the concept of self implies the possibility of the Other. In this sense, the self is, since always, a communicative agent that is constituted in the interaction of language plays unfolded by semiosis.

Even if the body, as an organism, is not an autonomous producer of the self, it becomes a semiotic materiality through which the self acts (HENN; KOLINSKI MACHADO, 2016). This primary media, as Beth and Pross (1987) calls it, in the condition of a sign, is the first stage of the mediations through which the self is organized. Mead (1934) makes a definite distinction between the self and the body. According to him, the body can operate

very smartly without having a self involved in the process. The self is an object for itself: this characteristic distinguishes the self from other objects and from the body. We cannot experience the whole of our body. The body is not an experience of itself as a whole in the same sense the self is an experience of itself. But there is a peculiarity in this process that was not considered by the author: when we transform an object for the self, it also becomes a sign and starts to operate in the field of language.

In summary, the self is different from the body and the body is only perceived as a sign. Both the self and the body, properly mediated by the self (that is a social product), only exist concretely as signs. From this perspective, we can think of the body as a construction. When it becomes a sign for the self, the body establishes a process of performativity. If, as is said by Colapietro (1989), no sign can be reduced to its corporalization, the body, as a sign, constituted through multiple platforms, is an uninterrupted flow of meanings building other possible framings (HENN; KOLINSKI MACHADO, 2016).

If the body can be comprehended as a construction, it makes sense, as proposed by Judith Butler (1990) in *Gender Trouble*, that just like gender, the sex can also be a cultural construction. Therefore, far from being permanent substances, these substances would have their coherence and relationships established in order to maintain what Rich (2012) defined as *compulsory heterosexuality*. In this sense, gender is not related to culture in the same way sex is related to nature. It is also the discursive/cultural media through which a sexed nature or a natural sex is produced and established as pre-discursive (BUTLER, 1990). Something that, according to the categories proposed by Peirce (2002), would be in secondness: a world on the borders of semiotization, with no established meanings.

So, taking gender as continuously in the making, as a becoming and an activity, and approaching the notion of performativity, from Austin (1962), Butler (1990) will say that he seems performative within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance – that is, part of the identity he supposedly has. Thus, gender became a repetition that happens in the body, inside a regulated and controlled frame, and that, throughout time, acquired a natural aspect.

The internal reality of gender is manufactured; therefore, gender is a fantasy that is replicated in the bodies: it can be neither real nor false, but is produced with the effect of a true discourse over a primary and stable identity (BUTLER, 1990). The most famous example she discusses, however, will be of the drag queen.

When playing with the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender being performed, the drag queen implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender. Instead of a heterosexual norm, what would be on stage is the de-naturalization of gender through a performance that exposes the beginning of its construction.

When a drag queen creates herself, she creates her body, showing how it is not natural and it is not unquestionable. She shows the total ability of construction/reconstruction of the body and, then, what we interpret as masculine/feminine signs (BUTLER, 1990; LOURO, 2008). Vencato (2002, p. 46), in an ethnographic research with drag queens,

brings quotes from the research subjects that show just that: “You make the body [...] did I not just make one?”.

Drag queens make a parody of gender (with the possibility of being subversive), since when they exaggerate the characteristics that are considered to be female they make explicit just how they are not authentic and remind us that, outside the stage, we are all hostages to what Butler (2012) calls intelligible genders. “Bodies considered to be ‘normal’ and ‘common’ are also produced through a series of artifacts, accessories, gestures and attitudes that society arbitrarily established as adequate and legitimate” (LOURO, 2008, p. 87).

These constructionist ideas about the self, the body, gender and sexuality that, at the same time, overcome the traditional opposition between nature and culture, gain special texture when thinking about the processes talked about here while in the media environment. The human species developed three technological unfoldings: utensils, instruments and devices (RODRIGUES, 2005). On the first two cases, the artifacts have very different demarcations and their presences are effectively noticed: from the pressure cooker we use to accelerate cooking processes to the equipment we use to measure our blood pressure, utensils and instruments have certain functionalities that require, just the same, knowledge about how to use them. Devices function similarly to how the body functions. At the same time, their presence is not completely noticed. When this happens, that is, when their presence is noticed, it will likely be because of a problem, because of malfunction.

The media is in the device category. Specifically, they are language devices: they work in the same way enunciation does. In the condition of devices, the media acts so we will not notice it. More than that, it constructs an environment outside of it. They are space/time constructions that are detached from physical time/space (MCLUHAN, 1964). This founding characteristic of the media means they have singular specificities, especially regarding interactions, that tend to go unnoticed because of the very naturalization with which it inserts itself in the public every day. There are performances that can only be established in certain ways because of the nature in which the media was instituted.

This assumption can be thought of in the following context: the body as a media in the condition of a culture device. In authors such as Foucault (2008) and Nietzsche (2011), cultural values emerge as a result of an inscription in the body and this, according to Butler (1993), puts the body understood as a medium, indeed a blank page. The author advances this idea proposing that this inscription, in the ways in which it was formulated, implies the destruction of the medium. We understand this “destruction” as a kind of “naturalization of cultural values in a body that obliterates itself”. It is as if it disappeared. It only calls attention to itself in performances perceived as “deviant”, “noisy”. Weightless bodies, as proposed by Butler (1993). These are performativities that, in the context of the media, aggregate their own singularities, which are only possible in this environment. It’s important to distinguish that performance (GOFMAN, 1973, TAYLOR, 1989) and performativity (BUTLER, 1993) don’t describe exactly the same phenomenon. In the performance, there are links of self-identity productions, which constitute interactions that take into account different

social environments and inscriptions that are made in the body, of different natures. From Colapietro (1989), the idea of this performance is advanced as belonging to a communicative network, through which the bodies become signs of the self. In Butler, performativity is linked to language environments whose actions normalize enclosing discursive practices. But what is on the horizon of this approach proposed here is the perspective of the body as something not given from the essence of nature, but resulting from numerous factors. Preciado (2014), with its contrasexuality proposal, and Haraway (2007), with its cyborg bodies, bring elements for the continuity of this conceptual configuration.

Currently, through the narratives spread in social networking websites, the semiotic power of these performances of self and of culture intensify. That is, they are performances of the self with the power to break with a picture of alleged normativity. The spreadable is a concept developed by Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) to classify the content that is shared on the web. The concept arises as opposed to the term viral, which puts the public as susceptible to contamination, as if spreading something over the web was an act which is only in the hands of the producers, seen as able to dominate the public. The spreadable brings the active action of the fans, that in the perspective by Jenkins (1992, 2006), are protagonists in relation to entertainment products to be consumed.

Fans develop their own culture, which has long been viewed with contempt by producers and by the society (AMARAL; MONTEIRO, 2012). No longer content with the products offered, in the sense of wanting more than producers offer, fans begin to create their own stories, to develop social groups to discuss the narratives of, for example, films, series and games (JENKINS, 1992). Thus, fans have an important role in the production of meanings. So, the meaning of a cultural transaction is linked to the way this cultural product allows the public to talk about themselves and the world. Therefore, especially with the advent of digital culture, there began to arise contents modified by fans who spread it over the web through the identification that other publics, including other fans, will have with these contents.

Today, it is a common practice to develop editing using the characters of a given entertainment product. Fans take over the scenes of the episodes, movies and assemble their own videos using music and effects available via a great number of software. And the spreading is done by people who are interested in this content. As Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) say, the interest in the videos that are shared on YouTube are based on affectivity more than on financial values that could result from this transaction. The fans spread this content on their social networks, crediting visibility to the fan who developed a certain content and giving them consequent power within the fandom.

Producers, aware of these specificities, began promoting transmedia narratives that can be spread across the web. The example brought by Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013), *Glee*<sup>2</sup>, illustrates how the performance in a given context may be consumed in other platforms without the need for immersion in the serial narrative. Because it is a music series, the

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2 Teenage musical show produced by Fox between 2009 and 2015.

episodes are full of dancing and singing performances which are now available also on YouTube, some even before the release of the episodes. The performativity of the narrative is capable then of promoting an identity performativity which breaks along with the spreading at the time the identification (or counter-identification) with a particular content occurs. New bodies are built in the materiality of the media that trigger constructions of the self.

The processes on social networking websites form media spaces that are propitious to the intensification of performances of the self. Most of us have probably experienced the difference between saying something on the dinner table and repeating it in the same terms, on a Facebook post: the consequences of an exposure that is essentially public and in the media can be uncontrollable. When we are already reasonably aware of some particularities of the medium, we constantly invent ourselves in these environments of multiple possibilities. The semiosis, which form the way the signs, languages and meanings are constituted socially, gain lush materiality in these processes.

The reality show *RPDC*, by exacerbating in the television environment performativities that continuously disassemble prospects that naturalize hegemonic and heteronormative gender roles, but also taking advantage of the neutrality present in the media device codes, produces what Iuri Lotman (1999) understood as a translation operations. By marking a unique performativity, the program is located in border areas that trigger the permeability of codes, signs and meanings. There is in this semiotic game a transmutation in the nature of the texts that enables other semiosis and possibilities of meanings.

The semiosphere is the space in which all semiosis are processed and metabolized (LOTMAN, 1999). It generates systemic structures that organize cultures and their dynamics. While there is a tendency for conservation, there are also transforming forces whose efficacy depends, among other things, on the level of opening of the system. To the extent that such self-organizational processes are established, and on account of social, political and semiotics, extracts of these cultures are expelled and come to inhabit extra-systemic spaces. Invisibility zones, silencing, that make up what Pollack (1989) understands as underground memories, which can be linked to subculture texts (GELDER; THORTON, 1997), are intensified and retain their potential.

Codes of these extracts can cross the borders of the semiosphere transmuting into texts that mix established information with new information. The function of all borders is to filter migration from the outside. And this operation becomes a translation process that constitutes the semiotization of what comes from the outside and is converted into information (LOTMAN, 1999). Such processes obey different time frames. Sometimes they unfold in long durations, almost imperceptible. In others, they burst into semiosis that are so intense to the point of transforming the semiosphere significantly. They form what Lotman (1999) called explosive processes: fragments from different cultures are reconstituted impetuously, transforming the system. These are times when, to Lotman and Uspenski (1981), a high semiotization of the behavior occurs. As a result, there is a trend of accommodation in the transgressor codes that can be revitalized with new extra-systemic information.

The scenario of convergence and trans-narrativity of contemporary media further intensifies these flows, increasing the dispute of meanings in the semiosphere. The spreading of RPDR over social networking sites, especially in the appropriations from fans, increases the proliferation of non-hegemonic performative acts. Besides giving form to a drag culture in the media complexes, these spread narratives, in the horizon that is coming, may implicate changes in cultural systems.

## Spreading and performativity

The official Facebook page, RuPaul's Drag Race, appears as a trans-narrative extension of the reality show. The platform has a verification system that validates pages that are actually official through a blue icon next to the name, which contributes to the visibility of publications, because the page is often accompanied by fans of the program around the world. Through videos with scenes of the seasons, discussions between fans, publications of blog texts and websites depicting the drag universe, the page is a cybersocial space that signals various performativities of the fandom.

There are products, however, that have autonomy from the official website, although emulating it. This applies to the Brazilian page, RuPaula, established on May 19th, 2015, with sporadic publications, without a standard weekly frequency. On January 19th, 2016, the page had 4,565 likes. The number of likes, shares and comments also varies, reaching 159 shares in some publications and none in others. This experience indicates the practices of fans inaugurated on cyberculture. Through the appropriation of contents, whether videos, songs or images which make up the canon narrative, new products are developed which move and carry signs from various sources, filtered by the ways in which LGBT culture is constituted in Brazil.

The appropriations are a very exciting media phenomenon in the communication in digital social networks. The RuPaula page intersects with another appropriation, that is, the appropriation of another TV show, *Glitter- Em Busca de um Sonho*<sup>3</sup>, which arose from the visibility of the drag universe resulting from RPDR (MORAES, 2015) and is produced by one a TV station from Ceará, a state located in northeastern Brazil. With very peculiar expressions and syntax, the show operates a translation process akin to parody. The codes, when transmuted into the environment of another culture, are enriched by singular textures, expanding the directions that were originally proposed.

When sharing scenes from the original show with dubbing from speeches originally from the Brazilian program, RuPaula reverberates this process, bringing even more complexity. Video 1<sup>4</sup> shows an argument between the drag queens Sharon Needles and Phi Phi O'Hara, from the S4, E4 of the reality show (directed by Nick Murray and

3 Glitter is a reality show part of the show by Ênio Carlos da Verdes Mares, of TV Diário, part of Rede Globo in Fortaleza. In the show, nine Drag Queens compete for making their dream come true. Hosted by Ênio Carlos. Release year: 2012.

4 Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Rupaulaa/videos/1512449499073334/>. Accessed on: aug. 2019.

released on January 20th, 2012). The audio takes advantage of the show *Glitter*, where the travestites Rochelly Santrelly and Sangalo argue enunciating very common expressions in the Brazilian gay culture: “bicha, a senhora é destruidora mesmo, viu viado” (something like “fag, the lady is really destructive, did you see, queer”?). If, as signals Preciado (2009), queer performativity resignifies pejorative terms by deconstructing them, which emerges from the situational characteristic of a sign, we can infer that in this translation process, the semiotization of performativity increases, also increasing queer texture involved in it.

On the other hand, they are performativities that travel between complex constructions of the self, involving not only gender, but identity issues in the cultural plan. The global trace of the drag queen, recognized and reproduced in different contexts, speaks, in this appropriation, of the singularities of a given location. In doing so, this translation operation enables the emergence of bonds between fans who do not delete their regional specificities, but stress what in, a macro level, unites this process: the constructive and transgressive aspects of these performativities.

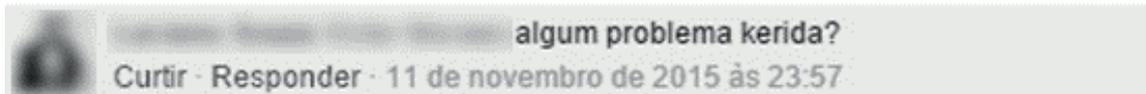
The video, in turn, enhances the properties that are typical of the digital culture: the possibility of handling various materials from different sources arranged in a juxtaposition of texts. This spirit of assembly enables that the signs, when they cross each other, trigger other senses, beyond those which were present in their places of origin. Similarly, this process evidences the constructive nature of any media product. If the environment of the traditional media, as enunciation devices, already speaks of a process that is part of being human, language beings that we are, these network operations intensify it. By joining a social networking site, this appropriation enters the logic of spreading, with the power of disseminating the senses in profusion. Through sharing, new bonds and performances of the self are installed.

The queer lexicon in Brazil has some important specificities. Among them, there is the change in the spelling of words, suggesting different intonations for phonetically identical words. Other than that, there is a whole vocabulary that is typical of gay culture and its use requires some sort of link with this culture. In the category of subcultures, these specific forms of expression circulate in non-hegemonic environments: they are transmitted through identity networks, often underground, and are the sources for many cultural texts such as movies, songs and TV series. Social networking websites gave more intensity to the circulation of this lexicon and caused it to appear in contexts where it would not have appeared in other times, such as the soap operas that are on at primetime in Brazilian television.

The comments on the video posted on the RuPaula page are exemplary in this regard. For example, on first post (Figure 1) where there is an emphasis on the term “kerida”, which means darling in the female. There is a change in spelling. In Portuguese, the correct writing would be “querida”. Since the letter “k”, in this language, is phonetically the same as “qu”, apparently there would be no transmutation of meaning. But the letter “k” is not part of the Portuguese alphabet, and its use in this graphical corruption speaks of identity

meanings: what is shown there, then, is an important distinction. A self which presents itself in an essentially performative manner. A language in a state of subversion, very close to continuous discontinuities, but with breaks in the engendering of the subject of negativity in the way understood by Kristeva (1974).

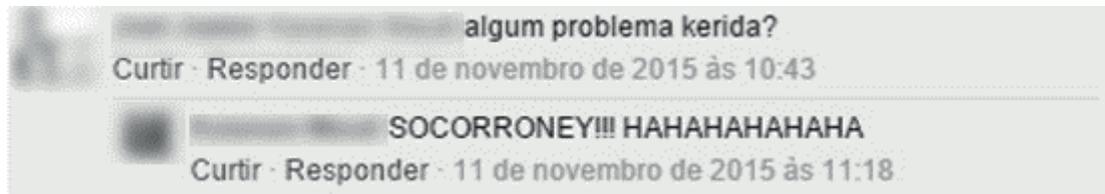
**Figure 1 – Kerida**



Source: RuPaula.

The mobilization of the fans, which is also expressed in the construction of a specific vocabulary, actively participates in these changes of language. This is because the comments are sometimes answered and bring expressions from other queer universes. In the case of the second post (Figure 2), the expression “socorroney” (something like “helpney”) appears, a language that came from fans of the singer Britney Spears. These fans have created a fandom called Neyde. Its followers began then to add the particle “ney” to the end of any word.

**Figure 2 – Neyde’s language**



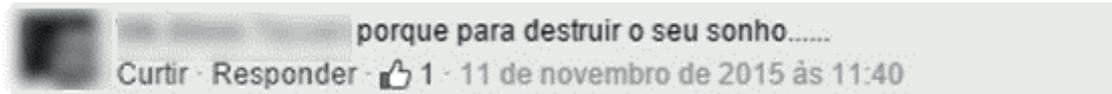
Source: Rupaula.

There are several terms that are used and appropriated through remixing (JENKINS; FORD; GREEN, 2013) of the RuPaula page. Comedy prevails with the exaggerated drama expressed in the narratives that are spread. The scene from Glitter, in this case, dialogued with RuPaul’s narrative<sup>5</sup>, as Sharon and Phi Phi were archenemies in the season in focus (Figure 3). There is a part of the show Glitter called “Say that to my face”, in which participants must choose a rival in the group, stand in front of her and say the reasons for which they wish they were eliminated. This is the situation in which Rochelly Santrelly chooses to face Sangalo and amid discussion, various expressions emerged that are, today, in Brazil, used by LGBT public in comedy pages. Thus, the audio of the dispute between the participants of the show Glitter was used on the original video of an argument between

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Rupaulaa/videos/1512449499073334/>. Accessed on: aug. 2019.

Phi Phi and Sharon. But instead of using the term “monster shock”, which Rochelly used to intimidate Sangalo, the fan plays with the use of the term “sharon shock” (Figure 4), as Sharon Needles was seen in the program as a more gothic and scary drag queen, a “monster” amid the other competitors, which even contributed to her winning the fourth season of the reality show.

**Figure 3** – Dream Destroyer



Source: Rupaula.

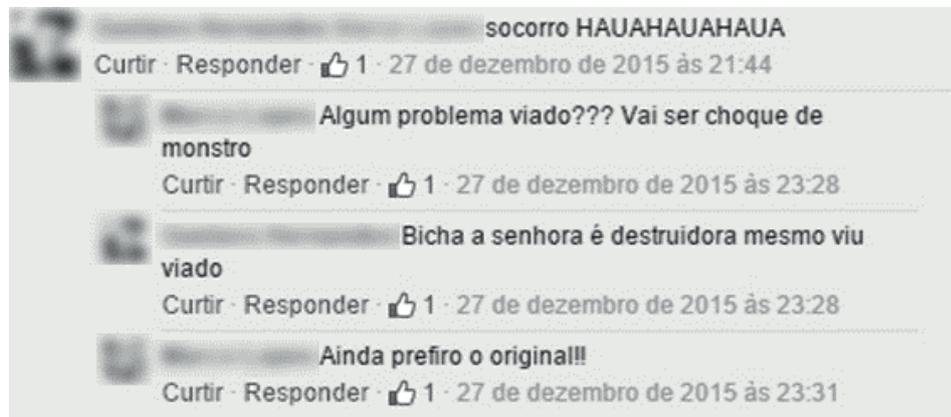
**Figure 4** – Monster clash



Source: Rupaula.

In subsequent comments (Figure 5), once again the terms of the video appear in use, signaling matters of appropriation and queer performativity. This signals the process of spreading and consequent visibility of specific languages. It also appears in response to a tagging, as the counterpoint of the fan who says they prefer the original discussion. Possibly the original discussion would not have the same power for a Portuguese-speaking public because of this mobilization of language barriers and the comic effect that emerges from this appropriation.

**Figure 5** – RuPaul’s Reframes



Source: Rupaula.

Originally, the video<sup>6</sup> refers to the dispute between Alyssa Edwards and Roxxy Andrews, which took place in S5, E7, where RuPaul decided not to eliminate either of them after their performance of the song *Whip my Hair*, by the singer Willow Smith. In the appropriation, the original song was replaced by a Brazilian funk song sung by Inês Brasil, a very popular character in Brazilian social networking websites<sup>7</sup> and performs shows in LGBTQ establishments. The overlap of audio and visual materials from different sources, as in the previous video, produces a very unique relationship of meanings. Semiotic layers emerge and submerge this profusion of signs.

In the first 29 seconds the original sound is heard, with Mama Ru<sup>8</sup> stating the briefing of the dispute. The elements of the conflict of the reality show are maintained through typical sounds that highlight the camera frameworks, now in RuPaul, then in properly tense drag queens. When the race starts, two elements overlap, making it difficult for those not familiar with the original video to understand that it is a remix. The first element is the performance of the candidate Roxy Andrews, which operates a deconstruction of her persona, stripping a first layer of costume: initially the skirt, covering a bathing suit, and then the dark wig, which gives way to blond hair. The look of astonishment and applause by RuPaul and jurors are fully captured in the dynamic editing.

The startled expressions could also be about the soundtrack, which would only be immediately recognized by Brazilian audiences. And that's where we have the second element of surprise, with the realization that this is an overlap: as a layer dissolves in the emergence of another body performed in the number by Andrews, another layer settles the appropriation in operation, creating a strong approach between cultural texts that are already hybrid in their origins. Brazilian funk, which has become popular in the slums of Rio de Janeiro since the 1990s, as an appropriation of the genre created in the United States, when African American musicians blended soul, jazz and rhythm and blues. Specifically in Brazil, the genre gained its own colors, from the incorporation of Afro Brazilian rhythms associated with quite eroticized performances. At the same time, the genre has come to mean a space of resistance and cultural statement, since it became a means of expression for poor segments of the population (VIANNA, 1997).

It is predominantly male genre, with sexist shades, but that, in the last 10 years, has been instigated by strong female presences, such as the singers Valesca Popuzuda, Anitta and Inês Brasil. The LGBTQ universe is also appropriating the genre, giving it new meanings, especially in productions geared towards social networking websites. In 2014, the travestite McXuxu posted a video on Youtube called "Um beijo" ("A Kiss"), which until

6 Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Rupaulaa/videos/1500888910229393/>. Accessed on: aug. 2019.

7 Inês Tânia Lima da Silva (born in Rio de Janeiro in 1969), better known by her artistic name Inês Brasil, is a Brazilian singer, dancer and web-celebrity (conf. Cornutti, 2015). Inês became nationally known after the video she sent to participate in Big Brother Brazil was posted on the web. After the video spread, she kept posting other peculiar videos in her social networks. She started performing in LGBTQ houses and in 2015 she released a studio album called *Make Love*, which mixes her own compositions with classics from Brazilian popular music.

8 Nickname given to RuPaul in the program and which refers to the drag culture, in which a novice drag queen usually has a Mother who gives her aesthetic and emotional support.



**Figure 8** – Was it my dream?

Source: Rupaula.

The people who comment have fun with the video. In the first comment (Figure 6), the authors, a fan of Alyssa and another fan of Roxxy, enact a dispute to find who did the worst dubbing. In the second comment (Figure 7), the performativity of the public with its queer vocabulary is accentuated: “nom”, “manas (sisters or sirs)”, “bate cabelo (hair whipping)”, “hairography”, “close” and “carão (poker face)”. The public reveals a way of performing that is specific to these spaces that dialogues with RuPaul’s universe. In new comment (Figure 8), we see a process that occurs in LGBTQ fan pages, the tagging of girlfriends and the use of Inês Brasil memes. The way of talking about Alyssa Edwards also dialogues with a use of the language that is removed from grammar rules and, at the same time, moves identities with new layers of semiosis.

RPDR official webpage is not the result of appropriations by the fans, and it is not active in specific cultural contexts, like RuPaula indicates other movements. Besides reverberating what originally happened in the TV show, there is a remix to accent certain performances. In Video 3<sup>10</sup>, Alaska appears, at first, wearing a horse mask and subsequently with no make-up and no clothes. Another drag queen narrates, “the reason she walked in

10 Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/rupaulsdragrace/videos/10153251120242828/>. Accessed on: aug. 2019.

the room with a horse face was ‘cause she is a horse”. There are two extreme layers of performances of the self and body that are juxtaposed on this edition. First the drag, in full costume, appears with a horse mask: a transformed body, jumping from the drag style to a composition with the mask, evoking imaginary places where the world is upside down, populated by hybrid creatures of humans and monsters. Bakhtin (1987) when speaking of the carnival festivities of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, mentions the duality of the world created by the working classes as opposed to the official world. In it, everything turns upside down, with constant permutations between high and low and between genders, with the transvestite figure. A parody of ordinary life, a world upside down, where hybrid and profane images ascend to the popular experience. The comments of the video (Figure 9), in a sense, reflected this imaginary with remarks like: “Ru really to love the Satanist”, a post that soon received a counterpoint: “Satanist? Have you been sniffing pixie sitx’s again?”.

**Figure 9** – RuPaul Loves Satanists



Source: RuPaul.

After that, the candidate appears without clothes, preparing her drag costume. There is a performativity of transposition: another body, apparently fragile, in another inside-out. The self unfolding into a palette of performances. The brand of theatricality, as suggested by Vencato (2002), is then highlighted. The doubling of the scene in the video posted reinforces the sense of counterpoint and dialogue. In the Video 4<sup>11</sup>, RuPaul herself performs the carnival game when he shows up for the candidates in laughing as witches typically laugh in fairy tales. A type of performance that is often staged in parts of gay culture, which revitalizes this narrative spread in the network.

## Final considerations

The contemporary semiosphere constituted from the connections between digital networks The contemporary semiosphere that is constituted from the connections in digital networks, even though it makes visible issues that slumber in what Pollack (1989) calls the underground memory and generates more intense constructions/disputes of meaning, still

11 Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/rupaulsdragrace/videos/10153214892602828/>. Accessed on: aug. 2019.

tends to keep beyond its borders the volatile radical bodies which are not aligned with what Preciado (2014) calls social and heteronormative technology.

RuPaul, in all her media career, culminating in RPDR, is part of an initiative to transpose these borders in a complex articulation of codes. In this context, performances of the self may constitute flows of multiple possibilities, and they engender what we call as semiodiversity (HENN, 2014), that is, the coexistence of a vast diversity of cultural signs of expression of the self.

On the other hand, social network communication enables a rich set of performances that give more colors to this semiodiversity. Appropriations, the remix culture, spreading and replication through memes and memes make this process denser. It can be seen, in short, that the performativities established in social network appropriations from RPDR which were analyzed evoke cultural series of different times and different natures, which become singular in the condition of an event that encourages processes of meanings that are being disputed in contemporary society (HENN, 2014). It is also important to realize that the program creates what can be seen, on the basis of Lotman (1999), as an explosion in a specific semiosphere, exposing, among other meanings, what mama Ru says: “we’re all born naked and the rest is drag”.

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