

Gender as a scientific and artistic experience: the display of metaperformative competence in walking practices

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ABSTRACT: Drawing from a fieldwork conducted on French speaking drag king workshops in Brussels (Belgium), and based on video recording data, I will focus on walking practices mobilized by participants in bodily gendered transformation practices and approached as gender (de) construction devices. My analysis deals with walking exercises following the make-up activity, through which participants can feel and experiment a new gendered body thanks to locomotive actions and verbal accounts referring to what they experienced. The embodied (i.e. sensorial and kinesthetic) and the experiential dimensions at work in these practices allow us to shed a light on the manufacturing of performativity, i.e. how participants adopt a reflexive stance vis-à-vis of their gendered bodily transformations, a metaperformative competence, and how, in this way, participants position themselves as the scientists and the creators of their own bodily creations.

KEYWORDS: drag kings; walking; experience; metaperformative competence; sociolinguistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

During a fieldwork I conducted in drag king workshops – social occasions in which females assigned at birth persons transform their gender through make-up activities, verbal resources, and corporeal exercises – I was intrigued by the amount of reflexive activities deployed by participants during the workshops. In fact, drag kings spent a lot of time discussing about their gendered bodily transformations, theorizing on walking and its relation to gender norms and public spaces, testing with other co-participants about how gender transformation affects their spatial perceptions, and finally discovering, in the course of interactions, the existence of a phenomenon they were theorized in precedent conversations.

By “Gender as a scientific and artistic experience”, I refer to the fact that gender could be experienced by participants as something closed to scientific and artistic experiences, science and art as they are practiced in their everyday activities. I will show how social actors, in the course of

drag king workshops, mobilize what Michael Lynch, an ethnomethodologist and a sociologist of sciences, calls “epistemic topics – description, measurement, categorization, observation, reproduction” (1993: 247) – of which some are shared by scientists and artists within their professional activities and by lay persons in the course of their ordinary practices. The focus on gender as a scientific and artistic experience is inspired by two sorts of literature. First, an amount of research coming from Science and Technology Studies, ethnomethodology and linguistic anthropology approaching science and daily life as practical accomplishments and situated more in a *continuum* than as discrete entities. In this framework, scholars have approached science in its practical and interactional accomplishment (LATOUR & WOOLGAR 1988; MONDADA 2005; SORMANI 2014), as well as in its intertwining with daily life, trivial matters, poetics (OCHS & TAYLOR 1992; OCHS, GONZALES, JACOBY 1996; LATOUR 2007) and art (SORMANI, CARBONE, GISLER 2018; KREPLAK forthcoming). Second, a tradition of works coming from Queer Studies and Feminism approaching the experiences on bodies as a source of knowledge and political change in the society and in everyday life of persons. The experiences conducted by the Italian *ante litteram* queer activist and theorist Mario Mieli (1976) *on* and *through* cross-dressing, as an artistic and a political activity or those of Paul Preciado (2008) on his body through the injection of testosterone, voiced the experiments accomplished by Freud (1976 [1884]) with cocaine and artistic performances in which bodily experiences are treated by activists and artists as inscribed in a political agenda against the binarity of the bodies and as an artistic reflection on bodies as plastic materials. In this framework, politics in Mario Mieli’s activism is never dismantled by aesthetics, bodily experiences (i.e. gender transformations, sexual practices, etc.) and a fine-grained analysis of our daily activities. Activism, in this perspective, is a practice and a method, or as Paola Mieli and Massimo Prearo (2019) coined in their introduction to Mieli’s writings, an “ethnographic activism” (*attivismo etnografico*).

As social actors, we experience gender, in different ways, and at different degrees, through the accomplishment of everyday actions or thanks to occasions in which we have the opportunity to come back to what we experienced through verbal accounts. In the first case, experience of how gender works in our bodies is more lived and perceived than spoken, whereas, in the second case, it is verbally explicit. The two cases will be approached

in this paper through the analysis of three epistemic activities: theorizing, testing, and discovering.

The analysis is inspired by an interdisciplinary framework combining linguistic anthropology, multimodality and queer linguistics (M.H. GOODWIN 2006; BARRET 2018; GRECO 2019). Gender is approached as a social resource interactionally (de)constructed and deeply intertwined with the experiences that participants make of their gendered bodily transformations and language. In this perspective, gender is approached as a doing, a practical achievement and constructed through a repertoire of multisemiotic resources (GARFINKEL 1967; GOFFMAN 1976; WEST & ZIMMERMAN 1987). This praxeological vision entails a focus on language as a primary site for the emergence, the construction and the deconstruction of gender and as a “mode of experiencing the world” (OCHS 2012: 142).¹

The focus on gender through language and experience allows me to think about gender as a process (vs. result) and through what scholars in queer studies and philosophy of language have called performativity. As a queer sociolinguist and working on daily interactions, I define “performativity” as the power of a multisemiotic-semiotic (i.e. linguistic, corporeal, material, spatial) sign to produce gender in cultural and historical contexts, as well as through ritual and embodied interactions with co-participants.

Compared to what Austin (1962) and Butler (1990, 1997) presented in their seminal works, the vision I propose is *empirical*, the examples of Austin and Butler are imagined, idealized and not ethnographically grounded; *interactional and multisemiotic*. Performativity is worked out in talk in interaction with at least two participants and through a repertoire of semiotic resources and not limited to talk; *temporal and experiential*. Performativity as a process is itself constructed, perceived and observed by participants in the course of interaction. Finally, the perspective I defend is definitely *participant related*. In this framework, participants themselves deploy what I call a “meta-performative competence”, i.e. the capacity, as well as the skills they have in observing, describing and testing the performativity (the manufacturing) of their action and gender. A vision of participants in which social actors are making science in the course of their everyday activities and not necessarily in a lab is particularly empowering

¹ The reader could refer to MCILVENNY 2002; GRECO 2012; DELL’AVERSANO 2018 for some interesting tentative combining queer studies and membership categorization analysis.

and irreducibly queer in that it disrupts the dichotomy between a “high” science and a “grass root” science and make participants the scientists, the ethnographers and the creators of their own lives.

2. WALKING AS AN EMANCIPATORY DEVICE

Walking has attracted the interest of scholars in social sciences and humanities, political activists and contemporary artists. Walking has been approached as a method in social sciences (O’ NEIL & ROBERTS 2020) as a way to challenge museum as sites of predilection for art (CARERI 2006), as a form of dialogue between “nature” and the body (THRIFT 2008:67-68), and as an emancipation device. The collective Stalker² – founded in Rome in 1995 and inspired by the Situationist International – focuses on the experimental, relational, playful dimensions at stake in walking practices. It has the ambition to create another vision of the urban environment, an appropriation of spaces by social actors, and another vision of social relations³.

The emancipatory potential in walking emerges also in Feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements. Activists and performers consider walking as a political activity, through which disrupt the social order in urban spaces dominated by patriarchy and heteronormativity. In this sense, the occupation of a space (i.e. slut walks, or drag walks) become an important issue in the repertoire of political action. It is approached as a way of emancipation that social actors embody through screaming⁴, and constituting joyful communities in streets and public spaces. Within a queer feminist framework, drag walking, as it has been approached by performers, allows pedestrians to challenge classical dichotomies as public/intimate, man/woman, inside/outside. It questions the strategies of public powers in the organization of urban spaces, and it denounces gentrification in urban areas (BORGI 2017; BORGI unpublished manuscript). Walking could be approached in this

² Here, the reader can find some useful information about this interesting collective and art urban laboratory: <http://www.archilab.org/public/2004/en/textes/stalker.htm>

³ A collective based in France “Les laboratoires d’Aubervilliers” (<http://www.leslaboratoires.org/projet/centre-de-developpement-de-la-deambulation-urbaine/centre-de-developpement-de-la-deambulation>) works on and through walking as an artistic practice. They conceive walking as a device through which participants discover some unexpected features of well known spaces, an occasion to trouble the social order and to reveal the social norms underlying the most ordinary practices (Lefkowitz *et al.* 2015: 49).

⁴ De Certeau (1974) proposes a fascinating parallelism between walking and speaking: pedestrians experience public space through walking as social actors appropriate and perform language through speech acts.

case as a re-subjectivation practice, a way to deconstruct what women have learned since their childhood about their bodily and kinesthetic stances :

The young girl acquires many subtle habits of feminine body comportment--walking like a girl, tilting her head like a girl, standing and sitting like a girl, gesturing like a girl, and so on. The girl learns actively to hamper her movements. She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous for her. Thus she develops a bodily timidity which increases with age. In assuming herself as a girl, she takes herself up as fragile. [...] The more a girl assumes her status as feminine, the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile, and the more she actively enacts her own body inhibition. When I was about thirteen, I spent hours practicing a "feminine" walk which was stiff, closed, and rotated from side to side (YOUNG 1980:153).

Walking is approached by participants as a *topic* in talk, as an *action* they accomplished and as a gender (de)construction *device* (Greco forthcoming). The analysis of walking conducts became an excellent case to examine ways through which gender works as something participants experience, observe and manipulate in the course of their actions, as artists during their performances, or as scientists analyzing the functioning of cells, manipulating materials, and discussing with colleagues about what they observed and experienced.

3. WALKING IN DRAG KING WORKSHOPS

The Drag King Workshops (therefore DKW) are wonderful occasions to make an experience upon gender through some bodily transformations made with the help of an expert, i.e. a person particularly knowledgeable in gendered transformations techniques (GRECO 2018). The DKW are structured through five steps:

- 1) a brief presentation of the objectives and techniques used for the male gendered transformation and a round-table discussion in which each participant presents himself / herself / themselves to the other members of the group;
- 2) a make-up activity, where each person gives life to a character seated in front of a mirror. Novices could be helped by experts who have been there for a long time, who perform outside the workshops and who can contribute with their know-how to the accomplishment of the transformation;

- 3) a bunch of exercises and role plays after the make-up activity;
- 4) a descent in the bar of the association where workshops take place and eventually an exit in the Grand Place of Brussels, in which “one tests” his/her/their new body;
- 5) and, eventually, a return in the second floor room to share what one felt about this experience.

My analysis deals with walking exercises following the make-up activity, through which participants can feel and experiment a new gendered body. In this section, I focus my attention on walking as a re-subjectivation practice, as it is situationally produced and theorized by participants. I analyze three different moments and activities in which participants deploy a scientific and an artistic (performance oriented) stance on gender, body and walking: theorizing walking (§ 3.1), testing walking theory in practice (§ 3.2), and the discovery of the phenomenon concerning walking, gender and space they previously experienced and theorized (§ 3.3.).

3.1. THEORIZING

In the next two excerpts, Max, the leader and one of the co-founders of DKW in Brussels, takes the floor and gives his personal vision about the relations between walking, gender, and space⁵:

(1) WalkingAsScienceDKB – Take the place

M: Max

1	M	en général ils ((en se référant aux hommes)) generally they ((referring to men))	prennent take
2		plus de place y a cette impression up more space there is this impression of (body)	d'enveloppe, envelope,
3		d'espace personnel qui est beaucoup plus large, of personal space that is wider,	
4		beaucoup plus grand much greater	

⁵ The audio and video recordings composing the empirical materials of this paper have been transcribed using the conventions proposed by a group of scholars (ICOR Group) working in multimodal conversation analysis in Lyon, France and by Lorenza Mondada: http://icar.cnrs.fr/projets/corinte/bandeau_droit/convention_icor.htm. Embodied actions are synchronised with talk through the % £ * @ \$ & signs. The symbol --> means that the embodied action described continues on next lines.

In Max's account, we are faced with something I call "theorizing practices" of the relationships between space, walk, and gender. This type of theorizing practice is constructed through the mobilization of the adverbial phrase "en general" ("generally", line 1) in a first position turn, uttered in an assertive mode, and establishing a relation between gender (men), and the construction of personal (and large) space through their way of walking. This process of generalization and abstraction of walking is accomplished in the next excerpt by another participant, Daniel (D):

(2) WalkingAsScienceDKB – Let's put this in practice

D : Daniel (%)

1 D j'ai trouvé assez euh\ au contraire assez assez facile à
I found quite uh\ on the contrary quite easy to
2 différencier/ rien que l'allure au niveau du coin de l'œil\ xxx
make the difference/ nothing but the silhouette in the corner of the eye
xxx
3 parfois des mecs vont marcher euh ils ont pas de souci le souci
sometimes guys walk euh they don't care about
4 d'être gracieux/ ils se posent pas du tout la question de d'être
being gracious/ they don't ask themselves at all about being
5 féminin (à partir) gracieux donc\ %ils marchent comme ça%/
feminine (starting) gracious so\ they walk like that
%curves his back%
6 %puis les mains dans les poches%
then hands in the pockets
%he bends more%
7 %mais presque complètement% recroquevillé avec un truc sur la tête
but almost totally huddled up with something on the head
%he bends %
8 et euh\ tandis que j'ai vu aussi des nanas qu'étaient parfois
and uh\ while I saw also some gals they were sometimes
9 ensemble alors elles se prenaient par le bras/ ça on verra jamais des
together so they used to grab each other by the arm/ this you never see
10 mecs le faire quoi\(.) quoique dans le coin\ et euh donc e-elles
guys do that\ though in the neighborhood\ and uh so
they're
11 se promener bras dessus bras dessous et tout puis c'est c'est la
going to walk arm in arm like and this that's that's the
12 démarche aussi est différente parce que j'en ai vu plusieurs qui
way of walking also it's different because I've seen many who
13 portaient des talons donc %elles sont obligées de marcher euh avec
wearing heels so they are forced to walk uh with
%looks down--->
14 euh avec l'avant du pied% ça ça f- s- s- ça
uh with the front of their feet this this this
--->%
15 donne toute une démarche totalement différente
it gives you a totally different way of walking
16 du coup plus fragile aussi\
thus more fragile also

((some lines omitted))

21 M : on va mettre ça en pratique alors

let's put this in practice then

In this excerpt, Daniel formulates a relationship between gender and walking activities. He is applying what the sociologist Sacks (1992) calls the “category bound activity” (i.e. activities culturally linked to categories). In this example, gender is not properly produced by walking, it is accountable, observable, and reportable *by* and *through* walking. Daniel adopts in this framework a fine-grained ethnographic stance, focused on observation of walking practices and a generalization about the relations between gender and ways of walking. In this example, he approaches his observational activity as accounting for gender difference (lines 1-2). He also focuses on the ways through which guys avoid any trace of grace or femininity (lines 3-5) through a corporeal representation of their physical postures and gestures in walking activities (lines 5-7), and he (re)presents “female walking” as fundamentally collective, caring of each other, and tactile (lines 8-9). In this way, Daniel constructs a dichotomy between guys and girls – a standardized relational pair (SACKS 1972) – whose corporeal behaviors are presented as dichotomous (lines 9-10), accountable, and generalizable. The formulation of a generalization does not exclude the presentation of a deviant case in his “folk theory”. The walking practices as they emerge in the neighborhood, show a subversion of the norm previously observed and formulated (line 10). The neighborhood, as Daniel refers in his turn, is a notorious gay area in Brussels, and a gay male walking is presented as deviating in relation to a norm referring *post hoc* to straight (male and female) walking. His observation and theorization about gender and walk is nourished by an element focused on the way through which women mobilize their bodies, and in particular foot, during walking activities. The focus on the movement of the foot, re-creates a vision of the world as gendered, dichotomous, and dominated by an ideology of difference in which the fragility of women is created, nourished and accountable by their way of walking (lines 12-16). This echoes some of the theoretical remarks formulated by Balzac (1833) on walking in “The theory of walking” (*La théorie de la marche*). In this essay, he observes, theorizes and establishes a relationship between locomotion, center of gravity, gender and material artifacts as dresses through the identification of two different ways of walking shaped by the gender of pedestrians and by the form of dress.

Femininity, as it emerges in the excerpt under scrutiny, is theorized as less tied to an essence that women have by virtue of their anatomy than as the result of historicized practices in which women learn to walk in a specific way with artifacts (high heels) who constraint their way of walking.

Finally, face to Daniel's presentation, Max takes the floor and proposes to translate these comments in practice (line 21). He opens in this way an avenue for a new activity (i.e. walking) and he approaches Daniel's activity as theoretical and needed to be tested in practice.

3.2. TESTING

In this section, walking ceases to be treated as a topic in discourse. It becomes a practice through which participants can test some of the theoretical points debated in the workshop. At the beginning, Max, as a performer during an experience he is proposing to participants, invites the members of the workshop to focus on themselves and to imagine the type of walking that is more relevant for the character they are embodying (lines 1-4, excerpt 3):

(3) WalkingAsScienceDKB – You observe

M: Max

E: everybody (the group composed by six participants) (E)

1M vous êtes vraiment concentré.e.s sur vous vous vous ne telescopez pas
you are really focused on you you don't step on each other's toes
 2 vous êtes vraiment allez tout uniquement par rapport à vous
you are really go just in relation to you
 3 En essayant de voir un peu le personnage quel est/ quelle serait
trying to get a sense of the character what is/ what would be
 e Egradually each participant starts to walk----->>
 4 la démarche, la vitesse/
the way of walking, the speed/
 5 (25)
 6 M tout en marchant, vous observez/ sur vous même/ comment/ vous
while walking, you observe/ on yourself/ how/ you
 7 marchez/ comment vos pièdes, se déposent sur le sol, sans bouger à
walk/ how your feet, settle on the ground, without changing
 8 quoique ce soit mais faites simplement m-
anything but do simply m-
 9 (4)
 10 M m-
m-
 11 (2)
 12 M faites attention plus spécifiquement à: comment vous marchez
be careful more specifically to how you walk
 13 (4)
 14 M est ce que vous mettez d'abord/ sur le sol/ est ce que vous posez
do you put first/ on the ground/ do you put

15 d'abord/
first/

16 (3)

17 M est ce que c'est (la fin) est ce que c'est le talon/
is it (the end) is it the heel/

18 est ce que c'est::
is this

19 (3)

20 M euh une pression euh forte/
uh a stronger pressu

21 (3)

22 est ce que vous êtes en équilibre/ en déséquilibre/
are you in balance/ out of balance/

23 (3)

24 M quel serait votre personnage
what would be your character

25 (2)

26 M par rapport à cette démarche justement
in relation to this approach precisely

In the middle of the invitation addressed to all the participants, the group (“e” i.e. everybody), in a gradual way, starts to walk, creating circles in the room (cf. non verbal descriptions in line 3). The beginning of the walking activity overlaps the moment in which Max explains the goal of the exercise: to test the more relevant walking for the character they are embodying. This activity is silently accomplished by the participants, while Max is giving them some useful verbal instructions for the exercise. Participants, in this way, are making a kinesthetic experience of their new gender through walking, feeling the movement of their legs, and regulating their speed. They are testing the functioning of walking while applying a phenomenological vision of gender on their bodies and transforming themselves into the subjects and objects of their experiences.

The instructions given by Max are recruiting some points treated previously by Daniel about the gendered dimension of foot movement in walking (lines 14-20). Contrary to excerpt 2, an invitation to introspection through some movements creating a sense of balance or imbalance (line 22) is proposed. As detailed in the analysis, walking is less related to an idealized gender than to a gendered character they are created during the make-up activity.

Following the Max’s invitation, participants continue to perform their gender through walking activities and some of the most ritual practices we experience everyday, greetings (see excerpts 4, 5, 6):

(4) WalkingAsScienceDKB – How are you

B: Bob (£)

M: Max (*)

1 B >>walks, gazes toward Max, stops
 2 sal£*ut
 b&M £*shake hands between M&B--->
hi
 3 M salut
hi
 4 (0.5)



5 M ça va bien/
how are you/
 6 B ça va
good£*
 ----->£*

(5) WalkingAsScienceDKB – Shake hands



In those examples, participants are walking in the room and exchanging some greetings. Such greetings could be exclusively non verbal (e.g. handshakes), as shown in excerpt 5, and constructed by a fine choreography of walking and gestures through which an encounter is accomplished or thanks to an assemblage of multimodal resources (e.g., corporeal and verbal cues), as in the excerpt 4. Greetings are organized in adjacency pairs (SCHEGLOFF & SACKS 1973) – hi/hi, how are you/good (excerpt 4, lines 2-6) – and they are intertwined with walk, gaze and gestures (cf. non verbal excerpt 4, lines 1-2). In the following excerpt, participants are performing a situation in which drag kings are constructing an escalation of tension through the repetition of some formulaic greetings:

(6) WalkingAsScienceDKB – Are you sure

M: Max (*)

J: Jo (@)

1 J >>walks toward Max
 2 sa@*lut/ ça va/
hi/ how are you/
 J&M @*shake hands between M&J--->>



3 J ça va/
how are you/
 4 M ça va et toi/@*
fine and you/
 ----->@*
 5 J ouais
yeah
 6 J t'es sûr/ ça va/
are you sure/ how are you /
 7 M ouais
yeah
 8 J t'es sur/
are you sure/
 9 M ouais ouais
yeah yeah

In this excerpt, the greetings machinery (i.e. the “Hi/How are you” sequences, lines 1-5) is interrupted by Jo (line 6). The position of this question (“are you sure”, line 6) and the repetition of the formulaic expression (“how are you”, line 6) provokes a trouble in conversation. It questions the ritual and formulaic nature of greetings, and it opens a sequence (lines 6-9) in which the repetition of the same phrases indexes a teasing frame between participants and a situation in which guys perform a sort of provocative masculinity.

In these examples, participants are experiencing their new gendered bodies through walking and greetings. They are approaching social actions and their ongoing genders as “experiment in miniature” (GARFINKEL 2006 [1948]: 180):

Every working act is an experiment in miniature; man is forever testing, accepting and revising the universe.

Gender is practically achieved into an intersubjective frame in which each participant – through the performance of walking and greetings – can test her/his/their own gendered and living body. In these excerpts, participants deploy a “metaperformative competence”, i.e. the capacity, as well as the skills they have in observing, describing, and testing the performativity of their gender transforming their bodies into experiential labs. In Section 3.1., participants demonstrate a strong capacity in describing the kines-
 thetic theorization of the links between gender and walking. In Section 3.2., social actors show, through bodily techniques, their ability to experiment and to test some theoretical points. In Section 3.3., I will show how this metaperformative competence is made intelligible through the capacity to discover phenomena and to treat it as a proof of theories.

3.3. DISCOVERING

In this section, the analysis is focused on discovery the phenomenon participants have theorized and tested in previous phases in the workshop. Discovery is an ongoing process, accomplished by and through interac-
 tional routines, as a form of situated social action that is temporally organ-
 ized and multimodally constructed:

(7) WalkingAsScienceDKB – Look !

M: Max (*)

A: Aurel (\$)

D: Danielle (£)

E: Eliane (%)

1 M ok al\$ors on va on va tester\$ \$((regarde la montre))
so we are going to test ((looking at watch))
 a \$is going to the window\$ \$looks out the window--->



2 (2)

3 M euhhh

4 A MAIS C'EST VRAI \$£ILS MARCHE*%NT avec le bassin en avant
but it's true, they (men) walk with the pelvis forward
 \$points and changes the window--->



d flooks out the window--->>
 m+e *%join aurel toward the window--->



5 E ben oui
 yes sure
 6 A regarde par rapport à elle
 look compared to her*%
 m+e ----->*%



While Max is announcing to the workshop’s members that the group is going to test something related to male walking, Aurel is moving toward the window (line 1) and begins to look outside. After a two second pause (line 2), and an attempt by Max to take and keep the floor (lines 3), Aurel announces (l. 4) something important to the workshop, and concerning the relations between gender, walking and kinesthetic. The exceptional character of his announcement is underlined by a prosodic feature, an augmentation of the volume of his voice (cf. capital letters in transcription, line 4). The connector “mais” (but, line 4) is indexing a cohesion between a topic worked out in previous conversations and what he is discovering and telling in his turn (line 4). The sentence “c’est vrai” (it’s true, line 4) gives an element of truth to the relations between gender (ils/they), walking (marchent/walk), and a kinesthetic feature (avec le bassin en avant/with the pelvis forward, line 4). In this way, Aurel treats the facts observed as a proof of a theory and worthy of interest. This discovery is proof of a precedent theorization, which is temporally organized and achieved

through multisemiotic resources and a re-organization of the participation framework (GOFFMAN 1981). Based on the dynamic and strong engagement of his body orientation (i.e., his nonverbal description; see lines 4), Aurel is observing men who are walking and moving their pelvis in a particular way, which triggers a collective participation to the observed fact. The discovery of the fact is ratified by the co-participants corporeally (non verbal descriptions, line 4) and verbally (line 5), and it offers a space for comparison with female walking (line 6). The next excerpt opens an interesting discussion about participants' observations.

(8) WalkingAsScienceDKB – Center of gravity

M: Max

A: Aurel

D: Danielle

C: Charlotte

F: Fred (&)

E : everybody

1 E is looking out the window --->
2 ? ben oui tu vois c'est la
yes you see that's the
3 F tu vois par rapport à elle est
look compared to her it's



4 F mais c'est ça t'as ton ton poids de comment on appelle ça comment
but that's it you have your weight of how do you call this
5 on appelle ça ton centre de gravité voilà
you call this your center of gravity that's it
6 ton centre de gravité c'est ta bite &y a rien à faire&
your center of gravity it's your dick there is nothing to do
&is bending toward her belly&
7 F y a rien à faire
there is nothing to do
8 D c'est pas la caricature mais
it's not a caricature but
9 F c'est ça c'est vraiment ton centre de gravité c'est ça
that's it it's really your center of gravity that's it
10 le mot
the word

11 (1)
 12 M et on peut tester son centre de gravité hein
we can try our center of gravity huh

In the first part of excerpt 8, participants are focused on the observation of what Aurel had previously presented (excerpt 7) as a fact worthy to be observed and related to a discovery he did in relation of some points discussed in the workshop. The comparative dimension is still present in the participants' accounts concerning the scene performed outside by pedestrians. Fred, one of the participants, takes the floor recruiting a connector ("mais"/"but" line 4), establishing a logical cohesion between what they have observed (in excerpt 7) and the topics participants have approached in the workshop. The phrase, "mais c'est ça" (but that's it, line 4), contributes to stabilize the discovery about the relation between gender, walking, and kinesthetic. Fred, who is no more in front of the window, adopts an objective and a scientific stance. In fact, he is operating a symbolic displacement of the discussion from what is going on in the street, on the field, to something that he, and everyone else, can test. The focus on "ton poids" (your weight, line 4), its reformulations by "ton centre de gravité" (your center of gravity, lines 5, 6) and "ta bite" (your dick, line 6), and its embodiment through some movements he is directing toward his pelvis (non verbal description, line 6), account for a sort of embodied symbolic translation in which facts observed and discovered on the field can be tested on his own body and localized in specific body parts (line 6). This is presented as a general, unquestionable truth (line 7), which is far from caricature or folk belief (line 8), but ratified and categorized once and for all (lines 9-10). After this particularly interesting moment, where facts observed through the window are translated in the body of Fred, Max invites the participants, to test their notion of center of gravity through some corporeal exercises (line 12).

4. INTERLUDE

In the analytical sections of this paper, I showed how gender is experienced as a scientific practice through the mobilization of theorizing (Section 3.1), testing (Section 3.2), and discovering (Section 3.3) devices. In these three moments, participants reveal a meta-performative competence, a reflexive stance adopted and thematized by participants in and through discourse vis-à-vis of their gendered bodily transformations. In those moments, walking is treated by participants as a *topic* in discourse, in which walking

is subjected to a form of discursive representation, and as a *practice*, in which walking is itself a type of semiotic resource. This double vision, walking as *topic*, represented in action, and walking as an *action*, echoes a vision of walking in contemporary art as *representation* and as *action*. At the end of the nineteenth century, the topic of walking and locomotion attracted much interest in the artistic representations, and in particular, through the lens of the stairs. One of the most famous examples are the first chronophotographic studies of Eadweard Muybridge “Man descending the stairs” (1884) and “Woman descending the stairs” (1887), as well as Marcel Duchamp’s “Nude descending a staircase” (1912), which draws inspiration from the Muybridge’s chronophotographic experiments.

However, it is with the dadaist, surrealist and situationist avant-gardes that we leave the mode of *representation* of walking and the locomotion to venture into one of the walking as *action*. Thanks to Richard Long and “Walking the line” in 1967, walking is definitely approached as a contemplative, corporeal activity and as an aesthetic practice shaping nature and landscapes. The invitation launched in 1964 by Yoko Ono to lose oneself in the city and to find other possible utopian geographies through walking, or the walking experiences of Vito Acconci (Following Piece, 1969) following a person in the course of his/her/their daily movements in urban space contribute to propose an intersubjective and a relational vision of spaces and bodies. In a performance, proposed by Serge Cartellier and Sophie Faria “Ai bordi del cammino. Un laboratorio itinerante” (2016), they invite participants to change their gender, through make-up, cross-dressing, and walking, outside *en plein air*:



FIGURE 1 “Ai bordi del cammino”



FIGURE 2 “Ai bordi del cammino”

In this framework, participants make the experience of a gendered bodily transformation through walking. The performance is structured by three phases. In the first phase, participants are invited to follow a path with the help of two performers. In this context, participants walk, listen, and read texts about gender norms. During the second phase, participants are seated in front of a table with mirrors, and they can change their gender through make-up and the choice of clothes, with the help of the performers. The last phase of the performance is focused on walking and it is an occasion to make the bodily and locomotive experience of a gender transformation through their perceptions, their muscles and their bones. The difficulty of the path, as well as the necessity to be helped through walking, the path can be indeed harsh, became an occasion to live the gender transformation as a collective and caring action in which participants can take care of their comrades at some moments. The performance ends around a table in a bar and the participants share the experience they lived in a very informal way. In this performance, as in the examples under scrutiny in this paper, the action of walking is not disconnected by its representation, introspection, and contemplation. The participants of the performance, as it is showed in the following excerpt from an interview I did with Serge Cartellier, are conceived as making experiments in a lab (lines 1-11):

(10) Interview Ai bordi del cammino

IR: interviewer

IE: interviewed

- 1 IR tu ne penses pas que cette dimension de
don't you think that this dimension of
 2 l'expérience du ressenti se rapproche presque d'une
experience of feeling comes closed to almost of a
 3 expérience scientifique que les gens aient pu
scientific experience that people have been able to
 4 faire comme une expérience sur eux mêmes au même titre
do as an experience on themselves just like
 5 qu'un scientifique puisse faire une expérience sur une
a scientist cand do an experience with
 6 matière
matter
 7 IE sur la question de l'expérience oui puisque le sous
concerning the question of experience yes because the sub
 8 titre de la performance c'était un laboratoire
title of the performance was a traveling
 9 itinérant dans le terme du laboratoire on retrouve
lab in the word of laboratory we find

10 quelque part quelque chose de la science et en tout cas
somehow something about science and in any case
11 de l'expérience euh et ce qui était sur pour nous c'est
of experience uh and what was for us it's
12 qu'on a essayé de traduire dans les deux parties de la
we tried to translate into the two parts of the
13 marche la première partie les gens grimpaient un peu
walking the first part people climbed a little bit
14 montaient sur un chemin mais facile d'accès et large et
they were walking up a path but easy to get to and large and
15 dans la deuxième partie on a choisi des chemins
in the second part we choose paths
16 beaucoup plus chaotiques où ils pouvaient faire
much more chaotic where they could do
17 l'expérience du déséquilibre puisque pour nous accéder
the experience of imbalance because for us to have an access
18 à une dimension genrée de soi amène du déséquilibre
to a gendered dimension of oneself brings imbalance

During this traveling gender experience, participants make the experience of their gender transformation through a diversity of paths (“easy to reach” or “chaotic”, lines 14-16), accounting their gendered transformation. In fact, the material diversity of the ground is conceived by Serge as producing a physical instability and as reflecting a sense of imbalance lived by people in the course of their gendered explorations (lines 11-18). In this perspective, participants to this performance become and are interpreted as gender *flâneurs* (DE CERTEAU 1974): the creators and the explorers of their own gendered transformations.

5. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

The focus on experience transforms the life of participants into creative laboratories and analytical materials. The work participants do *on* and *with* their bodies display the constraints but also the possibilities bodies offer to us. Through the observation, the manipulation and the experiments we conduct everyday on our bodies we become the ethnographers and artists of our gendered transformations. The meta-performative competence I introduced in this paper accounts for the capacity we deploy in observing, theorizing, comparing, generalizing, and testing connections between genders, bodies and practices in which we are constantly engaged. I show how a focus on meta-performative competence entails an interactional, multi-semiotic-semiotic, temporal, experiential, and participant related vision of gender performativity.

In my perspective, the manufacturing and the experiencing of a new body are lived by the participants as political, scientific and as an artistic

experiences : an (auto)ethnographic activism. In this framework, the practices that drag kings experience in the workshops share some elements of ethnographic methods and artistic practices: the observation, the reflexivity, the generalization and the comparison of the elements. These practices are political in that they allow an empowerment in participants experiencing those practices and the emergence of consciousness of the patriarchal domination and of a binary ideology ordering the world.

An attention to walking practice allowed me to put at the center of gender and queer studies not only the body but also the experience participants make of the materiality and of the motility of their bodies. Queer Studies need to be declined with phenomenological oriented linguistic and interactional approaches in order to grasp the manufacturing of performativity in its temporal, experiential and multisemiotic dimensions. In this perspective, I showed how the material forms of a body are thematized, imagined and experienced in the course of walking practices and verbal exchanges: how they are connected with gender, locomotion and space and how they are experienced as proofs of theories. The methodology mobilized in this chapter, ethnography, multimodal and sequential analysis as well as the use of artistic references and materials to shed a new light on the analysis, echoes the intertwining of science and art as it emerges in the practices under scrutiny. It refers to the contamination between art and science as contemporary artists and social scientists experiment in their practices.

The analysis of speech practices and corporeal conducts mobilized by participants in the course of their ordinary practices allows me to treat gender less as an eternal theoretical object than as a DIY (Do It Yourself) resource that we mobilize everyday in the course of our interactions. The focus on theorizing, testing and discovering – as they are mobilized by participants through dynamic and unusual assemblages of language, walking, space, and gender norms – creates a great opportunity to think to our living and gendered bodies at the intersection of science, experience and art.

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