Article

The linguistic-material construction of my black non-binary body

A construção linguístico-material do meu corpo não-binário negro

*Luiz Martins de LIMA NETO**

ABSTRACT: What is the relation between language and matter? And what is the relation between language and body? This text is an attempt to contribute to these discussions from the perspective of a study conducted within applied linguistics. Drawing on the long theoretical discussion about this topic and on (meta)pragmatics, I present a report of the main findings of a longitudinal *body performance autoethnography* on the *mutual* construction between language and body. I do so by analyzing my intra-actions with people who participate in two different contexts of my social life: my professional and my family ones. I also analyze several research notebooks and figures, while reconnecting with my personal memories throughout a part of my evocative writing. On the other hand, I also explicitly analyze the data generated with the aim of contributing to the refinement of performative and (meta)pragmatic theories. My focus of analysis is the use of vocatives and nouns and their mutual relation of indexical disjunction with (non-)human materialities.
Keywords: Language. Matter. Non-binary body. (Meta)pragmatics. Autoethnography.

RESUMO: Qual é a relação entre a linguagem e a matéria? E qual é a relação entre a linguagem e o corpo? Este texto é uma tentativa de contribuir com essas discussões na perspectiva de um estudo inserido na Linguística Aplicada. Recorrendo à longa discussão teórica sobre este tema e à (meta)pragmática, apresento um relato das principais conclusões de uma *autoetnografia da performance corporal* longitudinal sobre a construção *mútua* entre a linguagem e o corpo. Para tanto, analiso as minhas intra-ações com pessoas que participam de dois contextos diferentes da minha vida social: a profissional e a familiar. Também analiso vários cadernos de pesquisa e figuras, enquanto me reconecto com as minhas memórias pessoais ao longo de uma parte da minha escrita evocativa. Por outro lado, também analiso explicitamente os dados gerados com o objetivo de contribuir para o refinamento de teorias performativas e (meta)pragmáticas. Meu foco de análise é o uso de vocativos e nomes e a sua relação mútua de disjunção indicial com materialidades (não-)humanas.
Palavras-chave: Linguagem. Matéria. Corpo não-binário. (Meta)pragmática. Autoetnografia.

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* PhD in Language and Linguistics, Universidade Federal de Goiás. English and Portuguese teacher at Instituto Federal de Goiás. lmln2509@gmail.com

1 Introduction

What is the relation between language and matter? And what is the relation between language and what we call body? The theoretical discussion about these subjects is wide and has been lingering for a long time in the academic fields and beyond. This text is an attempt to contribute to this discussion from the perspective of a study conducted within applied linguistics, a research field where language is central for the intelligibility of social problems (Moita Lopes, 2006).

For common sense, people are what they are. Specifically in terms of gender and sexuality, according to this perspective, we can be born only with two restricted possibilities of sexual organs. Because of that, we can only be men or women, and, as a logical and natural consequence of that, we can only feel sexual attraction and affection for women, if we are men, and for men, if we have vaginas.

On the other hand, the linguistic turn in the Social Sciences, mainly headed by the philosopher Judith Butler, with her seminal book *Gender Trouble* (1999 [1990]), argues that even the sexual organs are linguistic inventions, since the relation between language and matter is indissociable. She also defends that being something, including a man or a woman, also depends on the agency exercised by the individual who is interpellated, and that, because of that, there is no logical connection between a sexual organ and the sexual attraction and/or affection that a person may feel. In sum, for common sense, identities are natural, whereas, for gender scholars, identities are linguistically created.

Butler has been criticized by other feminists since she first made her claims though. The posthumanist theorist Karen Barad, for instance, alleges: "poststructuralist theorists such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler blast the tenets of humanism and representationalism", besides destabilizing our cultural imagination. Nonetheless, she also declares:

> […] for both Butler and Foucault, agency belongs only to the human
> domain, and neither addresses the nature of technoscientific practices

and their profoundly productive effects on human bodies, as well as the ways in which these practices are deeply implicated in what constitutes the human, and more generally the workings of power (Barad, 2007, p. 135).

From 2018 to 2022, I conducted a longitudinal study with the purpose of investigating how it was that language could make our bodies, from a (meta)pragmatic perspective (Austin, 1962; Blommaert, 2012; Butler, 1997; Silverstein, 2003; Pinto; 2015; 2020). Nevertheless, during the process of data analysis, I was surprised by the role played by matter, and I present here a report of the main findings regarding this topic.

In methodological terms, anchored on the premises of ethnography as a research paradigm (Blommaert; Jie, 2010), I underwent a **body performance autoethnography**[1] (Lima-Neto, 2022), that is, an autoethnography where I, as a marginalized Other, answer and dialogue with (anti)socioconstructionist D/discourses[2] that aim to construct my body and my identity. Basically, in a **translocal perspective** (Wortham, 2006), I recorded my intra-actions[3] with people who participate(d) in three different contexts of my social life: my professional, my family and my homosexual friendly ones. Only two contexts will be analyzed in this text though, since the third one needs specific scrutiny in a specific text. Moreover, I maintained several research notebooks and pictures, while reconnecting with my personal memories throughout a part of my evocative writing (Adam; Bochner; Ellis, 2011). On the other hand, I explicitly analyzed the data generated with the aim of contributing to the refinement of performative and (meta)pragmatic theories. To do so, I base myself on the idea of an **analytical autoethnography** (Anderson, 2006), that is, a kind of autoethnography primarily committed to an analytical agenda, not

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[1] Ethical Review Presentation Certificate Number (CAAE in Portuguese): 04341918.0.0000.5083.

[2] According to Paul Gee (*apud* Rocha, 2013), <u>D</u>iscourses are ways of being in the world, forms of life that integrate words, actions, values, thinking, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, looks, body positions and clothes; and <u>d</u>iscourses are connected parts of language that make sense, such as conversations, stories, reports, discuss, essays, etc.

[3] The idea presented here will be better developed as the text flows.

specifically to create empathy with my reader through the exposition of my introspect feelings (Adam; Bochner; Ellis; 2011; Anderson, 2006)[4].

The idea I want to defend in this text is that **language and matter construct one another mutually** and I intend to show here **how** it happens, by focusing on the construction of my body as a black non-binary person. More specifically, my focus of analysis is the use of vocatives and nouns and their mutual relation of indexical disjunction (Barrett, 2017) with (non-)human materialities, in the construction of my own body.

2 How do the intra-actants of my professional and family contexts construct my body as a black non-binary person in-by the use of binarized and binarizing vocatives and nouns in our everyday intra-actions?

The title of this section is the research question that guided me throughout the conduction of my investigation. During the process of data analysis, it came to me that it should be answered in three smaller subsections. In the first one, entitled "Linguistic-corporeal presupposition: my proper name and its indissociable connection with my body", I discuss the autobiographical information that is necessary for the contextualization of the data that is discussed in the following subsection. In the second one, whose title is "The use of binarized and binarizing vocatives and nouns in the construction of my black non-binary body and vice-versa", I analyze the data that was generated during the research. Finally, in the third one, "Some considerations about race and about the coloniality of being in my linguistic-corporeal constructions", I analyze and make some comments on the data generated in terms of two specific constructs: race and coloniality of being.

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[4] Although autoethnography has been chosen to conduct this study, due to its great importance in language studies lately (see, for example, the whole volume about it published by the journal Veredas (Pereira; Vieira, 2018)) its discussion will be limited to this paragraph in this text, since the real scope of analyzes of this article is the discussion of the data generated.

2.1 Linguistic-corporeal presupposition: my proper name and its indissociable connection with my body

Even before I was born, the doctor who made the ultrasound scan on my mother's stomach saw a certain shape of what we call a sexual organ between my legs and, because of the historical regularities of the shape of this organ, I was given a penis (Figure 1). Then, I was identified as a man, and my mother, my father and everybody else took it for granted that I was a heterosexual man. As a result of all this, I was given a masculine name. As a tribute to my grandfather (Figure 2), I was named after him: **Luiz Neto**. **Neto** means "grandson" in Portuguese. Being named after the (grand)father is quite a typical habit in Lusophone cultures.

Figure 1 – My penis, the motivator of my proper name, in its oldest record.

Source: personal collection (1994).

Figure 2 – **Seu Luiz**, my paternal grandfather, an evident (meta)pragmatic model of a masculine body for me, **Luiz Neto**, on his lap.

Source: personal collection (1994).

According to Butler (1997), we are linguistic beings precisely because we are **vulnerable to language**. Anchoring herself in Althusser's notion of interpellation, this author defends that every **speech act** works as such. That is, every speech act has an interpellative function. For Althusser, an interpellation happens when a calling stated from someone constituted of power completes itself in the moment of recognition by the interpellated one. Thus, in this sense, not only interpellations per se have the

capacity to injure us, animating us into existence (Butler, 1997), but any other kind of speech act. Language does things, it does not reflect them.

This idea, in turn, was very much developed from Austin's (1962) theoretical reflections about language. For this author, we are always doing something with language, even when we have the impression that we are only reflecting reality. From this point of view, when we use the verbs "declare" or "describe", for example, in our linguistic uses, we are only constructing the ideas of "declare" and "describe", that is, these are actions that do not exist without the illocutionary and the perlocutionary force of language. Whereas the illocutionary force refers to the conventional force of language in the very enunciation of the verbs "declare" and "describe" (these verbs only exist when we enunciate them), the perlocutionary force refers to the persuading achievement we obtain when we use these verbs and finally persuade people to think that we are only "declaring" and "describing" things, as if what we were "declaring" and "describing" were not being (re)constructed in the exact moment we (re)enunciate them. Therefore, for Austin (1962), we do things not only with, but rather **in and by**[5] language: when the illocutionary force of the language is evident, but also and most importantly when we think we are not. In sum, we always do something when we say something: we *use* the words when we talk.

It is exactly here that another theory seems to be adequate for some contribution in the understanding of language as a tool of construction: the theory of **(meta)pragmatics**. Silverstein (2003, p. 196) explains that (meta)pragmatics is "the mediating factor between pragmatic presupposition and pragmatic entailment", since it is the linguistic function that links ideologies that articulate cultural values to the language use in the moment of its current enunciation in interaction. Simply put, what one says can only be said by previous sayings, which, in turn, generate present and future interpretative understandings. This intertextuality between past and

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[5] Besides that, the idea of using "in-by" is that language is not only the canal through which we stablish communication, but also the substance with which we make things with words (Pinto, 2020).

present/future sayings is, in turn, what (re)creates ideologies, since what we say is intrinsically linked to the already sedimented sociocultural beliefs we linguistically nourish.

Thus, the intertextuality in question happens in an **indexical** way, that is, it happens according to the property of language that makes it **point to** meanings backwardly and forwardly (Blommaert, 2012), instead of really or semantically referring to them. Consequently, this leads us to conclude that there is an **order** in pragmatics, an **indexical** one: our last sociolinguistic construction **points to** what has already been sociolinguistically constructed and to its future constructions as well. In other words, our last saying is normally only a token in a series of other tokens that link to one another indexically, constructing thus types: ideas and social constructs.

Applying all this theory to understand the concept of body, Pinto (2015) analyzes a humor black Brazilian female character. She uses the concept of **indexical order** by Silverstein (2003) to argue that this character in particular is a token that, together with other tokens, that is, other black bodies, especially the feminized ones, typify the feminized black body, maintaining it in the social place it should occupy: a place of playfulness, bestiality and subalternity.

As it concerns my study, the ideology that most articulates cultural values in the construction of my black non-binary body is the **cis-heteronormativity**. For Simakawa (2015), this ideology has its normality produced through the naturalization of three very important concepts: pre-discursivity, binarism and the permanence of bodies and gender identities. Fundamentally, the first one refers to the

> [...] sociocultural understanding – historically normative and produced, considerably, by colonial projects – that it is possible to define sex-genders of [human] beings based on objective criteria and certain bodily characteristics, regardless of their self-perceptions or

positions and intersectional and sociocultural contexts in which they are located (Simakawa, 2015, p. 61)[6].

The concept of binarism, in turn, is explained by Simakawa (2015), based on Fausto Sterling (2000): it is a device designed to maintain gender divisions and to cisnormatize those who are undisciplined to the point of blurring the boundaries. And finally, the concept of permanence refers to the "inevitability and immutability of cisnormative fantasies about gender identity and corporeality that, unfortunately, have also affected our body and gender-diverse communities" (Simakawa, 2015, p. 66).

In the specific case of the proper name, Butler (1997, p. 29) argues that, despite being used precisely to singularize the being, "shared by others, the [proper] name, as a convention, has a generality and historicity that is in no sense radically singular meaning". That is, offering, giving, imposing a name, a name that becomes someone's own, to a person is one of the ways we have of transitively, ritualistically and repetitively "feminizing" the being who is first called "girl" (Butler, 1997), for example, until she becomes a woman. In this sense, proper names, and consequently body signs, as I will defend in this text, do not have a pre-existing gender. They are **binarized** and, at the same time, **binarizing** within the culture in which they are constantly (re)created.

In a vein closer to (meta)pragmatics, still according to Butler (1997, p. 39, my emphasis), offering, giving or imposing a proper name to someone is renewing "the linguistic **tokens** of a community, re-editing and reinvigorating such discourse". Thus, naming is one of the ways we must motivate "elementary rules of use, where the referent is specified in relation to some speech event variable(s)", in this case, cis-heteronormativity. In other words, the (proper) name is a **shifter**, since it is a linguistic sign that points both to referential or quasi-semantic meanings, in a strict sense, and

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[6] [...] entendimento sociocultural – historicamente normativo e produzido, consideravelmente, por projetos coloniais – de que seja possível definir sexos-gêneros de seres a partir de critérios objetivos e de certas características corporais, independentemente de como sejam suas autopercepções ou das posições e contextos interseccionais e socioculturais em que elas estejam localizadas. My translation.

to indexical, pragmatic meanings (Silverstein, 1976). Someone's (proper) name is thus an occurrence of a socially typified name.

Nonetheless, gender is also prosthetic, as Preciado (2004) once declared, and as we can also infer from a posthumanist perspective. It was my penis, a materiality and just a simple occurrence (Figure 1), which macrosociologically points to the Penis, the type, the myth, which does not exist, and that refers back to the idea of Man, likewise a myth, that motivated my mother to name me **Luiz Neto**, a conventionally masculine name in lusophone cultures. Since my name is **Luiz Neto**, the indexical order of bodies (Pinto, 2015) is evident in this case, as my own name explicitly points to the model of body to be followed by me: the body of the patriarch, in this case, my grandfather (Figure 2). Summarizing, my genitalia points to my name and my name points to my genitalia.

In the specific case of my autoethnography, being named, baptized (even in the religious sense of the word) and having been ritualistically and repeatedly called **Luiz Neto** since my birth and even before it in a series of what I call an **interpellative chain** (Lima-Neto, 2022) was what made other people from my social spaces continue calling me in-by (Austin, 1962; Pinto, 2020) this name and others. That is, from my presupposed and/or explicit proper name, I was called other names, such as **professor** ("teacher" in the male form in Portuguese), **professor Luiz** (teacher Luiz[7]), **tio** (uncle), **senhor** (sir), for example. As Butler (1997, p. 30) explains, "after receiving the proper name, one is subject to being named again. In this sense, the vulnerability of being named constitutes a constant condition of the speaking subject".

Nevertheless, the data generated in this study showed that the logical sequence of namings and callings, the interpellative chain, derived from the very first naming of myself, which, in turn, is based on the regularity of my sexual organ, was several times interrupted by the materiality of my body and by the materiality of non-human

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[7] In the Brazilian culture, teachers are commonly called by their first name.

bodies. As it will be explained better in the next section, these materialities are humanized and humanizing and are of extreme importance for the construction of my own human body.

2.2 The use of binarized and binarizing vocatives and nouns in the construction of my black non-binary body and vice-versa

When I was born, my penis **incited** the emergence of my proper name and my grandfather's name **impelled** me to follow a certain (meta)pragmatic model of body. Similar to this process, during the generation of data for this study, I could identify a **mutual** and **intrinsic** relation between the vocatives/nouns used to interpellate me and my body and/or the non-human bodies used in contiguity with my own body. In fact, I could observe that the masculine interpellative chain was interrupted by feminized and feminizing body performances or materialities, in a **relation of contrast**. That is, my body, very agentively, **made** people from my social circles call me in a feminine way **and** in a masculine way.

Evocatively, in my family context, once, I was getting dressed in the bathroom of my mother's house to go to the university where I participated in an exchange program, in Belgium. My biological mother has been living in this country for almost 20 years. Then, she arrived at the exact moment when I was looking in a mirror and **scrunching the back of my hair, from bottom to top**. Seeing this, she let out a speech act against me, which I felt with love: **Luiza!** (the female version of my name).

My mother had already called me **Luiza**, the literal feminine version of my name, jokingly, a few times in my life, but never my coming out as a gay person. This way of addressing me made it clear that all similar names I had previously been given had to do with my body, sexuality and gender performances.

Besides that, I realized that my mother was making a psychological transfer between my deceased aunt, my aunt **Neidy**, and me. Several times during my life, when I had to wake my mother up for some reason (most of the time because she was snoring loudly!), my mother would say my aunt's name. It seemed like she was calling

me Neidy... One day, I think I told my mother this little story and I went out into the garden to read. Minutes later, my mother arrived, calling me: "**Neidy**! I mean, **Neto**!" My aunt was very feminine and was always very worried about her hair, which was always very short, never below her shoulders. My mother loves my aunt to this day and has always said that I was fragile like her and that my brother was stronger, just like herself...

This little story hit me so significantly that a few months later I asked my boyfriend to record this moment by taking this photo:

Figure 3 – **Luiza**!

Source: provided by the autoethnographer (2022).

Still in my family context, some months before, a similar event occurred, but now with my brother, in Brazil:

Fieldnote 1

Thinking about what my brother told me about my hair, I wonder: "What does my *curly hair* with a *diadem* index?" Yesterday, he told me that I looked like **Sandra de Sá**[8] and this made me laugh. I told him that he was also black, that he was a "sarará criolo[9]", and he refused that identity, even as a joke. He has already called me **Cazuza** and **Raul Seixas**, trying to "offend" me [...].

Source: research notebook, Aug. 04, 2018.

Figure 4 – Me: Sandra de Sá, Cazuza and Raul Seixas.

Source: personal collection (2018).

Figure 5 – Sandra de Sá and her curly hair.

Source: Vagalume (2022).

Figure 6 – Cazuza with his famous curly hair and bandana.

Source: Xapuri (2023).

Figure 7 – Raul Seixas and his famous curly hair.

Source: Alô Alô Bahia (2023).

[8] All the names I am called in these intra-actions are names of very famous singers in Brazil.
[9] A person who has black traits, but a fair complexion.

Similarly, in my professional context, an elementary school in Brazil, I wrote this about an event with a student:

Fieldnote 2

At G3[10], a female student, who called me in the feminine form on other occasions, called me **tia** (aunt). I don't think she was the only one today, but I'm not sure. Am I now hearing the feminine form when, in fact, it isn't? [...] When she called me this, a boy said: "Which **tia** (aunt), girl? It's **tio** (uncle)!" She tapped her hand on her forehead, as if she were confused, and corrected herself, calling me **tio** (uncle). Writing about this story, I remember that this same girl has already asked me for *a pair of my black and white flowery pants, which are in fact feminine*, and, one day, when looking at *my nails*, she said in the middle of the room, indignantly: "Why do men's nails grow and are strong whereas girls' don't/aren't?"

Source: research notebook, Aug. 24, 2018.

Figure 8 – Feminine black and white flowery pair of pants asked as a gift by a female student.

Source: provided by the autoethnographer (2021).

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[10] G3 = a 6th grade group.

What these pieces of data do so far is to evince that the relation between language and matter is really indissociable, as Butler (1997) has argued. In the first event, my mother called me **Luiza** because I first scrunched my hair in a "feminine" way, just like my deceased aunt used to do when she was alive. My brother called me **Sandra de Sá**, a female Brazilian artist's name, but also **Cazuza** and **Raul Seixas**, two male Brazilian singers, because **my hair** and **my diadem** motivated him to do it. The same with my student, who felt impelled to call me **tia**, even calling me **tio** afterwards, because of my **feminine black and white flowery pair of paints** and my masculine **long and strong nails** (Fieldnote 2). That is, my bodily signs led my intra-actants to (re)construct my body indexically and, thus, performatively.

In Barad's perspective,

> matter is neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things. Mattering is differentiating, and which differences come to matter, matter in the iterative production of different differences (Barad, 2007, p. 137).

This conception of matter is important here because it attributes agency to the concept of body, which, if conceived inseparably from its relationship with language, can be seen as inert, ready to be semiotized, as a separate thing.

Still for Barad,

> the space of agency is not only substantially larger than that allowed for in Butler's performative account, for example, but also, perhaps rather surprisingly, larger than what liberal humanism proposes (Barad, 2007, p. 177-178).

This is the case because, in her view, "agency is not an attribute, but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 141). Thus, for her, matter works agentively to become matter in an infinite process.

This vision, in turn, introduces another important posthumanist concept, the concept of **intra-action,** an expansion of the already well-known concept of interaction. In Barad's own words (2007, p. 139),

> the notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual "interaction", which presumes the prior existence of independent entities or relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the components of phenomena become determinate and that particular concepts (that is, particular material articulations of the world) become meaningful (Barad, 2007, p. 139).

This concept is important here because it conceives the relation between two or more elements, two or more bodies, always as a mutual relation, in which these elements and bodies act in their mutual construction, in the materially and discursively constructed delimitation of these two or more elements within TimeSpace. As theorized by Karin Murris , a scholar who relies heavily on Barad (2007),

> […] bodies are brought into existence ontologically through *material and discursive relations*, and not the other way round, as is the case with the humanist concept of 'interaction', which assumes that bodies exist independently and ontologically prior to their relationships with other bodies (Murris, 2016, p. 278, my emphasis).

In the same vein, but inserted within queer theory, Preciado (2014, p. 29, my emphasis) declares: "gender is not simply performative (that is, an effect of linguistic-discursive cultural practices) as Judith Butler would like. Gender is first and foremost **prosthetic**, that is, it only occurs in the materiality of the body".

He arrives at this conclusion, drawing on the use of the Derridean notion of "supplement" and thus identifying the dildo and not the penis as the principle of the theorization (Preciado, 2014). In his view, sex is a machine, a product, an instrument, a device, a trick, a prosthesis, a network, an application, a program, a connection, a

flow of energy and information, an interruption and a switch, a key, a piece of equipment, a format, an accident, a debris, a mechanism, a use, a deviation, a fruit of sexuality as technology (Preciado, 2014).

However, differently from what some may think, even Butler herself defends that discourses inhabit and accommodate themselves in bodies: "bodies, in fact, carry discourses as part of their own blood[11]" (Butler; Meijer; Prins, 2002, p. 163 *apud* Louro, 2004). In other words, before the criticism regarding her theorizations in relation to the matter of the bodies, Butler (1997) always reaffirms her first idea about the inseparability of matter and language: matter-language.

As we could see in the pieces of data shown so far, both human (**the way I scrunched my hair/my hair only and my nails**) and non-human materialities (**diadem and a feminine black and white flowery pair of paints**) **motivated** the interruption of a masculinized and masculinizing interpellative chain and established a relation of contrast between the names used to constitute me and my body performances and/or materialities. There are pieces of data where non-human materialities were enough for the construction of my body though, as it goes.

In my family context, back to Belgium, in Intra-action 1, my mother and I are in an Arab neighborhood in Brussels, looking for a shoulder bag and perhaps a **wallet**[12] to buy:

Intra-action 1

M: **Neto**, there are *wallets* too (.) Is there any price?
A: (.) No.
M: How much is it, please?

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[11] os corpos na verdade carregam discursos como parte de seu próprio sangue. My translation.
[12] The materialities, in the intra-actions, appear in italics in order to emphasize their function, presence and position in the construction of my body in relation to the (proper) names that I am called.

Attd: Ten euros. [(Parallel conversation in Arabic during our intra-actions in Portuguese.).

M: [Now, if you want a thinner one just to occasionally go somewhere, that's fine too. (.) In which you'll take less stuff. (.) Uhm? No? Do you want to get another one?

A: No, the material is not good, no. This will (inaudible) quickly.

M: Oh. But that other one up there is made of another material.

A: Uhm-uhm (indicating denial).(.) Thank you (to the attendant). (we left the store) (0.7).

[…]

M: What about this one? At least there's less stuff in it. (.) There are fewer feathers. This one is beautiful. Colorful. Look!

A: No.

[…]

A: And this one?

M: *This one*, **Neto**, *everything over here is feminine*.

Legend: M = mother; A = author; Attd = attendant.
Source: audio recording, Dec. 22, 2019.

Still in the same context, but now in Brazil, with my sister-in-law, my body is reconstructed **in relation** *to* a new materiality: a **skirt**. In this situation, my sister-in-law offers me a **skirt** that belongs to her sister, **Viviane**, for me to wear for a friend's drag birthday party, which would happen a few days later.

Intra-action 2

> SL: What do you want to wear?
>
> […]
>
> A: Uhm(.) Mine is a more modest drag... more feminine, more Cinderella.
>
> […]
>
> SL: No, you can't choose something large because you're short. You will be very ugly otherwise.
>
> A: So, I want a *skirt* full of pleats like... which goes until here (.) and goes up to the maximum here.
>
> SL: Uhum.
>
> A: A pair of sandals that is not very high… And I want… (laughing).
>
> SL: [(laughter).
>
> F: [(loud noise from my father, clearing his throat).
>
> A: [(laughing) and I want... and I want this black satin blouse underneath (laughter).
>
> SL: [(laughter).
>
> […]
>
> A: (laughing) So, I want pearls=.
>
> SL: = how ugly! (laughing).
>
> A: I want pearls, something very delicate. Pearls here, pearls here.
>
> SL: No, it's tacky.
>
> A: A fan and my [hair à la Cinderella.
>
> SL: [(inaudible).
>
> A: Hey, guys, but it's a bit like Breakfast at Tiffany's, a bit like Cinderella...

> SL: (laughter).
>
> A: Oh, it's going to be really cool.
>
> SL: (laughter)
>
> A: (high-pitched scream).
>
> SL: **Luiz Neto**...
>
> [...]
>
> SL: About the *skirt*, **Viviane,** has a wonderful *skirt*.

Legend: SL = sister-in-law; A = author; F = father.
Source: audio recording, Mar. 23, 2019.

In another situation with my mother, the non-human materiality at play is a **pink scarf**.

Fieldnote 3

> I sent a photo of the model of the *scarf* I wanted my mother to buy for me. However, the *scarf* was *pink*. She saw the photo and said: "but *pink*?" I took the opportunity to ask her: "Yes, *pink*! What's the problem?" She replied: "You're crazy, **Luiz Neto!** A *pink scarf* for you to walk around with?"

Source: fieldnote notebook, Dec. 03, 2018.

As we could see in these pieces of data, we can infer that neither bodies nor vocatives and nouns are naturally masculine or feminine, that is, binary, as nothing in social life in fact is. They rather **become** masculine and feminine, as we could state from a Beauvoirian theorization, through a mutual linguistic-material process, and, thus, they rather became **binarized** vocatives and nouns, which, in turn, **binarize** other bodies. That is, they are also **binarizing**. In sum, **Luiz Neto** and **Viviane** are not masculine and feminine vocatives and nouns by nature, just as a **wallet**, a **skirt** and a

pink scarf are not feminine pieces of clothes and accessories either. Nevertheless, once they **become** one or the other, they also masculinize and feminize.

Barrett (2017) can help us to understand this **clash** between vocatives and nouns and materialities in Fieldnotes 1 and 3 and in Intra-actions 1 and 2 using the concept of **indexical disjunction**, even though this author does not use it to talk about the relation between names and materialities. This author uses this concept rather to refer to the common habit among American black drag queens of using both white and female-typed English and African-American English in their performances, to explain the linguistic-social differences between the social groups represented through these ways of speaking. He argues that the indexical disjunction caused using these two very different linguistic varieties is precisely the sociolinguistic alignment, so to speak, to both an ideal of American femininity, the white middle-class woman, and to the drag queens' biological identities, as black men. However, he also uses it to talk about the bodily performances of drag queens who are unable to perform a "perfect" (flawless) female drag, which, in the slightest "revelation" of their anatomical identities, are strongly criticized ("read") precisely because of the indexical disjunction caused by the inadequate performance of the female gender.

This concept can be applied to the events presented above, as it provides theoretical support for us to understand the reason why my mother quickly corrects herself after calling me **Neidy**, just like my student is also corrected for calling me **tia** in Fieldnote 2. Moreover, it justifies my student's indignation in Fieldnote 2, when she compares my nails (those of a man, "large and thick") to hers (those of a girl, "small and thin"), as well as it justifies my mother's rage and indignation with my trying to buy a "feminine" **wallet** and a **pink scarf** in Intra-actions 1 and 3. In my family context, it explains my sister-in-law's laughter at each description of what I would wear for my drag performance, including her sister's **skirt**: there is a mutual indexical disjunction between a male genitalia and a drag performance, which, in this case, is feminine. The

corrections, the indignations, and the laughter are reactions to the clash between the feminized names and my "natural" masculine sex.

Adding to Barrett's (2017) theorizations, I understand that the mutual clash or indexical disjunction between names and materialities arises from two interconnecting points. The first point has to do with Barad's (2007) idea that matter is agentive. It is a constant differentiation, and this differentiation is always a material-discursive practice (Barad, 2007). Thus, materialities, things in general, just like individuals, also **call** people, also **interpellate** them, also **name** them and, therefore, **construct** them.

The second point has to do with a quote from Butler (1999 [1990], p. 142): "those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted".

Interpreting this idea from a posthumanist perspective, while non-human materialities are differentiated as such, in a process of differentiation, non-human materialities are subsequently humanized so that they become binarizing and, therefore, non-humanized materialities that humanize, since they **genderfy**. Once this process is completed, when a body constructed and imprisoned within one of the territories of the cis-heteronormative binarism (man or woman) wears any of the materialities "belonging" to the opposite territory, it is automatically constructed as abject, as it is precisely located on the border of the two genders. For cis-heteronormativity, a "normal" human being can have only one of these genders, just as explained before.

From the three concepts that produce and sustain cis-heteronormativity as an ideology (pre-discursivity, binarism and permanence of bodies and gender identities), already discussed before by Simakawa (2015), the one that needs more scrutiny here is binarism.

Specifically about this aspect, Louro explains:

> according to Derrida, the Western logic traditionally operates through binarisms: this is a thought that chooses and fixes an idea, an entity or a subject as the founding or as the determined center. From that place, the position of the "other" is its subordinate opposite. The initial term is always understood as superior, while the other is its derivative, inferior[13] (Louro, 2004, p. 42).

As stated in the previous section, binarism is one of the main roots through which cis-heteronormativity operates and that allows gender, the matrix of power (Butler, 1999 [1990]), to create and delimit territories, real countries, where the sexes must remain. The second sexes (the Others) are always subjugated to the first (the male one), especially because they are inevitable and permanent, once they are "pre-discursive" (Simakawa, 2015). However, if we continue to use the metaphors of territories and countries in our theorizations, there is always an arbitrary and authoritarian demarcation between the geographic territories which the borders delimit. And there is no better theorist who defines the concept of border than Anzaldúa (1999), a Chicana and a mestizo theorist.

According to this author,

> borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* [(the trespassers)] live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal". Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens - whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks.Do not enter, trespassers win be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only "legitimate" inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align

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[13] conforme Derrida, a lógica ocidental opera, tradicionalmente, através de binarismos: este é um pensamento que elege e fixa como fundante ou como central uma idéia, uma entidade ou um sujeito, determinando, a partir desse lugar, a posição do 'outro', o seu oposto subordinado. O termo inicial é compreendido sempre como superior, enquanto que o outro é o seu derivado, inferior: my translation.

themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 3-4).

Specifically in the field of sexual and gender performances, in a simple way, as a penalty for the mortal crimes they commit, those who insist on living in or crossing the borders of the two genders and the two eternal sexualities are transformed into abject beings.

According to Butler (1999 [1990]), the subject, from a structuralist point of view (the modern linguistic point of view that still constitutes us) depends on the existence of the abject to their own existence. She states that both the subject and the abject, the "internal" and the "external", only make sense mutually with the establishment of a mediating border between them, which must strive for stability. "And this stability, this coherence, is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject" (Butler, 1999 [1990], p. 170), to regulate, exclude and/or dominate. Thus, the existence of the subject only occurs through the dependence on the simultaneous existence of the abject, as this is exactly what the former cannot be, or better put, perform. The abject represents the boundary line that must never be crossed.

In the next section, I will continue focusing on the role of materialities in the construction of my body, but now paying special attention to some data related to the colonial aspect of my race and nationality.

2.3 Some considerations about race and the coloniality of being in my linguistic-corporeal constructions

The cis-heteronormative ideology analyzed here is the Western one, therefore white, and, from Fanon's (2008) point of view, colonial. According to Simakawa (2015), it is necessary to understand ways of thinking about cisgenerity and organizations around bodily and gender diversity based on analyses of whiteness and epistemological perspectives on **ethnic-racial** issues.

In the same line of reasoning, José Estevan Muñoz (1999, p. 11), a Latin theorist who studies queer performances in the American theater, states ironically: "the field of queer theory is [...] a place where a scholar of color can easily be lost in an immersion of vanilla while her or his critical faculties can be frozen by an avalanche of snow", his particular way of saying that this theory is too white in the epistemological sense.

The concept of **coloniality of being** refers to the emergence of "**liminal** subjects, which mark, so to speak, the limit of Being, that is, the point at which Being distorts meaning and evidence to the point of dehumanization" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 257, emphasis in the original), that is, the emergence of beings who are "inferior" in social terms, precisely for being "inferior" in racial terms, even if race is a colonial invention. These beings are constructed in such a manner due to what Maldonado Torres (2007, p. 245) calls **imperial Manichaean misanthropic skepticism**, "a certain skepticism in relation to the humanity of enslaved and colonized sub-others". This skepticism, in turn, arose from interracial relations during colonialism, but it exists to these days (coloniality). And as this author explains, "coloniality […] can be understood as a radicalization and naturalization of the non-ethics of war" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 247) in our most everyday (linguistic) practices, since "war […] is not just about killing or enslaving. [It] includes a particular treatment of sexuality and femininity: rape" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 247). Thus, Maldonado Torres (2007) teaches us that there is an interrelation between the concepts of race, gender and sexuality in the construction of liminal beings, sub-Others. In his own words, "racialization works through gender and sex" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 248).

Besides being called **Sandra de Sá**, a black female singer's name, by my brother in Fieldnote 1, during the generation of data for this study, I lived the following experience with my mother, thus, in my familiar context:

Fieldnote 4

> [...] Once, on the phone with my mother, she said: "hi, **neguinho** (little nigger)! Hi, **nego sarará** (the same as "sarará criolo" translated before in Fieldnote 1), **nego safado** (naughty nigger)! What else do I call him?" And we laughed [...].

Source: fieldnote notebook, Aug. 04, 2018.

Some months later, I lived this experience in my professional context:

Fieldnote 5

> I went to school in shorts and a t-shirt without sleeves. The day was super cold. When I got at school, I was greeted by the coordinator, who looked over me from top to bottom. My clothes were very inappropriate! I myself recognize that the clothes were more a club thing than a school one! I remember when I went to [(name of a famous language school in Brazil)], my first job, wearing shorts and, on the next day, in a meeting, the coordinator asked us to avoid going in shorts... Shorts are inappropriate in some situations here in Brazil, even though the country is hot. I'll never forget the shock I got when I saw a bus driver wearing shorts in Belgium, in the summer. Even though it's summer here most of the year, our bus drivers never wear shorts! Later, joking with me, my boyfriend asked me where I had been wearing those *whore little shorts*! I replied with shame: "I went to school!"

Source: fieldnote notebook, Nov. 26, 2018.

Figure 9 – The "whore shorts".

Source: provided by the autoethnographer (2018).

When I first arrived in Belgium, in 2021, I felt like I was not **seen** by anyone, that is, I felt like my identity, in Murris' (2016) own words, did not emerge in the world due to the lack of visual contact with me, with my body. This, of course, disturbed me, and I do not mean it only in terms of flirting, but in general terms. I simply felt like no one saw me, and that no one noticed me on the streets, on the subways, wherever I went to. This became more evident to me when, one day, I met a phenotypically white female Brazilian friend, who had also moved to Belgium to study. At a certain point during our meeting, in a bar, I had to go to the bathroom. When I came back from there, she was being harassed by a guy. She then told me that it was the third or fourth man within that time gap. I then told her about my experience as a black "man" in the country: no one saw me, I was non-existent, and I felt sad for that. She had nothing to say to me. What I only realized later was that, perhaps, the lack of attention was not because I was a "man", but precisely because of the opposite, that is, because I looked like a "woman". I was constantly called **madame** (m'am) by people on the streets and stores in the country, especially because my beard was hidden by the masks we had to wear during the pandemic, but when I was not wearing it as well. What I know

today, however, is that, regardless of the gender in that case, my race was crucial for me to feel I was not seen and/or not to be really seen in Belgium.

Nevertheless, all that changed, when, one day, while going to a beauty salon, I decided to be a little more daring with my outfit, which I thought was "too macho", "too straight", "too plain". I borrowed a dark blue diadem, a gold and red cherry earring, and a colorful scarf from my mother and went to the salon. Not coincidentally, that day, I was the target of many looks from the owner of the salon, an Arab man, who, on a future occasion, very annoyingly, massaged my shoulders, ran his hand over my chest and secretly asked me for my phone number, at the end of the haircut. I stood still like a statue while he ran his hand over my body. Until then, I was not sure if his looks were really a flirt or a harassment. One of the first questions he asked me was my nationality. These are photos of my exact look on that day:

Figure 10 – The first time I wore my mother's diadem, my gold and cherry earrings and my colorful scarf in Belgium.

Source: personal collection (2022).

Figure 11 – The first time I wore my mother's diadem, my gold and cherry earrings and my colorful scarf in Belgium: full body.

Source: personal collection (2022).

On another occasion, wearing the same accessories, except for the colorful scarf, and in addition to my child pajamas (mainly because of my height), I was once again

bothered by an older man, this time, a Portuguese one, a handyman who worked in the building where my mother lives. With a problem in one of the kitchen pipes in our house, I had to let him in a couple of days, and one of the first pieces of information we exchanged was our nationalities. From the very first day, this man sexually harassed me, insinuating things, and even after asking my mother to prohibit him from coming to our house again, he insisted that he had to come to finish the job.

The first consideration that has to be made here is about the importance of the concept of race in the construction of my body in the pieces of data such as the ones lived in Fieldnote 1, in which my brother calls me **Sandra de Sá**, the name of a racialized Brazilian female singer, and Fieldnote 4, where my mother calls me **neguinho** (little nigger), **nego sarará** (the same as "sarará criolo" in Fieldnote 1) and **nego safado** (naughty nigger). In view of this data, it is impossible not to see, just like Simakawa (2015) points, that cisgenerity, body and gender identity diversities are true challenges or critical intersectional vectors for our sociocultural analyses, especially in racialized contexts. As Moita Lopes (2006) has already taught us, our social identities are always **amalgamated**.

From my point of view, the best author who metaphorizes the concept of **intersectionality** is Piscitelli (2008). This thinker invites us to imagine several avenues where, in each of them, axes of oppression circulate. She states that, in certain places, these avenues intersect, and that the Others who find themselves at the intersection of these avenues must simultaneously face the flows that converge and that oppress them, not doubly, because identities cannot be accumulated, but **singularly**, **specifically** and **uniquely**.

The second consideration is a suggestion: I suggest that events like the ones described previously should be analyzed through a **racio-material perspective**, which is, in turn, an inspiration I take from Jonathan Rosa e Vanessa Díaz' (2020) concept of **racio-ontology**. According to these authors, the concept in question basically refers to the "fundamentally racialized grounding of various states of being", which they use

to analyze anthropological accounts of institutional racism and white supremacy in the juridical sanctions in the United States. These authors analyze several police cases with a racial profile, such as the one of Tamir Rice, a black American boy of just twelve years old who was killed by a police officer in no less than two seconds of approach for been mistakenly caught playing with a gun. Similarly, another case analyzed by them is that of a Latino man named Alejandro Nieto, who, after having to protect himself with his licensed taser from a dog attack, was killed by 14 of 59 shots fired by the police. He was also identified as a man carrying a gun. These cases, like so many others, show how

> […] *things*, including candy, soft drinks, sweatshirts, sidewalks, cellphones, and cameras are only constituted as such when they are inhabited and animated by—that is, indexically grounded in— normative whiteness (Rosa; Díaz, 2020, p. 122, emphasis in original).

It is in this perspective that I analyze my "whore shorts", my diadem, my gold and red cherry earring, my colorful scarf, and even my child pajamas in the events experienced in Belgium. In sexual terms, in contiguity with my color, these non-human materialities point to a "natural" black sexual appeal I have only for being black in Western cultures. This "natural" sexual appeal is confirmed by my nationality, the one I have for coming from a hot, welcoming, "open" and sexualized country: Brazil. This thought, in turn, is explicitly present in the popular racialized and racializing vocative/noun used by my own mother in Fieldnote 4: **nego safado** (naughty nigger).

In these cases, as expected, the process of abjection through which I go is **intersectional** because, when using speech acts that indicate the racialized cis-heteronormative binarism (**Sandra de Sá** vs. **Cazuza/Raul Seixas**; **nego safado/nego sarará/nego safado** vs. **puta**; **madame** vs. **monsieur** (sir)), my intra-actants do not reconstruct the "universal", so to speak, difference and sexual hierarchy in society. Rather, they reconstruct the racialized sexual difference and hierarchy: the white man, in the first place; the white woman, in the second one; the black man, in the third one;

and, in the last place, the black woman. For being seen as "an effeminate man", in Brazil and Belgium, due to the bodily signs I perform and for the materialities I wear or use in contiguity with my black body, I am constructed like the way black women's bodies are within these societies: (hyper)sexually. Thus, at the same time that I am objectified (Butler, 1999 [1990]) in terms of gender and sexuality, I am also (excessively) eroticized and violated (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) in racial terms, since, as Maldonado Torres (2007, p. 248-249) writes: "men of color are feminized and become for the ego conquiro fundamentally penetrable subjects".

3 Conclusions

The question that guided me during the development of this work was: **How do the intra-actants of my professional and family contexts construct my body as a black non-binary person in-by the use of binarized and binarizing vocatives and nouns in our everyday intra-actions?** In summary, the binarized and binarizing vocatives and nouns construct my black non-binary body in-by the oscillation or intercalation of the interpellative chain, **motivated by the bodily signs and/or materialities I perform and/or by the non-human bodies worn/used in contiguity with own body**, which are also binarized and binarizing in-by the (cis-)heteronormative ideology and, therefore, (meta)pragmatically evaluated here in a relation of contrast and indexical disjunction.

To facilitate the understanding of this complex process, I present the last figure of this study, Figure 12. It is a scheme based on one of the corporeal-identity constructions that most affected me lovingly and intellectually during the conduct of this study: the event in which I was called **Luiza** by my mother during my stay in Belgium. The idea of creating this scheme was strongly inspired by Pinto (2020):

Figure 12 - Scheme of the corporeal-identity construction in-by the colonial and (cis-) heteronormative ideology in an everyday intra-action.

Author: Plaza, 2022.
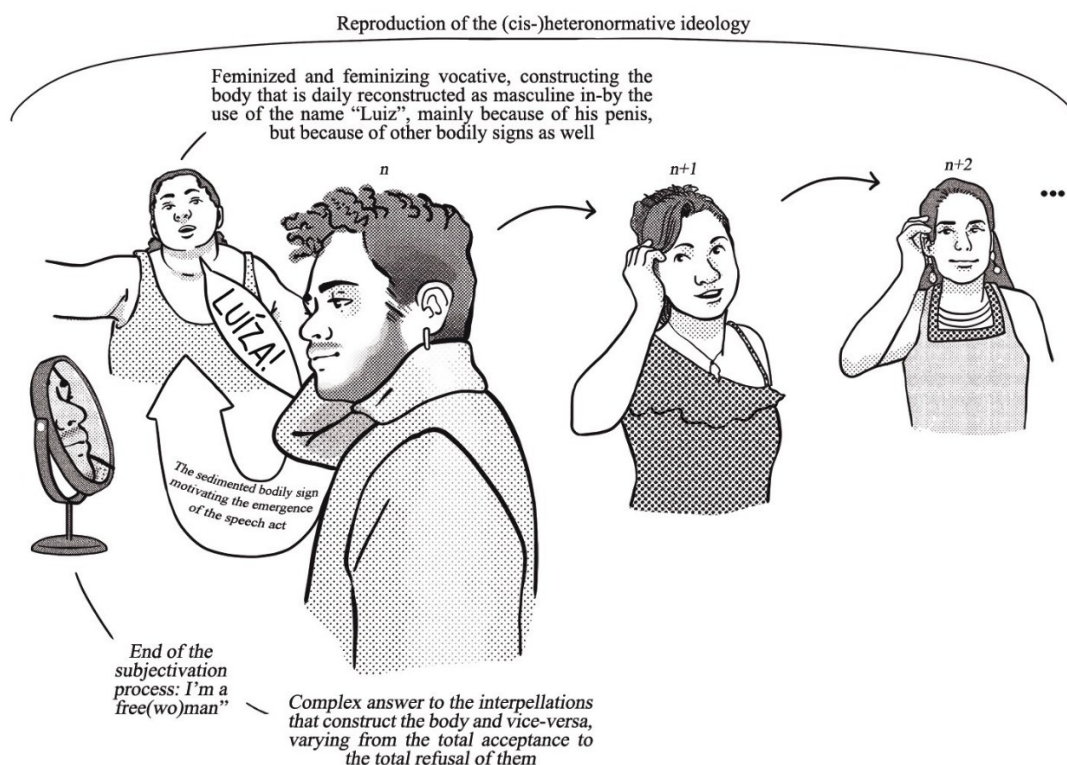
As it is possible to see in the scheme, in the intra-action in question, the intra-actant, in this case, my mother, who has commonly called me **Luiz (Neto)**, since before I was even born, due to the penis shown in my ultrasound exam (Figure 1), calls me **Luiza**. This happens due to the bodily sign that I perform in this situation: the touching of my hair in a certain way, as well as other bodily signs and (non-)human materialities feminized by the (cis-)heteronormative ideology and that, therefore, also feminizes.

The performance of this corporeal sign (n-th) points to other similar and ideologically sedimented performances performed by other occurrences of a broader social type, in the specific case of the intra-action at stake, the Woman, who does not exist, as has already affirmed Derrida (1994). First, it points to my aunt **Neidy** (n+1st), considered feminine by my mother and other people, among several reasons, because she was always worried about her hair. Secondly, it points to another (meta)pragmatic bodily occurrence, the one performed by **Glória Pires** (n+2nd), a famous Brazilian

actress my aunt used to admire. **Glória Pires**, in turn, also learned to be, to perform, a woman based on other female occurrences (...). In other words, the occurrences at play, me, my aunt, **Glória Pires**, form the female (meta)pragmatic body model, the "Woman", since she is not naturally real. There is not a feminine or a masculine identitarian essence, an inner core, an inner substance, etc.

Thus, from this work, I conclude that both language and matter/body construct one another **mutually**, in my specific case, in a relation of contrast and indexical disjunction. To be a validated occurrence of a man or woman is a case where people perform their genders in a relation of similarity and of indexical junction to the (proper) names they are called, and, thus, indexically constructed.

The part of the scheme where I look at myself in the mirror is a topic for another article to come. An article about the effects of language on the construction of my identity from a gay person to a non-binary one.

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