

Where the striptease ends

“It’s the theatrical / Comeback in broad day / To the same place,
the same face, the same brute / Amused shout:/ ‘A miracle!’”

Sylvia Plath

“Is that all there is to a fire?”

Peggy Lee

The seduction is theatrical. It slowly takes place in a ritual staged with time and attention. Each gesture is intended as a carefully selected revelation, instigating the apprehension of the whole, but “only the parts can be seen”. In striptease, one piece of clothing is slowly removed at a time, seducing through nudity, which may or may not be complete. It never does, in Mariana Destro's work. Even though she exposes herself like that, we don't see it all — “it is more beautiful this way”, she says.

Fantasy and identity engage in eroticism and symbolic terms consummated in *Nonada* (2019 – 2021), a hypermedia work that simulates Mariana's desktop. After months of experimentation in digital file production, her desktop is also her studio. It brings together, besides authorial productions, references, personal and found files, and work elements. Which, in a certain way, translates her entire work, made of cultural references and appropriations. *Nonada* may be an artful presentation of the research done just before and during the years of its production, but more than that, it is a generous overture to the artist's intimate space of poetic construction.

Out of reason, dreams, tarot cards and personal symbols take on digital formats and give rise to interpretations for the artist's psyche. And so one navigates through the work, among texts, images, videos, gifs, audios, and music, arbitrarily relating the arranged pieces and intuitively establishing one's own connections. The dreams, kept in a folder, tell stories lived in the unconscious, to the sound of *Journey in Satchidananda* (1971), by Alice Coltrane, over the image of the sea. The tarot cards, on the other hand, hide intimate stories of casual encounters apparently predicted by the oracle, as suggested by the end of the story in the card The Sun. If the works previous to *Nonada*, in the same year, show Mariana in front of the camera, performing like camgirls while investigating such practice, here she reveals thoughts and desires behind the exposition: “not only do I want to seduce them, but I want to be legitimized by my work”, in one of her texts.

As if telling the intentions behind the predecessor *Por meio deste trabalho desejo seduzir* (2019), *Nonada* also focuses on themes that run through other past works, such as *Floating gaze* (2018), *Rainforest* (2019), and *I AM THAT* (2019). In *Floating gaze*, the exercise of camming and self-exposure is explored and performed for the first time, in search of a coherent way of self-representation while the logic of the gaze hangs towards the male exploitative logic. In *Rainforest*, this logic is located, by the artist, in Western epistemology and its interferences in the Global South, illustrated in quotations from European authors who have defined the way Brazil is, even today, understood. These quotes invade Mariana's images as Maria Padilha, with a long brunette wig, in a tropical and artificial setting set up for the webcam presentation; Maria Padilha, as if she could challenge the gaze, even if immersed in contradictions. In *I AM THAT*, the artist questions the value of

presence in virtual sex interactions in a video that is simultaneously exhibitionist and meditative. The body-landscape with which Mariana interacts breathes in a deep rhythm, harmonized with references to meditative practices that integrate the work. The title, a translation of *so ham*, a Hindu mantra associated with the sound of breathing, could reverberate the passage from Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963): "I am, I am, I am", at the moment when the protagonist, so close to death, hears, in her breathing, the beats of her heart.

The relationship developed between identity and representation throughout her recent production is, then, made transparent in the desktop about the dynamics existing between the deep and true desires and the image we build for ourselves (or between the id, ego, and superego). The artist shows that her desire to seduce is the desire to recreate certain narratives and retell her story. To seduce to deceive the eye, by the power of determining what can be seen. To not only affirm her subjectivity, constituted under the political tensions of the gaze but dissolve it between life and death drives, so intimately active in eroticism; in a brief taste of political freedom.

Striptease is the central figure of *Nonada*, elaborated conceptually among the various pieces that mention it. In the text of *Le Striptease* (1988), by Sophie Calle; in the story told of Oshun and Oya; in the appropriated excerpt from the film *Strip-tease* (1963), by Jacques Poitrenaud, to the sound of the homonymous song in the voice of Nico; in *Lady Lazarus* (1965), by Sylvia Plath, in the verses quoted by Mariana; in the figures displayed on the desktop, recurrent in the artist's visual work, such as the wig and Swiss cheese plant (one for fantasy, the other for the mythical around sex). The dreams and stories in the tarot cards describe erotic experiences that can also be read from the perspective of striptease. Described and referenced in so many ways, striptease becomes a means of time management and expectations by the performance itself, tuning past and future, life and death. While Sophie Calle's text corresponds to an adventure, in Sylvia Plath's (this part being omitted in the excerpt available in *Nonada*), it is a metaphor for the spectacularization of death concerning the body that can be constantly re-enacted. It is a gradual revelation by layers, incorporated to *Nonada*'s access, that between one file and another, as the work is explored, reveals more of Mariana's universe, strategically presented by constructing itself within these relations, as in curation.

Mariana, as a curator herself, associates artistic and curatorial research by organizing such references directly and intentionally in her production. Thus, *Nonada* seems to produce a kind of milestone in her work, which concentrates, besides poetic issues, practices that define research: selection, appropriation, and articulation of already existing elements, reinscribed in other narratives. If the nature of the production of images of women in the Global South is implied in the gazes imbricated in pre-existing structures of domination, the artist is concerned with determining other points of view. She formulates her own image by actively reading elements from her universe, among books, films, music albums, and other visual artists, crossed by elements that challenge rationality (such as dreams and the oracle) for a critical and epistemological stance on experience and recognition.

In a single file, Mariana exposes her body and her image in an exchange of nudes logged by an archived online chat. This conversation produces some comments about striptease and the articulation of an experience through fragments of a whole. The man complains that Mariana never lets herself be seen in full, rather she instigates, seduces. She handles the interaction. She says, "you

just have to put the pieces together, then you can see me as a whole". When she receives the nude, a framed photo of a penis, she remembers Nagisa Ōshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), an erotic and brutal film based on the story of Sada Abe, a Japanese woman who murders her lover, cuts off his member, and keeps it in her purse. This memory makes the nude seem severed as well, as an independent image of a body transformed into an object. Like a revelation of the poetic thought about her production, this image indicates something about the others: they are all fragments of something, cut, framed, and edited, while recognizing a possible violence. And so, Mariana strategically articulates the presentation of these images and does not allow herself to be captured —

Here ends the striptease.

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