Before the Performance: contributions of speculative pragmatism to the sociology of art

Daniela Felix Martins[I]

[I]Universidade de Brasília – UnB, Brasília/DF, Brazil

ABSTRACT – Before the Performance: contributions of speculative pragmatism to the sociology of art – The aim of this paper is to analyze the main aspects that constitute the *performance experience*, as well as to examine the contributions of speculative-pragmatism to the renewal of the field of sociology of art. The text is structured in three parts: 1) a contextualization of the work within the scope of the research project *Protocols for the Musealization of Performative Actions in Public Art Museums* and its problematic from the sociological point of view; 2) a definition of the concept of experience; 3) verification of the analytical yield of this concept for research in performance arts. As a main conclusion, the text sought to systematize the ways in which pragmatic-speculative sociology may provide access to the complex networks of actors and social practices involved in contemporary artistic production.

Keywords: Art of Performance. Sociology of Art. Speculative Pragmatism. Social Theory. Art Theory.

RÉSUMÉ – Devant la Performance: contributions du pragmatisme spéculatif à la sociologie de l'art – Ce texte vise à analyser les principaux aspects qui constituent *l'expérience performatique*, ainsi que les apports du pragmatisme spéculatif au renouvellement du champ de la sociologie de l'art. Le texte est structuré en trois parties: 1) contextualisation du travail dans le cadre du projet de recherche *Protocoles de muséalisation des actions performatiques dans des musées publics d'art* et sa problématique du point de vue sociologique; 2) définition du concept d'expérience; 3) vérification de l'efficience analytique de ce concept pour la recherche en art performatique. Comme conclusion centrale, il s'agit dans ce texte de systématiser les formes mises en oeuvre par la sociologie pragmatique spéculative qui permettent de donner accès aux réseaux d'acteurs et de pratiques sociales complexes engagés dans la production artistique contemporaine.

Mots-clés: Art de la Performance. Sociologie de l'Art. Pragmatisme Spéculatif. Théorie Sociale. Théorie de l'Art.

RESUMO – Diante da Performance: contribuições do pragmatismo especulativo para a sociologia da arte – O texto pretende analisar os principais aspectos que constituem a *experiência performática*, bem como analisar as contribuições do pragmatismo-especulativo para renovação do campo da sociologia da arte. O texto estrutura-se em três partes: 1) contextualização do trabalho no âmbito do projeto de pesquisa *Protocolos de musealização de ações performáticas em museus públicos de arte* e a sua problemática desde o ponto de vista sociológico; 2) definição do conceito de experiência; 3) verificação do rendimento analítico desse conceito para a pesquisa em arte performática. Como conclusão central, o texto buscou sistematizar as maneiras pelas quais a sociologia pragmática-especulativa pode fornecer acesso às complexas redes de atores e práticas sociais envolvidas na produção artística contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: Arte da Performance. Sociologia da Arte. Pragmatismo Especulativo. Teoria Social. Teoria da Arte.

Introduction

> Performative practices produce a form of something that is (yet) to come. It provides a (preliminary) reality for something that is only imagined by performing it as concrete (Mohren; Herbordt, 2017, p. 220).

This paper aims to present some results obtained within the research project *Protocols for musealization of performative actions in public art museums* (CNPQ – Public Notice nº 18/2021). Composed of an interdisciplinary team (art historians, museologists, conservators, information scientists and social scientists), the research is in the stage of developing categories of analysis.

In this direction, it is intended, on the one hand, to approach the different dimensions involved in the inventorying of the performative art, as well as to examine the analytical yield of the notion of *experience* for this inventorying process. On the other hand, it is intended to analyze the contribution of the speculative-pragmatic perspective to the field of sociology of art through the development of a case study based on documentary sources. This is, therefore, a theoretical research work, but it aims at identifying methodological paths for the deepening of empirical research.

In an attempt to advance in this double task, of experimenting with the possibilities of inventorying performative works and of thinking through the theoretical assumptions of this experimentation, the text strives to develop some central questions, namely: which actors and practices become relevant in the course of the possible modes of *performative experience*? How to make the ephemeral last? How to translate performance into museum object? How to associate the practices of art conservation with the changes necessary for new exhibitions of the collected performances? Even, what are the criteria of pertinence and validity that preside over the process of musealization of performance art, regarding property, work and authorship? We can also ask ourselves, in the course of other possible modes of performative experience, what are the effects of low legitimacy, and then disqualification of certain artistic forms and situations for its practitioners (artists and institutions)? In attempting to analyze these questions posed by performance art, it is intended not only to inscribe an object of study for

the sociology of art, but also to develop a point of view for the realization of that sociology.

In this sense, this paper aims to present the contributions of speculative pragmatism (Debaise; Stengers, 2016) to the sociology of art, by thinking the performance by its modes of development in *experienciable* terms. That is, we will seek to think performance art from the pragmatist concept of *experience*, which forces us to make relevant the *processes of production of difference* through which the performative experience acquires continuity and transformation into new experiences. In this way, the notion of experience, in the speculative-pragmatic key, is linked both to what produces difference and to what is constructed in the production of difference. The very *reality* of what becomes performance is then linked to the modes of propagation of the experience and, therefore, to the processes of difference production.

In the case of the performance, an art in the process of institutionalization[1], it means to pay attention to the work of musealization practices when seeking to inscribe the performative experience as museum object, but it also means to become involved with the problems raised when considered object of rejection or crime. In this way, thinking about performance art from the pragmatist concept of experience, involves tracing its respective *practical consequences*, its varied productions of difference. Or, as James (2000, p. 25) advises, when we are faced with a challenge or problem, we must ask ourselves: "what difference will be produced in practice?".

The fact is that, by putting thought to the test of practical consequences, for what will matter, in pragmatism, the deeds and effects of experience begin to figure creative paths that demand attention to the particularities of each situation, attention to encounters, surprises, imbroglios, etc., and to the entanglement of the different actors and social practices mobilized.

To follow the experience

In the key of speculative pragmatism it is necessary, therefore, *to follow the experience*. Which involves an *openness of thought* (Savransky, 2017; Stengers, 2010) or a *letting be attracted* (Whitehead, 1978), that is, it involves the cultivation of a conduct elicited by the effects of following expe-

rience as a *process*, as that which propagates and connects from other experiences. In the case of performance, it resembles an invitation to attend the expression of the problems raised by the practical consequences of *existing under the amazement of ceasing to be*: either through the challenges faced by musealization practices in finding ways to produce it as a museum object, or through the imbroglios in situations in which it may be valued by the sign of rejection or offense. Thus, to follow the performative experience, it is necessary to become available to the processes of transformation and passage between art and non-art and the risks that emerge from these processes.

Moreover, given the increasing multiplication and complexification of practices that make up the universe of contemporary art, in which performance art emerges as an epitome, a speculative-pragmatic attitude could provide a renewal to sociological thinking. Once conventionally articulated to the restricted social space of modern art – sparsely populated, limited to a handful of central geographical areas (Canclini, 2012; Henich, 2008; Zolberg, 1990) –, and also to sociological pretensions to formulate a general and synthetic theory (Alexander, 1987; Corcouff, 2001; Dosse, 2018; Latour, 2012), it is sought to reduce art to a set of explanatory models (processes of reproduction of social stratifications; logics of liking; morphology of publics and cooperative processes in organizational environments)2, which lose in analytical yield when we consider the transformations launched in this universe.

In general terms, the contemporary art universe has transformed the conditions for thinking about art. First, because artists themselves have taken the various ramifications of institutional criticism as material for their works (Bishop, 2012; Sansi-Rocca, 2015; Bueno; Sant'Anna; Dabul, 2018). Second, because contemporary art circulates in a vast globalized market of works (Bueno, 1999; Moulin, 2007) and in dense networks with varied statuses – between cultural mediations of major contemporary art museums and assets in investment funds, but also between collectives of artists who experiment the street and other spaces as material and *locus* for their works (Felix Martins, 2017; Marguin, 2019; Sansi-Rocca, 2015; Silva, 2021; Tinoco, 2021), or even among social movements that conceive it as a platform for political action (Taylor, 2013; Heddon; Klein, 2012). And, finally, because contemporary art, especially performance, emerges as a social prac-

tice subject to significant rejection by the general public and other social actors – political groups, state agents, religious organizations, etc. (Heinich, 1999; Balieiro, 2022).

It is hoped that, by cultivating a speculative-pragmatic attitude, we can remain open to the complexifications and multiplications of the research field, not only to welcome new entities that arise in the field, but also to admit, as Isabelle Stengers (2007) called from the philosophy of William James, an *ethics of thought*. An openness to the possible that welcomes chance insofar as it refutes a determination and closure of the universe, but that also points to the level of effects and consequences by vectoring concreteness towards what comes to matter (Stengers, 2010), forcing one to act and simultaneously hesitate in the face of the possibilities of experience (Pastor, 2021).

We claim, therefore, a sociology of art oriented not to provide a key to absolute (representation, ideology, or falsification of reality), for which relations and their consequences do not matter, but rather to a certain pragmatics of thought. To think is always thinking in the *face of experience*. Insofar as thought is no longer outside experience, but is an integral part of a world experienced from *situated actions*. That is, it means to think "in the presence of all the entities, human and other-than-human, that constitute the situation" (Savransky, 2016, p. 109-110). Or, as Goffman (2012) suggested, thinking in experienceable terms we must ask ourselves, "what is happening here?" (Goffman, 2012, p. 30). Thus, the pragmatic attitude forces us to resist any temptation to turn thinking into a final operation that might be able to capture experience once and for all. For all thinking has become *experimental* and *situated*: thinking in which "[...] speculations can only be evaluated in terms of the effects and consequences they produce as part of the creation of world" (Halewood, 2017, p. 60).

This exercise of opening thought mobilizes another direction for the sociological theorization of art: instead of seeking a *telos* towards which a reality moves – be it the horizon of dispute or cooperation[3] –, a practice among practices, therefore, a process of production of difference. It allows, thus, to replace the notion of *finality*, of the reduction of the phenomenon to its normative dimension, by a process of learning, of *education of the attention* (Ingold, 2010), of making oneself responsive to the articulations and

modulations of the practices implied in the experience. To assume a speculative-pragmatic attitude means, then, to cultivate this openness of thought so that it does not simply report what we already consider world or reality.

For art practice, the pragmatic turn restores an ontological dimension, as it forces us to follow art's modes of engagement/activity in the world as "[...] way[s] of promoting an existence or making it more real" (Lapoujade, 2017a, p. 16). At the same time, it provides a pluralistic perspective, as there are several ways in which art(s) make a being exist (Souriau, 2020). It is thus an ontological question not in the sense of what art is, but what it does and what it makes to do. Or, agreeing once again with William James (2001, p. 30): "what decides the situation for us is not where it comes from, but where it leads".

In this sense, the sociology of art also becomes a creative part of artistic existences, as it starts, in a way, to advocate for the *right* to exist with more intensity, to legitimately occupy a place in the world. In other words, such pluralist ontology, which emerges from this speculative-pragmatic opening, transforms the relationship between sociological thought and art, by abandoning the foundation of *explanation* (finalism) to inhabit the territory of *instauration* (creative).

According to Souriau (1939, p. 67), the relationship between thought and art, as a matter of instauration, means to recognize that both "[...] aim at placing beings whose existence is legitimated by itself, through a kind of luminous demonstration of a right to existence that is affirmed and confirmed by the objective brightness, by the extreme reality of the instaured being". To instaurate is, thus, to assert the right to exist, to legitimize a way of occupying a space-time:

> From then on, to instaurate is like becoming the advocate of these still unfinished existences, being their spokesperson, or rather, their spokesperson-experience. We carry their existence as they carry ours. We share with them the same cause, as long as we can hear the nature of their claims, to see in these existences that which is unfinished, is necessarily to take their side. This is what it means to enter the point of view of a way of existing, not only to see where it sees, but also to make it exist more, increase its dimensions, or make it exist in another way (Lapoujade, 2017b, p. 90).

In this way, *to follow the experience* leads us to the *perspectivism of instauration*: there is no common world (or reality) from which each one appropriates to make it 'his/hers' world, but a multiplicity of ways to perceive it, to appropriate it, to explore its potentialities. However, we must also avoid the error of relativism: of believing that "[...] the perspectives add themselves from the outside to a preexisting world 'on' which they have a point of view. Again, they are not exterior to the world; rather, it is the world that is interior to the perspectives" (Lapoujade, 2017b, p. 57).

The varieties of the performative experience

Pragmatism throws us into a world that is not made without being at the same time undone, a world in which trajectories and coordinates can only be fabricated along the practical consequences of experience, freed from all preexisting form. In this way, the central concern of pragmatism is also accompanied by a problem of method: "[...] how can knowledge, truth, and belief be produced if the world in which we live is subject to perpetual novelty?" (Lapoujade, 2017b, p. 11).

To follow the experience would then involve a *method of practical evaluation*, because: first – as has been shown so far –, pragmatism examines ideas, concepts, philosophies, no longer from the horizon of their internal coherence or their rationality, but in function of their practical consequence. Second, as we intend to demonstrate, such a pragmatic position also becomes a tool for creation. Or, as Lapoujade (2017b, p. 14) suggested:

> Pragmatism is not a philosophy, but a method for choosing between philosophies. However, what it has to do – this time as a tool for construction – is to help us manufacture the ideas that can serve action or thought. It becomes, in this way, a tool of creation. [...] From a very general point of view, pragmatism, therefore, conceives the ideas as cause for action that allows us to create and evaluate. That is the great difficulty: not a method of creation, but a method *for* creation.

We intend, therefore, in the face of performative experience, to speculate *in the mode of* performance in order to renounce the traditional academic stance of seeing everything from nowhere. At the same time, by assuming the pragmatist grammar, to emphasize that knowledge processes are not passive, are not made of things that are in some objective reality, wait-

ing to be discovered by rational thought. Thus, the three performative events were brought together to the extent that their possible compositions and juxtapositions allowed us to *diagram*[4] the modalities by which performative experience unfolds. However, it is worth emphasizing that this reduced inventory has no pretension to exhaust the varieties of the performative experience, if much, it intends to explore some networks of relations between actors and practices that emerge from the experiences and progressively constitute them, either by undertaking ways of their propagation as contemporary art – to the limit of their full consolidation, or by contesting them.

Broadly speaking, performance intends to make something else art: the circumstances/ situations as material for artistic creation. In this way, each performance can be inventoried from the trajectories of actors and practices mobilized in an experience, but also by the connections that an experience establishes with other experiences. Moreover, performance involves an art/non-art distension, not only by the process to which all arts (and thoughts) are submitted: the success or failure of *instauration*. In performance, the art/non-art distension becomes a *motif*, a search for the variation between distances on the art/non-art scale, of sometimes fraying, sometimes moving or oscillating between distances, to experience from a *minimum* to an *extremum* of distension, or from a *minimum* to nothing. Performance is interested in the effects of framing (Goffman, 2012) and unframing as an artistic experience, as a way of imposing its reality on us.

Thus, the performative situations experiment, from the creation of a *scale of consequence,* by distending the artistic and social conventions limits. It is in this sense that we can understand it as a disruptive or problematic art, because it introduces an uncertainty in the (re)valorative distribution of the experienced reality. If it will be accepted in prestigious public or private art collections and what are the effects of this inscription, or if it will be treated as an offense and the consequences of being defined as a crime, or even, how will the audience behave in a given situation, in a docilized or untimely way? The fact is that performance establishes this space-time of heterogeneous coexistences (various actors and practices) from a risky trajectory.

In the first event, we find a situation in which the scale of consequence was experienced by betting on the maximum art/non-art distension in the

performative circumstance. In *Experiência n. 2* (1931), by the Brazilian artist Flávio de Carvalho, made in the São Paulo's capital, there was not the slightest concern in inscribing it as art, what mattered was its most complete novelty[5] for the production of the experience. We do not find the evocation of any artistic framing component, besides the performer's proposition (not revealed to the public).

According to Flávio de Carvalho (2001), in *Experiência n. 2*, the goal was to gather evidences for a study on crowd psychology. Making use of a kind of ethnomethodology[6] *avant la lettre*, Carvalho decided to test the "[...] aggressive capacity of a religious mass to resist the forces of civil law, or to determine if the force of belief is greater than the force of law and respect for human life" (Carvalho, 2001). On the occasion, the artist, wearing a green velvet hat, joined the parade of the *Corpus Christi* procession near the Cathedral da Sé. In addition to wearing the hat, something considered disrespectful in religious events and spaces of the time, Flávio de Carvalho walked through the procession on the wrong side of the road.

The unfolding of the experimentation can be collected in the book *Experiência n. 2*: *performed on a Corpus Christi procession. Uma possível teoria e uma experiência*, authored by the artist himself and one of the few records of the work, there are no visual records. In the book, Flávio de Carvalho (2001, p. 15) described the landscape that sparked the idea for the performance:

> It was Corpus Christi day; a pleasant sun bathed the city, there was a festive air everywhere; women, men and children moved garish colors of ordinary fabric; old black women in glasses and cassock or something; groups of colored men holding banners, candles; dirty little angels adorned with badly nailed gold paper stars; fat women dressed in pink, their hair neatly plastered, looked at the world around them with infinite piety. A succession of yellow gauze, black fabrics, velvets, lacy priests, starched, painted and rice-powdered children looked with amazement; fat, pale nuns moved like huge beetles, and the traffic stopped. I looked up into the cathedral and saw at the top of the staircase-beatified men that arranged with sexual care branches of leaves, flowers, golden fabrics and things around an altar. The vivid sunlight highlighted the purple rice dust of the black women and the dirty decorations on the facades.

Facing this landscape, Flávio de Carvalho took an electric tramway to reach the fundamental component of the experiment and, minutes later, re-

turned to the city center with the green velvet hat. There, near the Catedral da Sé, the characters described above were gathering for the *Corpus Christi* procession. As soon as the procession started its march, Flávio de Carvalho began his performance. According to the records, from the very first moments of the performative action, the audience reacted violently: "I saw only a tumult of arms, legs and people that kept shouting 'take off your hat'" (Carvalho, 2001, p. 17). In another excerpt, the artist reported: "The crowd bellowed 'lynch!' and a countless number of outstretched wrists, 'kill him... kill him!' shouted" (Carvalho, 2001, p. 23).

Thus, by effecting an abrupt transformation of the circumstance, *Experiment n. 2* erupted as a new perspective, by confusing the order of a certain plane of existence, it displaced the 'center of gravity' (the procession) by which actors and practices orbited. In other words, the artist decided to participate in the event by changing the point of view so that everything was perceived differently. In this case, it is possible to affirm that the artist's proposition modulated the performative experience: what would be considered real? Heresy and its consequent ecclesiastical punishment, or secularism and its guarantees for the respect of human life?

> I contemplated this curious scene for a few moments; a mass of people driven to the extreme of hatred, desiring to devour me and controlled by some emotion that kept them undecided; with my head uncovered, despite the tension of the moment, I don't know what kept me in place, probably a remnant of curiosity, I was about to decide whether or not to demand the return of my hat, when a young man who looked about 15 years old approached me and handed me the hat saying 'put it on if you're a man' (Carvalho, 2001, p. 23).

According to the note published in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* (1931), we found the following denouement:

> The believers, who were accompanying the procession, were revolted by this attitude and loudly demanded that he be uncovered. He, however, smiling at the mob, did not take off his hat, although the clamor of the crowd had already turned into an outright threat. It was then that numerous people tried to lynch him, investing against him. The boy went on the run, hiding in the dairy Campo Belo, located on the street of São Bento, where he was chased by the most exalted. The sub-delegate on duty at the Central Police Station came to the scene, where he gave the boy guarantees, protecting him against the wrath of the people. At the Central Police Station, where he was taken,

the victim of the crowd's exaltation declared to be Engineer Flávio de Carvalho, 31 years old, resident at Praça Oswaldo Cruz, 1.
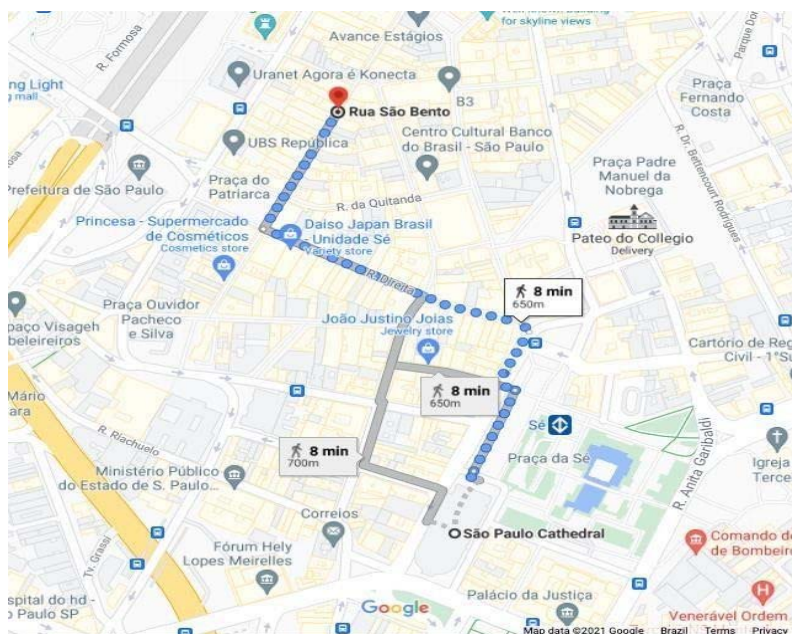

Figure 1 – Flávio de Carvalho's escape.
Source: Screenshot from *Google Maps* platform, Felix Martins (2022).

Figure 2 – 'In a procession. An experiment on the psychology of crowds that resulted in serious disturbance'.
Source: O Estado de São Paulo (June 9, 1931)[7].

In the second case, we find a situation in which the unfolding of the performative experience diagrammed another scaling. Initially we have a performative action that sought the *minimum* of distance, or an *extremum* of proximity in the art/non-art distension. However, due to the illegitimate participation of a non-artistic framing, this initial diagram was interrupted and then repaired by the action of another framing, the judicial litigation.

This is the performance *DNA de Dan* (2012), by the Brazilian artist Maikon Kempinski, arrested in 2017 during the exhibition of the work in Brasília/DF, accused of *obscene act* and then released after signing a circumstantial police report. In the state of Paraná, months after the exhibition in Brasília, Kempinski was prosecuted in a criminal action for obscene show. The legal case was closed only in 2020, when the 4th Turma Recursal dos Juizados Especiais do Tribunal de Justiça do Paraná decided to grant a petition for *habeas corpus* that requested the closure of the criminal action against the artist.

About the performance, it takes place in an artificial and transparent environment, and is divided into two moments. First, when the artist, motionless, waits for a substance applied to the body to dry, so then moves. In addition, after that, when the public is invited to integrate the space.

Figure 3 – DNA de Dan. Source: Maikon Kempinski's website[8].

The information about the unfolding of *DNA de Dan* was gathered from news articles published in the portals *Estadão*, on August 11, 2017, and *Conjur*, on June 23, 2020.

Excerpts from news report published by *Estadão* (Artist... 2017):

> On his naked body, a gelatin-based mixture, which dries completely in a period of three hours, is deposited. During this time, Kempinski remains motionless, with low respiration so that the substance does not break with the movement of the diaphragm. 'It is part of a research on shamanism as a creator of realities. In this case, I seek the archetype of the serpent, considered by many cultures as the founder of life. An understanding that emerged even before science discovered that the shape of DNA has a serpent-like silhouette intertwined', he says. [...] 'The nude is not even in discussion. It is just a resource to show that I am stripped of any culture. There is no sexual connotation. [...] In Brasília, the police broke the bubble and told me they were going to arrest me right there'. At the police station, the artist signed a circumstantial police report and was released.

Days after the incident, the then secretary of culture, Guilherme Reis, and the governor of the Federal District, Rodrigo Rollemberg, contacted the artist, both regretted the event. Rollemberg also wrote in a note: "the government believes, supports and encourages free artistic manifestation" (Artist... 2017).

In Londrina, the performance took place without police intervention. However, after the exhibition, a criminal action arose accusing the artist of having incurred in Article 234, sole paragraph, item II of the Penal Code "[...] according to which it incurs a penalty of six months to two years – or a fine – who performs, in a public place or accessible to the public, theatrical representation or film exhibition of obscene character, or any other show, which has the same character" (Santos, 2020). The performance, according to the complaint, "[...] caused a feeling of discomfort and embarrassment among those who witnessed it, notoriously offending decency" (Santos, 2020).

In examining the case, the rapporteur Aldemar Sternadt pointed out that the situation experienced by the artist in Londrina was "absurd and unreasonable":

> It is unacceptable, therefore, to imagine that half a dozen people bothered or sensitive to the artist's nudity, at their own discretion, would disturb an ar-

tistic presentation. The arrogance and ignorance are obvious! These are people who set themselves up as tutors of an entire population, hypocrites who believe they have the power to censor what their neighbors can hear, see and consume! (Santos, 2020).

Also according to the rapporteur: "[...] the disclosure itself was quite clear as to the content of the staging so that attended the show who desired so. The 'folder' distributed warned about 'artistic nudity' and also made express mention of age rating (16 years old)" (Santos, 2020).

Finally, a last excerpt from the prevailing vote follows:

> The ignorant or intolerant, it is said, is not the one who does not know something, but who sees his violence and prejudice as wisdom. The ignorant is easily recognized because he tries to destroy the knowledge that threatens to throw light on the darkness in which he dwells. After all, like mold, ignorance grows in darkness (Santos, 2020).

Thus, unlike *Experiment n. 2*, *DNA de Dan* convoked artistic framing components for the performative experience: performed in the premises of a recognized art institution, disclosed in the programming of events financed through public policies and in accordance with the indicative classification law. Moreover, performance art is on the rise in the most prestigious art institutions, a fact absent in the first half of the 20th century. However, in *DNA de Dan*, the components summoned have shortly lost the authority or *authorship*[9] in defining the experience.

Thus, if *Experiência n. 2* made us see the strength of religious passions over the strength of the law and the respect for human life, in *DNA de Dan* what we saw was the authoritarianism of the State acting against artistic freedom, copyright and, therefore, against the Brazilian legal system. If the initial proposition of the work sought a *minimum* of distance or an *extremum* of proximity in the art/non-art distention, State violence took it from a *minimum* to nothing. Legal operators restored its existence as an artistic work, and not as a criminal act, after its execution. In the meantime, it is worth mentioning that the circumstantial police report is still in Brasília.

Figure 4 – Maikon Kempinski in *DNA de Dan*. IC 10 - Arts Meeting, Salvador-BA.
Source: Photo by Leonardo Pastor (2016).

In the third event, we are invited to think about the performative experience from another diagram. In which the artistic framework enjoyed a sovereign authority. We refer to the performance *Tatlin's Whisper #5/ El Susurro de* Tatlin #5, by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, acquired by the Tate Modern Museum (London). In this case, the art/non-art distension was experienced as a *modulating harmonic progression*. In which these transpositions of tonality, sometimes art, sometimes non-art, sometimes document, sometimes work, vary according to the 'consensuses' in a *community of interpretation* (Lapoujade, 2017b). Indeed, in all the events presented, whether in the manner of the polemic in *Experiência n. 2*, or the litigation in *DNA de DAN*, we find communities of interpretation. For pragmatism, communities of interpretation are multiple, insofar as they are the result, always provisional, of a world to be made. Consequently, "[...] the unity of the agreement does not absorb the multiplicity of the ways of relating to it [...]. This is why we can say that communities are multiple, according to the signs with which they agree, and according to whether they close themselves in distrust (security) or open themselves to trust" (Lapoujade, 2017b, p. 112). Therefore, what matters are the signs in circulation in a community as what individuals exchange with each other, that is, it matters less the individuals in a community than the relationship that unites the individu-

als. Thus, by thinking in the mode of Bruguera's performance, we gain access to the process of building a community of interpretation by the *work of consistency* of musealization practices.

About the performance *Tatlin's Whisper #5/ El Susurro de Tatlin #5*, reference number T12989 in the Tate's collection, it is worth mentioning that it is part of a series of actions in which the artist activates, as a direct participatory experience, images that circulate in the press and other mass media (such as a molotov cocktail or a platform open to the public) and that, due to their presence and mass circulation, have lost their mobilizing power.

Paradoxically, however, in *Tatlin's Whisper* series, the images go through a process of *decontextualization*, in which the images are transposed from their everyday circulation and from the *event that gave rise to the news*, that is, from their non-artistic framing, to be "activated as realistically as possible in an art institution" (Perez Moreno, 2009), thus, betting on the sovereign legitimacy of the artistic framing for the success of the performance.

According to Bruguera, the proposition of this series of actions is the possibility of it working as a quotation. A "[...] visual quotation – it's an image that I saw on TV, on the news. And that's very important, because that's how can we transform our main source of political education or bad education, which is the news, into something else?" (Bruguera Tateshots, 2008). How to be taken by an experience that allows "[...] de-anesthetizing images of the past sedimented in the social imaginary with the intention of formulating a critical re-evaluation of the present?" (Bruguera, 2009).

In *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, for its live exhibition, two mounted police officers (one on a white horse and the other on a black horse) must be hired and brought to the museum. They patrol the space, guide and control the audience with the use of a minimum of six crowd control techniques learned during training at the police academy. This includes actions such as closing the entrances of the exhibition space, pushing the public forward with lateral movements with the horses, manipulating the public into a single group and surrounding them to compress the group, frontal confrontation with the horse, and separating the public into two distinct groups.

The techniques used by mounted police are commonplace at large public events. However, the artist is well aware that the experience of such forms of control changes radically according to the context in which they are encountered. The patrolling of mounted police at a sporting event staged in a liberal democracy, for example, is quite different from the patrolling at an unauthorized political demonstration under a more authoritarian regime. Such contextual particularities, mobilize yet another transposition of the performance by the action of a non-artistic frame: the wider political community in which the performance is performed.

In the documentation of the performance made available by the Museum, the action revealed certain particular characteristics in its London exhibitions. For example, the use of jocular humor by the British police as an additional method of keeping the crowd and the situation under control. This jocular mood was interspersed with more direct commands, with the audience following without resistance or remaining more cautious according to the momentum of the police officers on horseback. Thus, through this *modulating harmonic progression*, sometimes art, sometimes non-art, etc. *Tatlin's Whisper* put under examination the choreographed performances and experiences embedded in everyday reality and, in particular, offered possibilities for thinking about the complex relationship between state security agents and the people they aim to control.

Figure 5 – Tania Bruguera. Tatlin's Whisper #5 UBS Openings: Live – The Living Currency, Tate Modern.
Source: Photo by Tate & Tania Bruguera.

Figure 6 – Tania Bruguera. *Tatlin's Whisper #5 UBS Openings: Live - The Living Currency*, Tate Modern.
Source: Photo by Tate & Tania Bruguera.

Another aspect of the work is that the public should not be immediately aware that it is a work of art, and this condition figures as one of the contractual clauses with the Tate Museum. According to Bruguera, this condition allows a "[...] new experience for the spectator, which is linked to their media memory, rather than artistic. 'Oh, is this about controlling people? Is that about terrorism?'" (Bruguera Tateshots, 2008). All the possible modulations sketched by the audience matter.

According to Bruguera (2009):

> The most important element of this series is the participation of the spectator, who can determine the direction the work will take. The idea is that the next time that viewer is faced with a news story that uses images similar to the one he experienced, he will be able to perceive a certain personal empathy towards that distant event, and in front of which he would normally have an attitude of emotional disconnection or information saturation. The audience's experience in the work, allows them to understand the information on another level and take ownership of it because they have lived it.

The name of the series, *Tatlin's Whisper*, is also relevant to our analysis for two reasons. First, the title alludes to what the artist calls "[...] the current weakening of the impact of a moment in Western history in which great transformations occurred from social revolutions" (Bruguera, 2009). In this way, we can understand that *Tatlin's The Whisper* sought to high-

light the historical process by which previously radical avant-garde artistic practices, such as Vladimir Tatlin's art and architectural career, were domesticated and assimilated by more hegemonic cultural processes. According to Bruguera, the series explores how "the intensity, credibility, and exaltation of socialist revolutions", as with Tatlin's Tower (that was never built), were frustrated, and utopia begins to be rethought as the implicit effort of a weak 'whisper' (Bruguera, 2009). The second reason is the reversal that Bruguera seeks to establish, no longer the exaltation of monumentality, but the confrontation with failure:

> By conjuring Tatlin's avant-garde aesthetic project in its title, the series redefines his practice based on its failure rather than its projected monumentality. In the series 'Tatlin's Whisper', grand utopian schemes are transformed into small, ephemeral, almost impotent whispers. The series revisits an 'icon of the enthusiasm and grandeur of the Bolshevik Revolution – 'as she describes Tatlin – and reassesses 'the intensity, credibility, and exaltation of socialist revolutions', which, in many cases and as exemplified by the Monument to the Third International, [Tatlin's Tower] have been characterized by failure to implement utopian projects (Perez Moreno, 2009).

Thus, in comparison to *DNA de Dan*'s performance, we find similar but differently mobilized actors and social practices. In *Tatlin's Whisper*, the sovereignty of the artistic frame allowed the force/violence of the State to be added legitimately as a component of the work. Law was summoned not to restore its status as art, but to guide the activities of its musealization. That is, law was invoked as part of the formalization of commitments to the components of the work. It has become a tool so that with each new activation the performance can further its effects. Moreover, such a transformation has provided new connections and agency for the institutions. After all, it will be the Tate Museum, or another art institution, that will be responsible for managing these components in each performance execution. It is in this direction that we can understand how the process of musealization of the performance throws the museum into the set of entities involved (police, horses, public, the never completed Tatlin's Tower, the overwhelming circuit of images of repressive actions) in the activities of composition of the work. These entities, including the museum, are brought together in a trajectory, always risky, of realization of the work.

Regarding the protocols of musealization of performance, it is worth pointing out that the work can never be exhibited for its documentation (visual records). It can be represented by documentary material in the course of a lecture, but a clear distinction must be maintained between the work and its resulting images. In such a consensus, therefore, the compromise is sealed in which *Tatlin's Whisper* is only a work when activated. In other words, we are faced with a *speculative relationship* between record and performance. That is, before a bet on the unfinished nature of each activation of the performance, since the archives find the facts of the performative experience not as final or absolute, but as material for new experiences, as material for speculation, as ground for new experimentations.

In the contract that Bruguera developed to govern the transfer of the work, available on the artist's website[10], we find several unfoldings of this speculative relationship, namely:

a) Two mounted police officers will be hired to enter the exhibition space and will use, with the exhibition audience, crowd control techniques used at the police academy for political and/or public order demonstrations;

b) There should be a white horse and a black (or dark brown) horse;

c) The policemen must wear uniforms (of the country in which the performance will be activated);

d) Police officers must use at least 6 techniques (closing the entrance(s) to the space, pushing the audience with lateral movements using the horses, concentrating the audience in a group and compressing it into a circular formation with the horses, directly confronting the audience, dividing the audience into two clearly differentiated groups, etc.);

e) Under no circumstances may actors or persons, who are not active police officers at the time of the exhibition, be hired to perform the performance;

f) Each time the work is presented, a new set of police must be hired. The mounted police officers may not, under any circumstances, have participated in a previous edition. If the frequency of the exhibition reaches a format where police interventions exceed 6 times, a new set of policemen and horses must replace the previous one;

g) Each police exercise should not exceed 20 minutes in length, unless public reaction requires greater police participation.

Regarding exhibition rights, Bruguera agreed to provide the Museum with a certificate of authenticity and official recording photos of the performance, but retained the right to redo it whenever and wherever she wanted. Bruguera also secured a commitment from the Museum to follow a schedule, stipulating when and how the work could be mounted in future activations. This schedule also describes the materials that must be used (trained mounted police in uniform, no less than six crowd control techniques, and so on) and what the institution can and cannot do.

Another important dimension of the process of transmitting the performance to the Museum is the one concerning the status of the records made by the public itself. In article IV, paragraph "d" of the contract signed by Bruguera & Tate, we find the following formulation:

> The public is allowed to take as many photos (without flash) as they want, as well as record video and sound or any future mode of recording. They can display their recordings anywhere they want and sell them for their own profit to private collections, but never for public display (Conditions for showing Tatlin's Whisper #5 apud Tania Bruguera, 2009).

This authorization leads us to another transposition movement in the art/non-art distension. This new transposition occurs through the action of the audience, since there is the consensus that the audience is the author of its participation in the performance, and therefore of the production of its testimony. Thus, in Bruguera's work, we can identify an important element of contemporary art practices: the attempts to construct art works in *co-authorship* with the audience. But not only in the vague sense that the relational arts intend, that of conceiving the direct participation of the public in the work. Because it claims, above all, the strict sense of authorship in legal terms, that is, to the audience of *The Tatlin's Whisper* is assured the patrimonial rights of their participation in the performance. Unlike, for example, the shared participation with the Tate Museum, which owns the copyright of the performance under controlled conditions in the form of instructions for further activations, and thus pays for the whole process.

To preserve a performance, that is, to translate it as a museum object, means to produce consensus to guide decision-making for new exhibitions

of the work. For if these consensuses, including legal ones, are necessary for another activation of the performance to still be (or to also be) the performance acquired by the institution, future activations will inexorably be different from the *original one* (they will not be the same police, horses and audience, as well as, necessarily, another space-time contingency). In performance, paying attention to the processes of difference production is necessary – and even inevitable – for the work to continue to produce effects. It is, therefore, an ongoing process of managing the changing conditions of each work.

Final considerations

Being *before* the performance makes us, then, mediators or intercessors of a *trajectory of realization.* Both by the invitation to participate in the processes of intensification as an experimental work and, therefore, to take seriously the risks involved – the work ceasing to be recalcitrant, losing the ability to engage the community of interpretation (curators, conservators, museologists, historians and other art theorists, but also the public and performers, whether human or other-than-human) in new processes of production of difference. In addition, conversely, it is necessary to fulfill the demand to engage in processes of diminishment, processes by which the performative experience is dispossessed of the legitimacy of the artistic frame. Not only to make its defense, but also to witness what it lets us see in this minimal degree of existence, be it in the way of polemics, injustice, etc.

In short, from the perspective of speculative pragmatism, *to follow the experience* is never a one-way trajectory. For it forces us to replace the *synthetic* principle – the confirmation of what we already believe (or know) – by the cultivation of a *synaptic* principle for thought. A principle that involves a leap out of the certainties of an already finished world, but which finds openness to the entities (actors and social practices) mobilized by the movements of a world under construction, while also transforming thought into an ingredient of this world-making. By thinking of performance in experiential terms, that is, synaptically, we seek to build a sociology that advances by attempting to unfold the potentials for change in each process of establishing the works, and that takes into account the risks involved in the process. It is about forging a sociological sensibility that makes us available

to the processes of difference by which the performative experiment redistributes a reality, and that also offers access to a *pluralistic pattern* of world, from which sociology can no longer entail a reduction of varieties by the certainty of absolutes.

Notes

[1] We consider as institutionalization of performance the process of public and private collection of performance works beyond their representational indexes (photographic records, videos, material traces). This process began in the early years of the 21st century.

[2] About this important movement of consolidation of the sociology of art, it is worth mentioning the proximities between the sociologies of Pierre Bourdieu (1996) and Howard Becker (1982). For, often considered antagonistic, they share a common foundation: the institutional theory of art. According to Richard Shusterman (1998), Morris Weitz was the great exponent of this perspective. For Weitz, any attempt to establish the necessary and sufficient properties for the existence of art would be logically unrealizable, since there would be no essence to be defined. Following Wittgenstein's formulations, the author stated that the complex networks of similarities and family resemblances, through which works of art would be related, would provide all the available or necessary agreement to effectively employ or teach this generic concept. The dialogue with institutional theory allowed sociology to overcome the "reflex theory" (Heinich, 2008), as well as to develop empirical work, among which we highlight the work of Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu. However, it is worth noting that Becker and Bourdieu developed different forms of appropriation of institutional theory. That is, they developed their studies according to different paradigms of sociological theory, which resulted in a sociology of the art world, in Becker's case, and, in another   direction, in a sociology of the artistic field, by Pierre Bourdieu (Zolberg, 1990).

[3] We refer, again, to the sociologies of Pierre Bourdieu (1996) and Howard Becker (1982). Since, for the former, the *artistic field* is reproduced from disputes and conflicts, from symbolic struggles for the control of internal mechanisms of legitimation and consecration. It is, therefore, a restricted social space, founded on its own rules, whose access is allowed only to those who dominate the *habitus*. In Becker, differently from the restrictive structure of the field concept, we find less delimited limits between art and other dimensions of life

in society. Through the concept of *art world*, or rather, of *art worlds*, Becker intends to describe the dynamics of social interactions through the *cooperative actions* between individuals in each artistic world.

4   In Brian Massumi's speculative pragmatism (2011, p. 14), *diagramming* is a technique for extracting change potentials from an experience in order to channel them and make them available to the new experiences that will follow: "a technique that takes as its object the process itself, as the speculative-pragmatic production of oriented events of change".

5   Flávio de Carvalho is considered one of the pioneers of performance art. It is also worth mentioning that the term *performance art* emerged as a category in Art History in the 1960s.

6   I am referring to the similarity between Flávio de Carvalho's artistic propositions and the *experiments of rupture*, a methodology proposed by Harold Garfinkel's sociology. In ethnomethodology, rupture experiments are experiments in which social reality is violated in order to shed light on the *practical methods* (ethnomethods) by which people construct social reality (Garfinkel, 2018).

7   Available at: http://www.bienal.org.br/post/368. Accessed on: June 01, 2022.

8   Available at: https://maikonk.com/dna-of-dan. Accessed on: June 01, 2022.

9   This wordplay refers to the synonymy between *authorship* and *authority* explored in the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (2020). In *Leviatã: Matéria, palavra e poder de uma República eclesiástica e civil*, Hobbes took up the etymological identity, in Latin, between the terms *auctoritas* and *auctor*. This synonymy lies at the basis of Hobbes' well-known formulation: *Sed Auctoritas Non Veritas Facit Legem*, that is, authority, and not truth, makes the law. Thus, authority and authorship are creative activities in world-making. On the relationship between authority and authorship, it is also worth noting that in the complex processes of art production in the Renaissance, only the one who had the authority to do so could sign as the author of the work, even though many assistants worked on the production of the work. Cf. Flynn (2022).

10 Available at: https://www.taniabruguera.com/cms/files/tatlin s_whisper_tech_spec_1.pdf. Accessed on: June 01, 2022.

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Daniela Felix Martins is an associate professor at the Department of Sociology at the Universidade de Brasília (SOL/UnB). She holds a BA in Social Sciences from the Federal University of Bahia (2009), an MA (2012) and a PhD (2017) in Social Sciences from the same University. She held a sandwich PhD at the University of Roehampton (2016) and researched at the Live Art Development Agency (2016), in London. She did a Post-Doctoral Internship (PNPD/CAPES) at the Graduate Program in Translation Studies at the Universidade de Brasília (POSTRAD/UnB).
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3514-8497
E-mail: daniela.felix@unb.br

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