



A Performative Urban Intervention: displacements of a buffoon

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ABSTRACT – A Performative Urban Intervention: displacements of a buffoon – The article aims to investigate the *Bassibus* action, created and performed by the contemporary buffoon Leo Bassi, who travels through themes and problems that affect the place of the city and its inhabitants. An action that parodies the touristic activity, *Bassibus* promotes with its participants a dynamics of occupation of the city and questioning about the forces that affect it. It is concluded that this Bassi's *praxis* creates an artistic phenomenon that touches the political as an intersubjective process of reconfiguration of the perceptible and the thinkable, carrying a call for confrontation and resistance, both to the artist and to the spectator/participant, in the face of capture devices and expropriation of desire.

Keywords: **Buffoonery. Urban Intervention. Performativity. City. Anti-tourism.**

RÉSUMÉ – Une Intervention Urbaine Performative: déplacements d'un bouffon – L'article vise à étudier l'action du *Bassibus*, créée et réalisée par le bouffon contemporain Leo Bassi, qui parcourt des thèmes et des problèmes qui affectent la place de la ville et ses habitants. Action qui parodie l'activité touristique, *Bassibus* favorise avec ses participants une dynamique d'occupation de la ville et la remise en cause des forces qui l'affectent. Il est conclu que cette pratique de Bassi crée un phénomène artistique qui touche le politique en tant que processus intersubjectif de reconfiguration du perceptible et pensable, portant un appel à la confrontation et à la résistance, à la fois l'artiste et le spectateur/participant, face aux dispositifs de capture et expropriation du désir.

Mots-clés: **Buffoonery. Intervention Urbaine. Performativité. Ville. Antitourisme.**

RESUMO – Uma Intervenção Urbana Performativa: deslocamentos de um bufão – O artigo objetiva investigar a ação *Bassibus*, criada e executada pelo bufão contemporâneo Leo Bassi, que transita por temas e problemáticas que afetam o lugar da cidade e a seus habitantes. Ação que parodia a atividade turística, o *Bassibus* promove com seus participantes uma dinâmica de ocupação da cidade e o questionamento sobre as forças que nela incidem. Conclui-se que essa *práxis* de Bassi cria um fenômeno artístico que tangencia o político como processo intersubjetivo de reconfiguração do perceptível e do pensável, carregando um chamado de enfrentamento e resistência, tanto ao artista como ao espectador/participante, em face dos dispositivos de captura e expropriação do desejo.

Palavras-chave: **Bufonaria. Intervenção Urbana. Performatividade. Cidade. Antiturismo.**

Introduction

A tour bus with fifty passengers crosses the streets of a large city, highlighting the architectural dynamics and urban plans of the places where it passes. At each stop, the tour guide emphasizes the historical and economic characteristics of the place, as well as its social implications. This would be an anodyne route linked to tourist entertainment until the places where it takes its crew are observed: works carried out with large expenditures of public money and only to serve a small part of the population, neighborhoods whose inhabitants are being expelled by real estate speculation, and green areas felled in the name of unbridled construction.

In this inventory of urban aberrations, characters of everyday life cross each other, such as businessmen and politicians accused of corruption, and also citizens on the margins of economic and social processes, anonymous victims who try to create bodies of resistance against brutalization with little resources. The tour leader: the French-Italian buffoon Leo Bassi.

This article focuses on the *Bassibus* action, investigating how this artistic work, created and performed by Bassi, approaches themes and problems that affect all of us, such as the artist's citizen responsibility, the models of expropriation and totalizing organization of the urban space, its dynamics of movement and exclusion, as well as the capacity of artistic experience to promote symbolic occupation and the reappropriation of places formerly confiscated by shadowy interests.

Bassibus: an anti-tourism

Born in 1952, within a circus family whose records of performance date back to 1850¹, Bassi acted early in his career as a juggler and a clown. However, from the 1970s onwards, the artist began to exercise, far from the circus tradition, the necessary liberation to develop a more authorial work through the comic and theater games, in the search for other ways of relation with the spectators.

Creating provocative scenic experiences, often marked by shock and awe, Leo Bassi has named himself as buffoon. By articulating events, norms, and vices of social order, Bassi returns them to the spectator in a comic and

corrosive manner, operating in ways to make criticism and deviant from common sense – even transposing the classically conceived image of the buffoon figure, expanding the field of buffoonery².

Bassi commonly shows up wearing a suit, a tie, and social shoes, clothing that is far removed from the monstrosity imagery carried by the buffoons. The artist clarifies that the option to use a discreet costume, different from the eccentric characterization of buffoonery, starts from a premise of enhancement of relations with the audience, generating surprises on the spectator with the aim of “widening the field of the game” (Bassi, 2001, p. 34).

The researcher Elizabeth Lopes (2001), in turn, emphasizes that the ambiguity caused by buffoonery does not remain restricted to a scandalous corporality or to histrionic gestures, but it compiles visions of the world capable of representing the human being in its complexity and amorality, species of a mirrored surface capable of showing to men his inverted and degraded portions.

Thus, following the provocative perspective of buffoonery, Bassi performs the first tour of the *Bassibus – Travel to the worst of Madrid*, in 2004, offering what he claims to be a worldwide novelty: the political tourism. Using a specially prepared bus to drive around fifty participants to a tour guided by the artist and a team of collaborators, the buffoon emphasizes that this work is a mixture of journalism, spectacle, and provocation. The trip will take its passengers to the heart of real estate scandals, historical absurdities related to the past of the Spanish people and spaces of the city whose processes of urbanization and accelerated construction have been the target of accusations of over-billing and political corruption.

This *Bassibus*'s first trip was organized on the eve of the March 2004 Spanish election, for, according to the buffoon: “Realizing the discouraged state of the opposition in Spain, the *Bassibus*, in its humble proposal, intends to revive the rebellious and critical spirit without which democracy cannot develop”³.

Presenting different itineraries and routes published only moments before each trip, the *Bassibus* keeps in its proposal the ironic and provocative input of Bassi's works. On his website, the artist sarcastically

argues that this action is in line with the Spanish tourist trends and their economic importance, revolutionizing the way to enjoy Madrid – the first city to receive the work that would later be held in Barcelona, Lanzarote, Mallorca, and Murcia – offering participants the exploration of what Bassi defines as “[...] asphalt jungle and its particular fauna: especially its predators”⁴.

In this analysis, I will take a detailed look at the *Bassibus* tour held in the Spanish city of Barcelona, in July 2005, an action that generated a short film called *BASSIBUS in Barcelona*, a work of documentary genre that I understand as surpassing the function of video graphic recording, operating as a spatial-temporal unfolding of Bassi’s action.

Available in one of the largest web video platforms⁵, this documentary extends the scope of the denunciation produced during the tour, allowing the facts it covers as well as the provocative nature of Bassi’s performance to be conveyed in a virtually unrestricted way. This factor reinforces the public dimension of this artistic work and provides new exchanges within the collectivity, reverberating its questioning powers beyond the moment of its accomplishment, widening its range of reach to places and people who did not participate in the tour experience in person.

The character of insertion of the *Bassibus* in the public dimension can be observed from its initial moments when, before the participants enter the tourist bus, Bassi delivers a speech in the street. Wearing black trousers and a white shirt in a social style, as well as his traditional red tie – which gives a serious air to the buffoon –, the artist speaks with a microphone, echoing his voice through the public space.

He stands on an elevation that leaves him above the others, as if he occupies a position on a platform – it is not possible to claim it with certainty in the film, but the buffoon seems to use a bin as a pulpit. Bassi ironically clarifies that “It will be a trip to another planet. A different planet than ours. A happier planet, a better planet. A village of people who have nothing to do with normal people like us, starving like us [...]”⁶.

When they take their places on the bus, the participants receive from a friendly woman, dressed in a blue uniform that resembles that of a flight attendant, paper bags that bring the teasing *BASSIBUS: use in case of ideological nausea*, which, together with the announced proposal about this

work and the introduction speech made by Bassi, anticipates the critical bias about the public space and its flows, which will be the main motto of this artistic action.

Certeau (2014) emphasizes that the City would be constituted not by agglomerations of people or institution of the public powers, but by sets of operations and densification of intersubjective exchanges. In this sense, the public space is shaped by its multiplicity of flows, not as watertight territory. Among these dynamics, the author claims that some bundles of exchanges would stand out as *identitarian flows* of that respective collectivity, constructing the notions of a city tradition, with values and standards common to its subjects. Therefore, it is on these *traditional and identitarian* flows that the *Bassibus* action seeks to generate intervention.

And thus, Bassi's bus continues to take its passengers to the first venue⁷ to be visited by the excursion, the Poblenou neighborhood, an old industrial district located near the coast and home to the favela called Mina, one of the poorest in Barcelona, a community that had been largely affected a year before by the 22@ urban plan. Also known as the *District of Innovation*, its architectural project promoted the expelling of hundreds of low-income families from their homes in the name of creating a territory that would be transformed into a business center, a shopping and a hotel's construction area, a public initiative aligned with major real estate interests.

The buffoon begins the *Bassibus* trip denunciation aspects that will constitute the main focus of the excursion: the adoption of a public administration model that privileges tourism and the investments of private companies in projects of spatial reorganization that contribute, over all, to the increase of the city's economic and social inequalities.

Along the initial route, while still in the bus, the flight attendants display posters with photographs of Spanish occupiers of political positions and businessmen involved in the denunciation that will be carried out along the action – giving their names and relevant data of their biographies, as their connections with companies and political parties, and also the public offices they have held, reports of corruption and administrative impropriety, as well as the legal proceedings against them.

In the specific case of the *Bassibus*, it can be observed that the buffoon initially creates a very peculiar procedure to the exercise of his candid talk,

using the display of signboards with the faces of politicians and businessmen involved in the denunciation stamped in them. The artist also performs the oral transmission of information that he understands as necessary so that the viewer/participant can apprehend the scope of existing illegal relations between these public figures and the corruption issues that affect and constitute the venues that will be visited by this political tourist excursion.

Thus, Bassi is able to carry to the final consequences his artistic options, being these understood as denaturalization exercises on the *status quo*, although his performances imply him numerous risks, contaminating both the artist and the spectator/participant by this kind of call to responsibility of resisting in the face of capture and expropriation devices.

In this sense, I understand that Bassi, in creating his strategies, generates an artistic phenomenon that is close to what Caballero (2011) would call *artist's citizen responsibility*, in a perspective in which art incites reflections that go beyond the aesthetic classifications to enter the field of conviviality as a space for dialogue and encounter. In the author's words, one of the powers of affection of art, in its latent force of intervention in the perceptions of the individuals of a certain society, would come to the understanding that (us) artists:

[...] are all citizens who, through their position in the artistic gallery – which is a platform for political excellence – have a privileged space to be able to put the thought or what is meant, in a direct way, as through a metaphorical dimension (Caballero, 2011, p. 203).

Since the exercise of citizenship implies rights and duties, pointing to the participation of subjects in the dynamics of public life, the *Bassibus* places the spectator/participant at the center of an experience that insists on confronting the silencing and apparent naturalness of harmful processes which affect all of us, collectively calling for critical positions.

Taking up the example of the *Bassibus* excursion in Barcelona, along the way to Poblenou, in addition to dealing with the controversial 22@ urban project, pointing out its socioeconomic implications, Bassi highlights the holding of the Forum of Cultures, an event organized by the Barcelona municipal government in 2004. Officially based on the promotion of sustainability and multiculturalism, this initiative would have allowed, in practice, the valuation of public lands in favor of private economic interests,

through the construction of a large space by the sea surrounded by hotels, technology companies and convention buildings.

The buffoon emphasizes the fact that the construction of the Forum's premises, occupying a large area of public land, had definitely cut off the landscape, preventing the poor residents of the Mina favela from reaching the coast. Therefore, the first stop of the *Bassibus* in Barcelona, held in the architectural area of the Forum of Cultures, leads the participants to a place capable of generating debates and inquiries about topics of public interest and collective interest, especially concerning gentrification processes.

Bidou-Zachariasen (2006) clarifies that, more than a physical and economic phenomenon, gentrification has strong cultural and social characteristics, being considered as one of the main strategies of globalized capitalism when a given urban area is requalified by a double process: on the one hand, demand is created by the real estate sector, which invests in the construction of middle and high standard housing, stimulating the occupation of these places by the middle class. On the other, starting from negotiations between the governmental sphere and the private sector, there is the offer of new services, safety models sold as more effective and spaces aimed at consumption (shops, restaurants, malls) and entertainment (cultural centers, bookstores, museums, art galleries).

In order to better understand the implications of gentrification, I would like to highlight the notion of city, developed by Certeau (2014). He states that the city space carries within its scope the project of articulating and overcoming the contradictions arising from urban agglomeration, giving precedence, through models and planning, to paradigms of rational organization that stifle and repress the (physical, mental, political) pollution that could compromise its own management, as well as the management of the system that produces and reproduces it. In his words:

In this place organized by 'speculative' and classificatory operations, it combines management and elimination. On the one hand, there is a differentiation and redistribution of the parts according to the city, thanks to inversions, displacements, accumulations, etc.; on the other, everything that is not treatable is rejected and therefore constitutes the 'detritus' of a functionalist administration (abnormality, deviation, disease, death, etc.). [...] This is how the concept of city works, as a place of transformations and appropriations, object of interventions that serves as a beacon or a totalizing

and almost mythical framework for socioeconomic and political strategies [...] (Certeau, 2014, p. 160-161).

Exposing the contradictions of the city and its models of management, Bassi demonstrates how this type of paradigm lies on bases constituted by aberrations such as social exclusion, tightening marginality to low-income populations, exploitation of fear and prejudice in the face of the abyss of economic and social inequality, and also elimination of difference.

In the consumerist and functionalist perspective of the city, one of the great consequences of exclusion and gentrification, and perhaps the cruelest, is soon felt by the low-income families who once inhabited the *revitalized* region, being expelled from their residences as ‘detritus’ that need to be eliminated either by the process of real estate speculation, or even through legal actions of eviction and expropriation, being replaced by the economically stronger class. This problem would not be different with the residents of the Mina favela in Poblenu, marginalized and under-resourced targets before so many predators in the speculative and exclusive law of the urban jungle – to remember the image created by the buffoon in the initial speech of *Bassibus*.

Thinking of the marginal constitution that permeates the history of buffoonery, with its aberrant subjects, and through exclusion, the statute of exteriority that allowed them to comment and ridicule their targets with impunity, we can perceive the *Bassibus*'s procedure of action as a buffoon experience, bringing the speeches of those who are on the margins of power and who so often become neutralized and silenced.

Contrary to the processes of organization and elimination of heterogeneities, this buffoon elaborates, through *Bassibus*, what I understand as an anti-tourism event, an intervention by its group of passengers/participants that provides ephemeral occupation and reappropriation of spaces once confiscated by speculative and sanitizing interests.

Tourism, as Debord (1997) points out, understands the dynamics of human circulation as consumption, a byproduct of the circulation of goods, constituting one of the economic activities that promotes the superficialization of experience through the purchase and sale of services. Although it is defended by many governmental discourses as a necessary

opportunity for development, it should not be forgotten that tourist activity is one of the arms of the process of capitalist spatial reorganization, permeated by the expropriation of places and the consequent gentrification or exploitation of its populations, what occurs worldwide.

By reversing the logic of capitalist appropriation to remove critical powers, Bassi subverts the scheme of consumption of the tourist apparatus, without losing, however, the relation with its elements. Through the structural characteristics of *Bassibus* – such as a guided tour of previously selected places and the exhibition of characteristics of these places, as well as the use of a bus prepared to comfortably welcome the participants and facilitate their movement with the participation of a team responsible for the function of flight attendants – the artist establishes another movement, digging the tourist experience inside, to generate critical-reflexive confrontations.

Bassi produces an event in his *political tourism*, as he calls it, promoting with his fifty participants the ephemeral occupation of the place of the city and the question about the forces that affect it.

The *Bassibus* generates the inversion of tourism – as it is characteristic of an action created by a buffoon and its *modus operandi* of approach of the world by its aversions and ambiguities – to an *anti-tourism* that gives place and voice to the supposed *debris* that are being eliminated by administrative dynamics of a functional and total character.

The dynamics of movement and circulation of this action is removed from the tourist consumption character of the *spectator-traveler*, which traverses or contemplates (Augé, 2005), to demand of the participants the co-creation of the artistic work through the mobilization of their role as witnesses and actors of social processes, requesting a reflection produced in that specific place by the experience that affects their bodies.

Thinking about society as a construction that revolves around flows – flows of capital, information, technology, organizational interaction, images, sounds, and symbols –, in processes that determine social practices (Castells, 2000) the artistic action of the *Bassibus* is creating another dynamic of crossing in the flows of circulation. Promoting what I understand as a dynamics of performative urban intervention, this action privileges the immersion of the body of the participants in the artistic event,

in the co-creation of the action, putting at stake their subjectivity and capacity of affections.

Acting directly in the place of the city, the urban artistic interventions, in their plurality of actions, provoke and precipitate resignifications and other senses to the spaces, pointing to a hybrid field, which shuffles social, political, cultural, and artistic context. In this sense, Brissac (1998, p. 117) points out:

In a city where we no longer know what is public or private, we have been alienated from the public space which, in fact, is a space of war. When the public space is in crisis, it is necessary to think about what kind of [art] intervention can help us to relate to this contemporary city.

Therefore, the *Bassibus* generates intervention in the hegemonic modes of spatial circulation and symbolic circulation of information, working with displacements and occupations strategies, rubbing these instances with sets of knowledge that are being acquired, mainly, through the body's presence of the group. In this sense, there is a kind of performativity involved, by the immediate action of the participants who follow along with the buffoon, blurring the boundaries between the space of the city and the artistic experience.

The *Bassibus* action places its participants in a witness situation, an event that generates a collective pact that will lead them to experience in their bodies, in the surprise of the here-now, the absurdities to which each of us is daily exposed as citizens, processes that most of us have no more physical, emotional and temporal scope to deal with.

Bassi transmutes the place of the *observer* into participant of an artistic device, a subject that receives the information conveyed by the action and, at the same time, every participant is responsible for giving it life, working in the elaboration of its meaning, which is given *in situation* and in group.

Claiming an idea of *clearance* – of the senses, of reflections that cross the flesh itself – Bassi appropriates a certain journalistic character and, also, surpasses it, because, in the *Bassibus*, the transmission of facts and denunciations come mixed with the smell of the places where it runs, the hardness of the concrete that repels the body of the participants, the sun that burns their skin and makes them sweat.

The annoyance in the *Bassibus* involves reflection and sweat, saliva, steps, movements, odors, words and images that touch each passenger in a sensory way, in exercises of displacement of ideas, operation of distances and approximations in critical and corporeal reorganizations.

By denaturalizing and disorganizing the logic of the banality of tourist entertainment and the transmission of information that, because of its dizzying excess, has its capacity to affect or create experience emptied, Bassi generates a collective dynamics, a kind of choir that expands its character of action as an interventionist practice in the place of the city, which can be better observed during the visit to the Forum of Cultures.

Disembarking from the bus at its first stop, Bassi leads the participants on the tour of the Forum's architectural facilities, leading the group to walk along the cement-covered grounds where a convention building was built, now used as a cultural center. The sunny summer day coupled with the excess of concrete used in the place further increases the feeling of heat and visit to an inhospitable place.

As the group of people crosses and occupies the space, the artist points out to the participants the poor houses of the favela that insist on inhabiting the not so distant landscape and, on the other side of the concrete area, the participants can see a haven harboring luxury boats, geographically opposed (with their opposite demands) territories, whose communication is torn by the cement area of the Forum.

And the buffoon asks: would the residents of the Mina be the owners of the luxury boats? A collective boat, perhaps... He then states that he had gone down to the marina and asked himself what the rent would be for a yacht of about fifteen meters, the size of a vessel which, according to the artist, was considered a small boat by the port official. And Bassi gets the answer that reaffirms the perverse logic of inequality: the amount needed to rent a small part of the port, where other boats were moored, would be one hundred and thirty thousand euros per month, which would allow the purchase of a hundred and fifteen houses in the Mine.

In his explanation, the buffoon also highlights the incongruity that the urbanization team responsible for the Forum's work would be formed mostly by public figures from the medical field, among them surgeons and anesthesiologists linked to the Spanish government. And the artist ironically

concludes that, in the end, the professional functions of that team would be of great value to *revive* the space, since, due to the architectural constructions, Bassi says, that place would be visibly dead.

As he walks through the cement-covered grounds of the Forum, Bassi pulls out a cart with a coupled stereo box and a microphone, a device that allows the artist to cross space with his body and his speech, as he attracts and guides the bodies of the participants by his action of intervention and occupation.

Bassi goes on to point out that the architects themselves, at the time of the construction of those architectural installations, would have been caught in polemical statements about the improbable future occupation of their structures by the Barcelona population after the activities of the event were carried out, due to the distance from the coast in relation to the rest of the city and the difficulty of access to the place. This fact would be verified by the *Bassibus* group in front of the Forum's little-traveled space – any similarity with the construction of the Olympic Park in the city of Rio de Janeiro does not seem to be mere coincidence, just another symptom of the dynamics of kidnapping of the urban place and the mismanagement of public goods⁸.

And so it had been built with public money from the city of Barcelona: a huge empty space by the sea, a large architectural work whose cost would have reached three million euros. Bassi also says that he had descended to the waterfront, and by the sea he had found two lifeguards sitting in large chairs on a beach without bathers, and the artist describes the scene: “– Looking for eternity [...] a poetic vision. They can write novels, plays about what goes on in the head of a lifeguard when there is no one to help”, concludes the buffoon.

Next, the buffoon invites the participants of the excursion up to the terrace of the building, which functions as a cultural center (for whom?), where there would be an artificial lake, a new landscape in interaction with the sky and the sea. According to him, this space would not be divulged and would be under restricted access, so that it was enjoyed by few. The participants readily rejoice and soon the fifty-people group rush through the large halls that function as a venue for artistic exhibitions (seen by whom?) to climb up the stairs.

In the documentary it is not possible to see if there is even such a lake, but the video graphic record shows the fifty participants of the *Bassibus* occupying the terrace of the Forum and, in the distance, the luxury hotels that make up the coastal landscape. The film's narrator emphasizes that those constructions would have been carried out by a real estate company whose owner was one of the organizers of Poblenu *redevelopment* project, accountable for the expropriation and expulsion of many families from Mina and, not by chance, one of the great privileged ones with the profitable return of that urban development.

In this sense, in thinking that “[...] a place is a historical singularity, reverberating (a political) past, present and future [...]” (Lepecki, 2012, p. 56), it is not surprising that the place of the city becomes a hostile space, a producer and reproducer of the gears of capitalist expropriation, an extension of the abduction of the common that affects political, economic and social instances.

Lepecki (2012) points out that, in contemporaneity, the spatialization of the polis becomes the object of a double illusory process: in a first bias, the city presents itself as space of circulation of supposedly free subjects, pointing to the ideals of mobility and freedom as privileged *locus* for the (supposed) processes of subjectivation and political autonomy. In a second perspective, of a topological order, the city presents itself as a supposedly neutral place, a stage open to the construction of architectural devices, which would determine the urban as the circulation of the emblems of autonomy.

Thus, the above-mentioned author points to the connection between movement and architecture, two fundamental elements to the fantastical (perhaps phantasmagorical would be the right word...) political-kinetic ideal of contemporary urbanity. And it is these two elements, movement flows and architectural constructions, that I understand to constitute the matter on which the *Bassibus* acts directly, pointing out the incongruities and absurdities that construct and destroy the urban from the architectural structures and the dynamics of movement and exclusion that they denounce.

An intersubjective action, which demands participants to engage their bodies, their histories and behaviors, the *Bassibus* provides the intertwining

of distinct temporalities, when in their accomplishment they collide and interact: the time of the place visited (with its past, present and notes of future), the participant's time of understanding about shared information, his/her own temporalities as subject, and the decision-making time.

Bassi's critical position cries out for resistance due to the critical position that demanded by him from the participants of the excursion. The artist speaks out on the purpose of *Bassibus* trips to Madrid – words that could be extended without great difficulty to several other cities in the world, as Barcelona, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and so many others:

To take people where no one took them before, visiting today's Madrid with its aesthetic horrors and its ecological and social disasters. Recalling the attacks against the historical memory, the mockery of the penal code, the astronomical amounts and the planned attack on the democratic system. A city where rich people live in urbanized shelters protected by private armies. A city of medieval organizations that dominate the world of finances, as shoeless children walk in the favelas [...] and there are pharaonic tombs for old dictators. A Madrid full of cranes, invaded by asphalt and concrete. A city with ambitious projects and, at the same time, deeply backward and provincial in its desire to be 'modern'⁹ (Bassi, 2004, n. p.).

Looking at an urban and political landscape that takes on almost apocalyptic contours, it is urgent to rethink the politics and its powers of resistance. When the political institutions wave with the flag of their obsolete and reactionary forms, invoking a kidnapping that has less and less of concealment cunning and increasingly proud of their gross manipulation spectacles, it is necessary to investigate the political as a space of swap, visibility and circulation, an intersubjective process of confrontation and creation.

Pelbart (2008) points out that if, on the one hand, the common is a matter of capturing capitalist flows, it is above all that the common that carries the capacity to create lines of flight in its most diverse dynamics, shuffling singularities of continuing variation, a heterogeneity contrary to totalization and to ideals of representation, defending:

[...] the common rather as a premise than as a promise, more as a shared reservoir, made up of multiplicity and uniqueness, than as a shared current unity, [...] than as a lost or future ideal unity (Pelbart, 2008, p. 4).

As the author points out, it is not a matter of nostalgic thinking about a possible notion of community that has been lost. Society with its flow of signs, its forces and needs, had not been built on the ruins of a community lost in immemorial time. Pelbart (2008, p. 5) problematizes: “Nothing has been lost, and for this reason nothing is lost. Only we are lost, we about whom the ‘social tie’ (relations, communication), our invention, falls heavily...”.

Therefore, the idea of community as unity and communion is nothing more than a phantasmagoria ideal, since the common must be exercised as a denial of the identity forces of fusion, the denial of any homogeneity or totalizing impetus. The condition for the experiment of the ordinary is in its process of experimentation by trial and error, is openness to heterogeneity, to plurality, to a game of proximity and distances. The common would be then an asymmetric space, an area of otherness that “[...] is embodied by the entirety of the subject, making to collapse his/her centered and isolated identity by opening it to an irrevocable external, a constitutive incompleteness” (Pelbart, 2008, p. 6).

Therefore, the provoking and subversion of the *status quo* are important notions to think Bassi acting as buffoon, an artist who seeks the denaturalization of established things, creating a scenic experience where a space of asymmetry may emerge. The inverted mirror of buffoonery reflects the dark portions of social relations, an artistic dynamics where there are no sheltered instances, scrambling notions like *good* and *evil* in an amoral configuration because each subject can be a victim and executioner of exclusion and oppression actions.

Look back to the past of buffoonery makes us to return to comic figures whose presence is recorded in pictorial and literary artifacts, from ancient times, in Greek-Roman rites and ceremonies, as well as in Persia and Egypt. According to Castro (2005), the performance of the buffoons was initially related to sacred ritual practices and focused on the removal of evil through the imitation of human deficiencies such as physical deformities, blindness and leprosy.

In addition, buffoonery retains part of its history in the performance of medieval fools and buffoons, whose existence was dedicated to the exercise of the ridicule and subversion of standards, acting alongside the

power of nobles and sovereigns. As eccentric beings and physically deviant from the so-called *normality*, they generated at the same time disgust and fascination. A target of mockery, sometimes even violent, they also aroused the admiration of others for the openness they acquired to utter acid criticism that the common man's sense of humor did not convey.

The more sincere and cruel in their positions, the more the buffoons were admired for their daring, bringing kings and lords to the delight. Under the protection of laughter and madness, these figures were given the power to transgress hierarchies, being the only ones who could say everything to the sovereign. In Minois's words (2003, p. 232):

The fool's laughter also has another function in the Middle Ages: to ritualize the opposition by representing it. True anti-king, inverted sovereign, the fool symbolically assumes subversion, revolt, disintegration, transgression. It is a parapet that tells the king the limits of his power. The reasonable laughter of the madman is an obstacle to despotic deviation. It is not only a coincidence that the function of a king's fool has disappeared from France at the dawn of Absolutism, at the beginning of the kingdom of Louis XIV: the monarch who can, without laughing, compare himself to the sun is too serious to be sensible.

Whether in China, Egypt or Medieval Europe, there are many examples of these comic types who, acting on courts of kings and emperors, or at popular fairs, shocked the world's serious structures and their appearances through ridicule, fertile targets to derision. The buffoons perpetrated the vision of the marginalized, of those whose lives are erected over mocking and transgressing because of their inadequacy.

Thus, through *Bassibus*, its creator invests efforts in a collective and interventionist practice in the flow of movement of the city and in the schemes of hegemonic representation that cross it, mirroring them in a comic and acidic way.

Last Steps: final remarks

By the intensities evoked, even tangential political activism, I understand that Bassi's comic *praxis* creates networks of displacement between two configurations that Rancière (2012, p. 53) names as "pedagogical model of the effectiveness of art" and *dissent*. According to this philosopher, the efficacy model of art presupposes the existence of a

continuum between the artistic work and the perception of a certain situation, a kind of pedagogical mote that would lead the spectator to a set of knowledge to be conveyed by the artist.

So, there would be a causal relationship in which the audience is confronted with a certain organization of the sensitive signs, which would lead to a reading previously desired by the author – which seems to point to the scenic-journalistic experience of the *Bassibus*, in which the public is led, physically and ideologically, by the buffoon through the public spaces that help to compose an inventory of denunciations about the mismanagement of the place of the city. In the artist's own words:

I know how the audience works, and it needs support points, it needs a person in whom it has confidence, it needs to delegate power to someone who is able to maintain it. That has the physical sensuality to maintain this power¹⁰ (Bassi, 2007, n. p.).

The excerpt of Bassi's interview illustrates his position on the maintenance of power by the artist, pointing to a certain totalizing bias in his relation with the spectator. On the other hand, the very dynamic insertion of the *Bassibus* in the public space, with its proliferation of stimuli, generates a floating artistic phenomenon, making unstable any assertive transmission of knowledge on the part of the buffoon.

Since spectators' attention and perception may be leaked by the signs and information that permeate the places visited by the excursion, there would be no guarantees that would ensure the unequivocal assimilation of a possible pedagogical set of information and reflections.

More than creating mere political commentaries with his *Bassibus*, I understand that this buffoon generates a hybrid field between a certain pedagogical character in his sensitive organization and the perspective that Rancière (2012) would call *dissent*, an experience of disconnection provoked by the artistic doing that causes a clash between different sensory regimes. In an emancipatory bias, this philosopher highlights the contemporary theater's ability to generate porous constitutions between the instance of the scenic phenomenon and the spectator's zone, a *between* that is formed by approximations and distances. An experience that is not subject to unequivocal appropriation or control of causes and effects, either by the artist or by the audience, due to the unpredictability of their games of association and dissociation, in dynamics that are floating and leaked.

Bassi generates destabilization in the perception of his audience, subverting logics, patterns and expectations through irony and blasphemy, going beyond the supposed acquisition of knowledge by the spectator, or the creation of new habits or encouraging decision making. Process that is political as: “To reconfigure the landscape of the perceptible and thinkable is to change the territory of the possible and the distribution of capacities and incapacities” (Rancière, 2012, 48-49).

Bassi confronts the spectator with the clash of living action, the scenic presence that carries in its latency our obscure, against control, conventional portions in a borderline and disturbing artistic experimentation. Bassi’s rational strategies are present in the performative-theatrical action, in meeting with the other, constructing sensory reflections and games along with alterity, celebration of the potency of the buffoon’s controversies as an assertion of insubordinate vitalism.

The *Bassibus* is capable of producing reflections and denunciations in the face of problems whose confrontation becomes more and more urgent to the maintenance of the democratic sphere, in floating questions about the institutions, and also about the role of each of us in the perpetuation of these processes of erasing the differences. Since there are no protected instances to these dynamics, and this is one of the great difficulties in dealing with them, each one of us can daily mirror and generate mechanisms of oppression, being, at the same time, victims, accomplices and executioners of these processes.

Carrying these questions and ambiguities that cross the flesh with their doubts and concerns, this seems to be one of the main characteristics of the *Bassibus*: between powers and risks, offering resistance by this action, even in a nomadic and ephemeral way, by the lines of the improbable, claiming openings and possible clearances as a way of escape from suffocation. Between stretches of road, dust, vestiges and singularities, perhaps micro-responses can be constituted, even if utopian and fleeting, possible lines of flight against the zones of blurring and elimination of the difference that cross the urban space and all of us.

Notes

- ¹ Biographical information taken from the artist's website. Called *Bassiblog*, this site is a communication channel between Leo Bassi, his artistic practices and those interested in his work. Available at: <<http://www.leobassi.com/biografia.html>>. Accessed: 23 December 2017.
- ² According to Bakhtin (2010), one of the main elements connected with buffoons concerns grotesque demotion, a process by which the transfer of spiritual and abstract ideals to bodily materiality would take place. In this way, the buffoons usually presented corporeal deformities that alluded to the affirmation of intensities, when the deviant body was able to operate with vagueness and instabilities in relation to normative standards. Such deviations gave these comic figures the right to utter provocative discourses that carried a destructive drive on values, hierarchies, and power relations.
- ³ “*Constatando el estado desanimado de la oposición en España, el BassiBus, en su humilde propuesta, pretende reavivar el espíritu rebelde y crítico sin el que la democracia no puede desarrollarse*”. Translation from the website: <<http://www.leobassi.com/bassibus/info-bassibus.html>>. Accessed: 20 July 2017.
- ⁴ “[...] *la selva asfáltica y su particular fauna: en especial a los depredadores*”. Translation of the aforementioned site.
- ⁵ The documentary, BASSIBUS a Barcelona, can be found at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjza1hrf8kU>>. Accessed: 21 July 2017.
- ⁶ Transcript of the aforementioned video.
- ⁷ Certeau (2014), in a phenomenological view, establishes the distinction between place (order of spatial elements distributed in relations of coexistence) and space (as a practiced place, in singular relations in the world, pointing to an existential dimension, as the subjects, in their itineraries, symbolize the place from the interferences and transform it from their occupations, appropriations and experiences). Although this is an interesting parameter for thinking about spatial relations, this research does not agree with the distinction of the terms made by the author, since the idea of transforming places into spaces through subjective practices seems to point to an illusory possibility of free choice and appropriation of the urban space by its occupants. This factor that does not seem so simple and not so accessible,

according to the *Bassibus* action, which comes to problematize in its confrontations with the networks of force that affect the urban. In this way, the present research chooses to use space and place as synonymous terms.

- ⁸ Several journalistic articles have portrayed the abandonment and almost nonexistent occupation by the population of areas built to host the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. More information can be obtained at: <<https://g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/apos-quatro-meses-parque-olimpico-no-rio-tem-sinais-de-abandono.ghtml>>. Accessed: 4 March 2018.
- ⁹ “*Para llevar a la gente donde nadie les ha llevado antes, visitando el Madrid de hoy con sus horrores estéticos y sus desastres ecológicos y sociales. Recordando los atentados contra la memoria histórica, las burlas al código penal, las estafas astronómicas y el asalto planificado al sistema democrático. Una ciudad con ricos que viven en urbanizaciones-bunker defendidas por ejércitos privados. Una ciudad de sectas medievales que dominan el mundo de las finanzas, de niños que caminan sin zapatos en las aldeas de chabolas [...] y de tumbas faraónicas para viejos dictadores. Un Madrid lleno de gruas, invadido de asfalto y de hormigón. Con proyectos ambiciosos, y que paralelamente resulta profundamente paleta y provinciana en su deseo de ser ‘moderna’.*” Translation of the website: <http://www.leobassi.com/bassi_bus/info-bassibus.html>. Accessed: 20 July 2017.
- ¹⁰ “*Yo sé cómo funciona el público, y necesita puntos de apoyo, necesita una persona en la que tener confianza, necesita delegar el poder en alguien que sea capaz de mantenerlo. Que tenga la sensualidad física para mantener ese poder.*” Translation from an excerpt from an interview given by Leo Bassi and available on the site: <<https://blogderadiaciones.wordpress.com/2007/04/26/leo-bassi-un-bufon-activista-version-completa-de-the-interview-published-in-the-no53-of-diagonal>>. Accessed: 20 August 2017.

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