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## Human rights in everyday poetics: inflections unveiled by performing programs

*Direitos humanos em poéticas do cotidiano: inflexões desveladas por  
programas performativos*

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### Abstract

This paper reports a teaching experience in a discipline offered by the authors to the Dance Undergraduate Course and in the Performing Arts Graduate Program of the University of Campinas (Unicamp) during the first semester of 2019. It was a discipline offered jointly for two classes, undergraduate and graduate, in which a series of performance programs were carried out at the university campus in order to carry out actions in the field of performance that could promote dialogue between politically divergent. It was hypothesized that a non-challenging, but an embracing approach to campus contradictions, has the potential to help the campus community prepare to rethink becoming, in a sensitive way.

**Keywords:** Performing arts and human rights. Performance programs. University life.

### Resumo

*O artigo apresenta um relato de experiência docente em disciplina oferecida pelas autoras junto ao curso de Bacharelado em Dança e ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes da Cena da Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp) durante o primeiro semestre de 2019. Tratou-se de disciplina oferecida conjuntamente para duas turmas, de graduação e de pós-*

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*graduação, em que foi realizada uma série de programas performativos no espaço do campus universitário no intuito de efetivar ações, no campo da performance, que pudessem promover diálogo entre pensamentos divergentes do ponto de vista político e da vida em comunidade, tendo como hipótese que uma abordagem acolhedora das contradições do campus tem o potencial de auxiliar a comunidade deste campus a se preparar para repensar o devir sensibilizada pela arte.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Artes da cena e direitos humanos. Programas performativos. Vida universitária.*

In the first semester of 2019, the course “Dance and Human Rights” was offered for the first time at the Dance Undergraduate course and the Performing Arts Graduate Program of the University of Campinas (Unicamp). It was offered jointly to both classes, with seven undergraduate students and eight postgraduate students (seven masters and one doctorate) enrolled, according to the University legislation that allows to provide the same course for both educational levels, in order to encourage exchange of experiences.

The course was designed in alignment with the University strategic actions: the first one being Unicamp’s adhesion to the Nacional Academic Pact for the Promotion of Respect for Diversity and the Peace Culture and Human Rights, signed on October 19, 2017, an initiative of the Ministries of Education and Justice and Citizenship (SUGIMOTO, ALVES FILHO, 2017). The second one being the creation of the Unicamp’s Human Rights Observatory, whose mission is “to promote human rights diffusion and discussion so that they can be incorporated to ordinary practices informing the ways in which every aspect from the University’s activities is fulfilled, conducted, planned and structured” (ODH, 2019, translated by the authors).

A series of consultations was undertaken by the Management Committee of the Nacional Academic Pact for the Promotion of Respect for Diversity and the Peace Culture and Human Rights in various academic instances throughout 2017, one of these actions being a search for graduation and postgraduation programs at the University that dealt directly with human rights or related topics. From that research, some Teaching Units made an effort to organize course proposals that aligned themes which were already being approached under the

major theme of Human Rights, as occurred in the Dance graduation course and in the Performing Arts Postgraduation Program, both of them targets of this article's analysis. Since 2018 second half, Unicamp's Human Rights Observatory publishes on its website a complete list of courses on that subject (ODH, 2019b).

At first, the course had, as practical activity planned by the first author, the elaboration of small choreographic cells, taking as inspiration the dialogue between the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and each student research project, insofar as these correlations were verified. The course counted with 15 meetings; so, in every class, the students would receive through Moodle teaching managing platform two UDHR articles and small pieces of paper, each one containing an article, which were used to perform drawing lots and/or to set working partners. At that moment, fundamental theoretical references were studied, such as John Rawls (SILVA, 2011), Hannah Arendt (FREITAS NETO, 2018), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself (NAÇÕES UNIDAS, 2019). Afterwards, under the second author's instructions, the students developed a series of performative programs having as theoretical reference the works of Fabião (2013), Rabelo (2015) and, on theoretical discussion field, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) and Rustom Bharucha (2017). Lastly, we engaged on group discussions where students could share their perceptions about what had been experienced with the performative programs throughout the *campus*, interacting with the bibliography. We can say that course planning was built during its unfolding, for it was an experimental course. Therefore, it took form as students' perceptions were revealed, experiencing lots of pedagogical redirections. This essay was taken as a final objective, so that we could organize the experience *a posteriori*.

In this text, we present our views as observers and testimonies of the students process of re-signifying the *campus* and circumspect areas through a performative view put as a poetic method for them to see and re-see the University *campus* and its contradictions; provoking them to realize themselves as agents of (possible) changes. We begin contextualizing human rights in Brazil in a contemporary point of view (2019), and then introducing the experience reports.

## 2019 and Human Rights in Brazil

Brazil is passing through a delicate political moment which makes the discussion about human rights not only contemporary, but also relevant. Brazil's Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), promulgated in October 5, 1988 – forty years after the publication of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (NAÇÕES UNIDAS – BRASIL, 2019) –, in many of its articles, basic conditions of access to food, health, housing, and education. However, we know that since Aurea Law sanction in May 13, 1888, which decreed the end of slavery in Brazil, no affirmative action policy was adopted for social inclusion so that people hitherto enslaved could acquire minimum living conditions and achieve social welfare, made possible by universal access to education. We've had a slavery "abolition" forced by antislavery movements of the period, but we've never had an effective decolonization. It's important to reinforce the word "basic", since the Constitution, based on the UDHR, has an "abstract universality of the conception of human dignity underlying human rights" (SANTOS, 2014, p. 55, translated by the authors). Notwithstanding, despite of having a Federal Constitution consonant with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we can say that it expresses much more a "wish" that some parts of the population would like to be accomplished than a reflex of concrete political actions historically and collectively built to achieve, in long term, a fairer and more egalitarian society.

Great world powers continue to explore the poorest countries. Great landowners continue to explore cheap workforce, favoring the economic neoliberalism. "The vast majority of world's population isn't an individual of human rights. It's object of human rights speeches" (SANTOS, 2013, p. 42, translated by the authors) as the hegemonic epistemology do not consider everyone as human being.

It's possible to defend liberty and equality of all citizens and at the same time slavery because there is an abyssal line, which I referred above, subjacent to human rights and through which we can define who is actually human and so has the right to be human and who is not and so doesn't have this right (SANTOS, 2014, p. 76, translated

by the authors).

The Constituent could have started a historical rescue and reparation of Brazil's original peoples and Africa's kidnapped and enslaved ones, but we realized that the conservative power strand of our country, since colonial times (with rare "breaks"), remains controlling financial and political powers until today maintaining exploration, which is now embracing liberalism, marketing logic and predatory capitalism.

Since slavery abolition in 1888 and the Republic Proclamation in 1889, a lot can be said by Law experts, a discussion we don't want to develop in this article. Therefore, as performative artists facing Brazil's contemporary scenery (2019), where a significant part of the population denies the existence of structural racism and machismo in our society, and facing the fact that more "rebellious" forms of art tend to potentialize the polarized conflict established between the most progressists sectors of society, we've proposed the challenge of developing inside our classroom a series of performative programs in the *campus*, firstly instrumentalizing our students at performative exercises and secondly trying to develop performative actions that could promote a dialogue between divergent thoughts from a welcoming approach of *campus* contradictions, so that the community could prepared itself to re-think future through art sensibilization.

## **Performative programs and their revelations**

The first performative program done by the students was a drift (which consists to walk aiming to be at that very moment, observing, "listening" *to* and *with* the space), that took place in Mach 22, 2019, and was developed from the choreographic cells students had created at the beginning of the semester. It was a simple drift in which the group walked together and, whenever someone felt comfortable, passersby could be intercepted just by asking "May I dance for you?". If the answer was a negative, the proponent wouldn't insist; but, in case the response was affirmative, the person who proposed the interaction started dancing for the

passerby as the rest of the group stood by, supporting the action. Afterwards, we learned from the students that it was a positive experience and so we decided to adapt it to include the entire class<sup>3</sup>.

The second performative program was also a drift and was held in April 26, 2019. The participants took photographs and made videos based on the theme “*Campus* and its contradictions”. As they walked, not only capability of listening was aroused, but also a critic point of view of the *campus*. The cellphone applicative Whatsapp was used as a tool by the group in several programs, easing communication and image/video sharing during the actions.



Image 1 - Photograph by Flávia Pagliusi: “Safety: use the bike rack and always put on a locked; Prefer surveilled places with security cameras; Do not let



your bike on sidewalks or access ways; Respect traffic laws and do not drive in the wrong way”.  
 Image 2 - Photograph by Maria Fernanda Miranda. “DPSCCELL: everything for your cellphone’s health”.

<sup>3</sup> As the last hour of the classes was destined only to postgraduation students, we moved the performative programs proposal to the very beginning of it, so that there was enough time to conclude the programs and the practical and bibliographic discussions.



Image 3 - Photograph by Erica Cunha. “Tubulation”.



Image 4 - Photograph by Milena Pereira. “Due to safety reasons keep the door always closed/ locked”.

The performative program used until that moment was conceived by researcher Flávio Rabelo (Coletivo Cambar – a group of Brazilian performative artists<sup>4</sup>) and was adapted by the authors with Rabelo’s authorization. At first, the students executed performative programs created by the first author and, further, they engaged on their own ones.

During the semester, we concluded a great number of performative programs based on the UDHR<sup>5</sup>. As examples, we’ve selected two other actions, one of them still on the insides of the campus and the other one at Barão Geraldo’s district, where Unicamp is located.

<sup>4</sup> For further information: <http://flaviorabelo.com/> and <http://www.cambarcoletivo.com/inicio.php>

<sup>5</sup> Two articles from the UDHR were pointed out to guide discussions, performative programs or choreographic compositions.

1) May 3, 2019 –

**Erika Cunhas's Proposal for UDHR articles 13 and 14:**

**Article 13**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

**Article 14**

(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**Program title: *Right to come and go***

It was performed with all students in class (09 people)

**Preparation 1:** having a cellphone fully charged and with some songs recorded; color pencils, sheet of paper, an object to be detached, and be wearing something for a special occasion.

**Preparation 2:** First, we'll create a Whatsapp group with all participants. You'll walk in pairs. Everyone will leave the classroom punctually at 8h45 a.m. Keep your cellphones on and connected to a network service. You'll receive cellphone messages in every 10 minutes. They'll actions suggestions. As soon as you leave, you'll describe everything you see. You'll record this description o your cellphones. Attention! The task is to describe, not to qualify. You'll be receiving further information soon.

**Guidelines in every 10 minutes:**

8h45 a.m. – Walk describing everything you see. You're walking along your pair as a safety measure, not because you need to do things together.

8h55 a.m. – Write a list of three contradictions of contemporary society (remember posters/images that you took at Unicamp), leave that list on a bus stop (whenever you reach one). When you finish writing, start walking again and look for the bus stop.



\* *Suggestion: write as if you were leaving a note to somebody.*

9h05 a.m. – Take a selfie. Put your headphones on and listen to the song you've selected. Just keep walking.

9h15 – Offer your headphones (and your song) to someone and dance to him/her. After finishing your dance, ask him/her if you guys can take a selfie together. You and your partner must choose different people to complete this action. The other one should observe from afar.

9h25 a.m. – Did you guys conclude the action? Both of you? If so, now it's time for you to exchange your songs and dance for your partner.

9h35 a.m. – Write down on a paper the answers to these questions:

Have you ever been prevented of coming and going? Have you ever been arrested? Are you afraid of not being able to walk anymore?

\* *Suggestion: write down the answers as if you were leaving a note to somebody but take it with you this time.*

\*\* *When you finish this action, return to the classroom.*

9h45 a.m. – Have you arrived?

## 2) May 31, 2019 –

### Student Luciana Mizutani's Proposal for UDHR articles 17 and 18:

#### Article 17

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrary deprived of his property.

#### Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with other and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

**Program title:** Would you have a minute for Paulo Freire's word?

It was performed with all students in class (see picture bellow)

**Necessary material:** a book marked with phrases about education (or flyers made by the action's author)

**Action description:** wear black social pants, white social shirt, black shoes and a shoulder bag (men) or long skirt, white social shirt, hair up and sandals (women). Engage in conversation with passersby (or knock from door to door) by asking: “*Would you have a moment for Paulo Freire’s word?*”.

\* The action took place at Barão Geraldo’s bus station surroundings.

## Discussion

The contradictions found at the first drift (03/22/2019) were extremely diversified and included dumpsters placed in handicapped parking spots, road signs indicating blind people crossing not using Braille writing or as the pictures of this essay show: 1. A banner about safety that inspires unsafety feelings (recommending lockers, not leaving bicycles loose on the drive ways and choosing areas with scanned by cameras); 2. A picture of a trash bin with a recyclable trash symbol and an advertising “Everything for your cellphone’s health”; 3. A sign of tubulation system with a skull, a death symbol, surrounded by bright green foliage; and 4. A picture of a banner demanding that a door must remain locked for safety reasons in a public University (a place where people should be able to freely circulate during the day). It’s important to notice that contradictions are not necessarily due to inattention by administrative sectors when placing signs and/or banners but may become contradictory by the action of time – as happened with the foliage growing in an unexcepted place. Therefore, our actions towards urbanization and civility require constant attention no matter how much we tend to comprehend these daily little things “settled”. We don’t think about the right to occupy public space as much as it is necessary: we tend to remember our individual right to enjoy what’s public rather than the responsibility implied in this collective right to preserve what’s public. The property logic

imposes a dispute notion to the concept of public much more than a notion of sharing. And this is Brazil's 2019 scenario.

Performative programs as those examples presented above allowed us to introduce valuable issues discussed in the theoretical bibliography chosen for the course in a practical and poetic way.

Dance to a cleaning worker making visible individuals we often make invisible, even though knowing they are a fundamental part of our daily lives; discuss the urgency of University quotas as part of a policy of historical reparation and representativeness (being noteworthy that this year was the first one to offer an indigenous exam to attend Unicamp courses); discuss the place of black women in the University context (still very Europeanized, a theme brought by the students); inclusive infrastructure (a safe blind people crossing, wheelchair seats, accessibility ramps etc.); understand the body multiplicity that they bring to the University. All these themes were problematized and enlighten by the human rights discussion, allowing students to open themselves to different realities that surround Unicamp: debating themes of the University itself was to debate, in a microworld, macroworld issues, since “the principle of equality grounds the universalism pretension that underlies the Eurocentric human rights” (SANTOS, 2013, p. 78).

The performative program “Would you have a minute to Paulo Freire’s word?” brought to the students the opportunity of interacting not just with Unicamp’s passersby (employees or other students) but also with Barão Geraldo’s community. Students reported that in this activity, which was performed in pairs scattered throughout the neighborhood, they found themselves more comfortable to interact, dealing with the risk sensation set by the street context, since actions like that are best understood – or even expected – at the campus, where people are aware about the existence of art courses. In this program, the most unusual situations were established, and students could share these experiences at the classroom. This action happened in May 31, 2019, the day after a huge manifestation in favor of Education, and the proposal was “in tune with the programming of the universe”, as the performative program proposer said (Luciana Mizutani).

## Final Considerations

To build a bridge between the fundamentals of art, issues like aesthetics and scene ethics, and some law and sociology fundamentals was a challenge to the authors of this article while conducting the course at Unicamp. When elaborating a teaching plan, it's known that the professor will face a heterogenous class with multiple past experiences and values. And that was no different with the experience described in this text, even though we had a class where almost everyone had some kind of artistic training.

The interest in human rights doesn't exactly coincide with an openness to listening to differing opinions: in our experience, the vast majority of the students were permeable to listen, but we might come across a class with a large number of impervious people that struggles with divergent ideas. In that case, the teacher, as a debate mediator, has a substantial role to play, and it's imperative to have a consistent academic background to promote effective dialogues, not limiting a discussion to a simple ordained exposition of untouchable ideas, self-limiting monologues about points of view allegedly affected by a collective dimension, but mostly restricted to a pack of preconceived ideas, anchored to specific political and ideological spectrum, that the student bring with him/her.

The debate about rights inevitably bumps into the discussion about duties – the duality right/duty –, and it's no different in the art field. So, the main challenge for the responsible for this course at Unicamp was to seek to promote the possibility of divergence, reflection, and criticism, not the mere reproduction of discourses on human rights whatever they might be. Therefore, poetic immersion as a method can open possibilities as it puts the individual before concrete situations on which he/she wants to position him/herself.

After all, taking a position in the face of contemporary events in Brazil is not merely a matter of externalizing opinions, but also the possibility of positioning oneself in front of percepts, a creative pedagogical possibility, especially in times that claim for inflections towards the encounter of a welcoming social *ethos*.

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