

For the license towards pure abstraction: Available impossibility in Live Arts

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Abstract | The text is an answer to the review “Mimesis performativa: imediatez em ação ou a ação da mediação?” (Conceição | Concept., Campinas, SP, v. 7, n. 2, p. 110–142, jul./dez. 2018), from Stephan Arnulf Baumgartel, to the book of Luiz Fernando Ramos, *Mimesis Performativa: a margem de invenção possível* (Annablume, 2015). The author praises the Baumgartel’s disposition to debate frankly and rigorously and tries to answer his critical remarks, mainly, facing their two central issues: a disapproval towards the idea of “pure opsis” and closing the book perspectives to the ones of the North American critic Michael Fried. The intention of this replica is to open a public debate, extending the questions proposed by the two texts to the community of Performing Arts researchers.

KEYWORDS: Mimesis, Performance, Live arts.

Pela licença à pura abstração: impossibilidade viável da cena expandida

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Mimesis, Performance, Cena expandida

Por lo derecho de lo puro abstracto: Imposibilidad viable en la cena expandida

Resumen | El texto es una respuesta a reseña “Mimesis performativa: imediatez em ação ou a ação da mediação?” (Conceição | Concept., Campinas, SP, v. 7, n. 2, p. 110–142, jul./dez. 2018), de Stephan Arnulf Baumgartel, al libro de Luiz Fernando Ramos, *Mimesis Performativa: a margem de invenção possível* (Annablume, 2015). El autor elogia la disposición de Baumgartel al debate franco y riguroso y tiente responder a sus comentarios críticos, principalmente, abordando sus dos puntos claves: una mirada restrictiva a la idea de “puro opsis” e una aproximación das perspectivas presentadas pelo libro aquellas do crítico e historiador norteamericano Michael Fried. Pretende-se con a réplica abrir un debate público, extendiendo las cuestiones propuestas pelos dos textos a la comunidad de pesquisadores en Artes Escénicas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Mimesis, Performance, Escena expandida.

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Frank and rigorous debate is rarer in our academic milieu than would be desirable. When a researcher proposes to carry out a careful and exhaustive critical analysis of a peer's book, one must above all, congratulate the initiative and thank them for the generosity of the effort. This is the case of the article "Performative mimesis: immediacy in action or the action of mediation?", de Stephan Arnulf Baumgartel¹, on my book *Mimesis Performativa: a margem de invenção possível* (Annablume, 2015). As suggested by the German poet Ingeborg Bachmann, there was more "audacity before friends" than "courage in the face of the enemy", and it was this fearless disposition that made it essential for me to respond and try to live up to his analytical perspicacity and critical meticulousness.

sense of justifying the book's deficiencies, which are certainly many, and more in terms of seizing the opportunity to extend the debate, examining the issues presented in the review, and thus perhaps, to elucidate their conflicting terms to possible readers of the two texts. In fact, many of the restrictions placed on the book are not taken here as defensible but rather as assumed limitations or dissonant perspectives to be clarified. I should also remark that some of the problems pointed out there are genuine misunderstandings as they are based on the reviewer's detection of positions attributed to me that I do not recognize as mine, or because they accuse me of blatant omissions, which do not seem to me appropriate or necessary for the achievement of my original intentions. This is the case, for example, of his efforts to propose a discussion of the "allegorical formations of subjectivities and sociability" on the scene and the thinking about the contemporary scene, in contrast to the supposed aims of the book to "be contemporary", or of intending to exhaust the terms of contemporaneity. Although this "contextual allegorical" project is recognized as a very interesting and promising way of approaching some of the themes that the book worked on, it is necessary to refuse a desired adhesion to it and to the currents of epic theatre and Benjaminian criticism from which they emanate. They are legitimate and very influential perspectives, but it is not appropriate to impose them in preference to others, as the argument presented suggests that they should. After all, the central core of the entire review is to rescue the notion of "performative *mimesis*" from an epistemological and ethical negligence, based on an elitist posture of its proponent, and bring it to the field of a committed engagement with the issues of Brazilian society and with the criticism of the current stage of globalization and advanced capitalism. This rescue, or appropriation, of a notion that is not discussed in itself, but is rather understood as given, is intended to offer an alternative thinking to that presented in the book, filling its gaps and mobilizing the referred to "notion" in the "contextual allegorical" model that would make it productive and regenerated.

Certain themes, or subjects, are recurrent landmarks in the 20th century aesthetic debate and seem to extend relentlessly into the current discussion. Among them is the discussion on the dialectic of form and content in the Hegelian-Marxist dialogue, which takes on specific features each time it is mentioned. I would say that, nowadays, this debate has been taking place around the extent to which the works

¹ Conceição | Concept., Campinas, SP, v. 7, n. 2, p. 110–142, jul./dez. 2018.

are made explicit as references to the world or resist this explanation, without ceasing to participate in it. It is therefore here worth mentioning an initial refutation of what is proposed in the review since the book never intended to offer a sociological or truly political response in its criticism of the acute issues of contemporary Brazilian society, nor to dialogue with contemporary theories of art and the scene in an explicit and exhaustive way, or, at least, not in a totalizing way, as an approach with the emphasis proposed by the review would require. Precisely because it started from a complex, millenary and at first apparently anachronistic concept to deal with the so-called "contemporary stage", that of *mimesis*, every effort was made to make possible this idea of a "performative *mimesis*". It is true that, if there were the intention to propose it as an alternative to the theoretical models of dominant theatrical and performative studies, all European and North American, it was not to deny or disqualify them, demonstrating their inaptitude, but only to offer a new perspective on these contexts, arising above all from the singular starting point adopted, namely the inaugural theorizations of the phenomena of drama and spectacle made by Plato and Aristotle, especially those of Plato contained in the *Republic*, and of Aristotle in the *Poetics*. This option, coming much more from the experience in the undergraduate teaching of these ancient Greek texts than from a purely epistemological perspective, could and should have been critically examined, and not completely ignored, as was the case in Baumgartel's assessment. This is because, more than addressing the complexity of the Brazilian scene in the context of globalization, or any other of the issues which the book failed to include in the reviewer's understanding, it returned to the original meanings of the notion of *mimesis* in Plato and Aristotle to account for a very specific aspect of the "contemporary scene", more precisely that of the field of theatre and performing arts. The fact that, in contemporary times, the so-called visual and plastic arts are sometimes confused with theatrical and dramatic arts, with their contours and borders blurred, is not reflected in the studies corresponding to these two traditionally distinguished territories. Especially when observing them in performative aspects, theorizations have been much more towards a differentiation between them, often of a purifying and essentialist character. In general, contemporary theories of the visual arts do not ponder the current proximity of these areas and tend to treat them in isolation in their respective niches. The option to return to the ancient Greek notion of *mimesis* is directly linked to the simple evidence that, in the first three chapters of the *Poetics*, Aristotle, in dialogue with the Platonic distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis*, but advancing beyond the pioneering distinction that only differentiated the narrative from the dramatic, thinks of *mimesis* as being linked to all representational *teknês*, those that we would call today "arts", and which differ only by the means and ways in which they are produced and presented. Therefore, the option to return to the idea of *mimesis*, after a century in which it was denied and trampled on in different ways, was due to the intuition that it could be productive to think from a common perspective about the contemporary artistic manifestations that fits the definition of "expanded scene" and which are usually approached in their specific theoretical fields. Performance theory itself, whether in its North American (Schechner, Carlson) or European (Féral, Fischer-Lichte) lineage, aspired to this integration or at least pointed to it. The fact is that the book in question only reaches the notion of "performative *mimesis*", which emerged as a corollary of this ambition, or one should say audacity, on account of this peculiar path, and to take it without

mentioning this “detail” seems problematic. As much as it is to ignore the fact that almost all of the contemporary artists mentioned work in the field of visual arts, and, above all, that of the six European and North American artists selected to operationally test the alternative model, only two, Samuel Beckett and Romeu Castellucci, could approximate the pure dramatic and theatrical fields, and even then, in a very tangential way. That is, the book is about artists whose poetics refute the stable territories of the visual arts, on the one hand, and dramatic theatre, on the other. Therefore, it is not trivial to comment on the notion of “performative *mimesis*” as something already given, and its appropriation without the recognition of this conceptual journey, which, by the way, was essentially the gesture that the book sought to make, seems to be a diversionary movement, aiming at highlighting what was not done, but which was not intended, and hiding what was actually done and was intended as a contribution to the debate. The attitude of rescuing this notion to put it on the right path is flattering, a sign that it was useful to propose it, but to do so ignoring the reasons that the book presented as foundational, and affixing goals and tasks not carried out, which had never been among the author's intentions, suggests the book that the reviewer would like to have written. As already stated, if he had done so, I have no doubt that he would have written an extraordinary work. I shall return to this question, of a little studied contiguity in studies of the “arts” or of “art” today, when discussing Baumgartel's comments on my criticism of Michael Fried. For the time being, I will advance in responding to the criticisms presented by the review and address one of its two central points, perhaps the most incisive. In both cases to be examined, Baumgartel's argument raises configurating assumptions that will allow him, further on, to depreciate what was achieved in the analyses in the book.

The first point to comment on, in this sense, is the criticism of the notion of *opsis*, or “pure *opsis*”, which the book decisively uses in its proposition. This path was a natural consequence of the initial option, of starting from the terms of Aristotle's Poetics to think about the expanded contemporary scene. Aristotle, in his dissection of the phenomenon of Greek tragedy in the 5th century BC, creates an analytical device that results in the definition of the six founding elements of the tragic spectacle – *mythos*, *ethos*, *dianoia*, *lexis*, *melos* and *opsis* (plot, character, thought, language, melody and spectacle). In this methodological operation, Aristotle wanted less to establish a quantitative and classificatory compartmentalization than a qualitative difference of the weight of each of these elements in the realization of the phenomenon, or, in Aristotelian terms, in the achievement of its ultimate purpose: to impact the viewer by inspiring in them the feelings of terror and pity and provoke in them an objective catharsis. Without going into the merits of Aristotelian hermeneutics, and only starting from the symmetrical opposition that the Poetics establishes between a more important element to achieve that purpose, *mythos*, against a less crucial one, *opsis*, the book moves to the contemporary and performative stage, that of Appia and Craig, at the beginning of the 20th century, and the historical vanguards, but especially after Artaud, with a complete inversion of this perspective, and today, when there is a clear profusion of examples of theatrical poetics in which the *opsis*, or the theatrical materiality that allows itself be seen and affects the spectators, stands out against the previously composed dramatic structure. It is not an absolute trend, but it has been sufficiently recurrent

in the last fifty years to the point of having given rise to theoretical formulations such as the “post-dramatic” and the “performative theatre”, and of reverberating even in more recent studies, focused on the dramatic tradition, and in a divergent dialogue with the very idea, already classic, of a “crisis of modern drama” (Szondi), now expanded to the condition of anti-dramatic circumstances (outside the “Aristotelian-Hegelian” model) of modern and contemporary dramas (Sarrazac). When pointing out that this *mythos/opsis* dialectic is inverted in relation to the Aristotelian analytic model, it is assumed that, as before, notwithstanding the lesser importance of the *opsis* in the realization of the purposes of tragedy, it would always join with the *mythos* in its realization. Likewise, in those cases where the drama was no longer there, or was much less dramatic, with factual, visual, energetic or purely material narratives, there would still remain some inevitable residual *mythos*. This is said and reinforced in the book, and the review admits it. What it does not recognize, however, is that when one takes Mallarmé’s utopian proposal of a scene completely emptied of logical and rational meanings, like a delta zero in the intensity gradient of the *mythos/opsis* dialectic, and chooses the “pure *opsis*” as the delimiting mark of one of the extremes, a profession of faith is not being made in favour of a sterile and anodyne theatricality as Baumgartel seems to point out. What is being done is demarcating an analytical device, in some way similar to what Aristotle himself establishes in the *Poetics*, with his overvaluation of *mythos*, or as Peter Szondi does when, in *Theory of Modern Drama*, he establishes the notion of “absolute drama” in the 16th century, to demarcate the crisis that the dramatic pattern faced at the end of the 19th century. It is understood that the review needs to build this ghost, a “phantasmagoria” as it is said, to carry out the disqualification of the analysis carried out and reinforce the point, emphasized from the beginning, that “the radically non-dramatic operation makes the position of the spectator and the actor irrelevant” since, by replacing the cognitive and hermeneutic operation of the drama with an alienated relationship of supreme aridity, it leaves the spectator in a land where “nothing can be ploughed” as any possible productive connections are interrupted. The “pure *opsis*”, taken literally as a programmatic and absolute alternative to “interpretation”, appears as an aberration that exalts the erasure of “social references” and isolates the viewer in a “sensory monologue”. Having established this premise, which is quite debatable and goes against the arguments of the book itself although driven by some rhetorical raptures which, it is recognized, at certain moments its author may have launched himself, the path is open to counter-propose a “new performative *mimesis*” that “would not incur this risk” since, as it is performative, but still a little dramatic, it would guarantee minimum levels of intelligibility. This regeneration would make it possible to safeguard semantic operations and avoid depoliticized alienation, linked to the option of “contemporary *vanitas*”, this “utopian and escapist, modernist gesture, which exalts the indefiniteness and impossibility of firm cognition”.

The first objection to be made here is to reject the idea that a radical semantic opacity provided by this projected “abstraction”, the “pure *opsis*”, necessarily generates a void of hermeneutic elaboration, like a black hole that leaves no traces of light to its observers. It is true that Baumgartel does not fail to recognize a hermeneutic and thought-generating potential in this obscurity, but he demands some moderation because this purity, radically emptied of meaning, seems to him to

sterilize any appropriate mental operation on the part of its receiver. But, and this is the most important point of my rebuttal: as already said, the “pure *opsis*”, more than an objective and historical reality, or a wishful slogan, is a mere heuristic resource for thinking at the limit about a scene that is no longer meant to be dramatic, or that is built against drama and its arsenal of meanings and contents that are supposedly essential for it to be successful. One of the examples in the book, the shows by Romeo Castellucci, particularly an epigone of what the idea of “performative *mimesis*” proposes, serves to problematize this partial and biased reading of “pure *opsis*”. The reception of the “performative *mimesis*”, as proposed in the book, would be defined by its evading the usual cognitive fit of drama, in which sufficiently clear references correspond to the codes available to the spectator in their cognition process. Unlike recognition, a key device of the dramatic tradition, there would be a kind of immediate non-recognition and the incessant search for some semantic stability. I translated this circumstance in the book with the metaphor of the telephone token that goes round and round without fitting into the slot, postponing the call to be made. It is a poor or simple metaphor, but it seems to me to be effective in delimiting the impossibility, in some cases, of objective and crystal-clear recognition of what a show, or performance, presents, or, otherwise, demarcating what it withholds from the spectator in terms of a secure and firm interpretation. In a recent interview, Romeo Castellucci, responding to the role of the spectator in his densely opaque theatre, states that there

“the spectator is a monarch. It is they who determine the picture. This is different from mediated spectacle. It is the insurmountable weakness of theatre, the strongest and most beautiful art. If the monarch turns his face to the side, the theatre vanishes. Everything depends on him and hence the theatre's unprecedented fragility. (...) My theatre has no content, and this may seem strange for the continuity of this project, which ultimately generates a kind of tautology, and its representation, in itself, is always the same thing. But the fate of the show is the spectator's mind and body. The spectator is the fifth wall. Call this spectator, make them feel touched. It is not a question of affirming the artist's or playwright's vision. I hate that. The spectator is always present; it is they who determine what will be said”.²

It seems that in these aims of Castellucci, the non-existence of an immediate recognition of what one can see and feel, rather than isolating or forgetting the spectator, exactly intends to make them the protagonist, author of a personal and non-transferable reading. It will be a hermeneutic process full of potential creative elaborations on their part. But, yes, it is far from a hermeneutics inducing rationality and thought channelled to historical-social realities and to the due engagement in a critical and political dimension, one that would submit the spectator instead of emancipating them. These contextual elements will operate or appear to each spectator as their intellect allows, without any scraps of a guarantee. I argue that the most political gesture today would be to propose this open game, not with prior

² INCONTRO con Romeo Castellucci. DAMSLab | La Soffitta, 2021. Disponível em: <<https://site.unibo.it/damslab/it/eventi/incontro-con-romeo-castellucci>>

purposes and appropriate ethical conditions as if it were possible to offer more than the spectators themselves will be able to generate in their reception, assuming that they will need this external support/control to think and feel what is most important, most necessary or most appropriate, being possibly outside the bubble of the privileged and unable to make an autonomous reading. If so, we would be back in the realm of the "convenience" of neoclassicism in a progressive didactic key. Without entering into the merits of the gap between the objective conditions of those who think and make this expanded and radically anti-dramatic theatricality and the vast majority of the Brazilian population, lacking minimal assistance, such as basic sanitation and quality education, because these are issues that transcend the aims of a book and do not seem relevant to the point in question, I would say that this notion of an active posture of the spectator facing a spectacle unrecognizable as a form, or enigmatic from the point of view of the usual codes of dramatic narratives, seems to me more mobilizing than the conciliation with a minimal clarity, or a moderate opacity, that would send us back to the parameter of acceptable or recommendable fits.

The second unavoidable point that must be refuted concerns the notion of anti-theatricality and the meanings attributed to it, by myself and by the American critic and historian Michael Fried, which, according to Baumgartel, are only apparently distinct and in the end convergent. In fact, one of the book's most obvious conceptual efforts was to work on the notion of "anti-theatricality", taking it as a dominant element in 20th-century theatre. This undertaking, starting from Nietzsche's criticism of Wagner, focuses on understanding the term "anti-theatrical" as equivalent to "antidramatic" or "anti-mimetic" (the review wants to differentiate the two terms and is perplexed that I didn't), and had to face two distinct premises. The first, and most evident, is that the "theatricalist" tradition (Meierhold, Evreinov), which prevailed in modern Russian theatre as an alternative to naturalist drama and consolidated itself in epic theatre (Piscator, Brecht), intended to differentiate itself from dramatic, realistic, and naturalistic *mimesis*, and therefore took a somewhat anti-dramatic stance. Here, theatricality is a virtuous instance, combatting naturalistic illusionism and favouring the specificity of the theatrical, without renouncing drama. The second premise, similar to the previous one, but still converging with it, thinks of theatricality in the lineage of the criticism of Wagnerian opera, as a negative power, which, behind the appearance of a "total work of art" effectively carries out a colonization of all elements of the scene under the yoke of the dramatic, or the mimetic. In this Nietzschean reading of Wagner's opera, the drama submits and makes music obey its dictates.³ Martin Puchner wrote a book to describe how this Wagnerian gesture of thinking about the spectacular totality underlined in the dramatic vector had a decisive influence on modern theatre, making theatricality a value to be assumed or rejected and generating a more radical anti-dramatic bias.⁴ It is from this concept that Puchner elaborates his own notion of anti-theatricality, seen in his analysis of several modernist dramaturgies of the 20th century, and on the basis of which my

³ NIETZSCHE, Friedrich, O caso Wagner - um problema para Músicos; Nietzsche Contra Wagner - Dossiê de um psicólogo, São Paulo, (trad. Paulo César Souza), Companhia das Letras, 1999, pp 23-4.

⁴ PUCHNER, Martin, Stage Fright - Modernism, Anti-Theatricality & Drama, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. P.36.

book works with the notion of the anti-dramatic, coinciding with, or synonymous with, the anti-theatrical. These are the essential background to understanding my critical approach to Michael Fried's theatricality, expressed in his famous article "Art and Objecthood", in which he accuses American minimalist artists of fouling the tradition of modernist painting and transforming art into theatre, exactly what, in itself, could not be considered an art.⁵ In the book I try to show the contradictory aspects of the notion of anti-theatricality proposed by Fried. He uses his historical studies of 18th-century French painting and what he calls the "absorptive" tendency manifested in the canvases of its dominant painters and in Diderot's texts about them to conceptualize what constitutes an "anti-theatrical" feeling, which is there established in line with an essentially dramatic and illusionist project. I point out, for example, Fried's failure to recognize the evidence that Diderot's project for painting, which would be the basis of the supposed anti-theatricality in this absorptive tendency, fully coincides with his proposal for the theatre, seen in his "Discourse on Dramatic Poetry", where he rescued Aristotle's *Poetics*, purified of neoclassicist deformations, and anticipated by a hundred years the naturalist project, that which 20th century theatre, in its most anti-theatrical aspects, in the sense proposed above, would abandon. Despite the possibility that all this is no more than a lesser terminological dispute, there is, in any case, an evident mismatch between the understanding of modernity and contemporaneity in the fields of theatre and visual arts, or between what is presented in the book and what is configured by Fried. What was done in the book in question was to approach this anti-theatricalism of Fried, trying to understand and reveal it as an opposite, from the perspective of contemporary theatre and performance studies, of an anti-dramatic anti-theatricality, so to speak. It was a simple task to separate the wheat from the chaff, but whose opportunity the field of visual arts ignored and very few studies in the theatrical field had bothered to clarify.⁶

Interestingly, Baumgartel's review does not consider these arguments, even though it recognizes them as valid and pertinent. He prefers to return to the criticism of "pure opsis", already pointed out and refuted here, which would project this as a frontal attack and eliminate any hermeneutical possibility. In this way, he likens my defence of works that reject closed reception, in the referential fitting, to Greenberg's exaltation of Fried, of an absolute autonomy of the works vis-à-vis their observers. It is a skilful movement that, juxtaposing two antagonistic notions of anti-theatricality, manages to neutralize the two with the same reductive argument and opposes both by proposing a third way, "an anti-theatrical position as a metaphor for social relations, or as a way of being together". For Baumgartel, both Fried and I wish to extirpate works of art "from these mundane vestiges", which we fear as a "danger" to the open hermeneutic game. Hence his conciliatory proposal for the "performative *mimesis*", which would not imply throwing out the baby with the bathwater, that is, "losing the chance to install the construction of meanings and representations of the world as an always self-reflective process in the interaction between material performativity and activation of semantic contexts", or to ignore

⁵ FRIED, Michael. "Art and Objecthood", in *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p.148

⁶ GRAN, Anne-Britt. "The Fall of Theatricality in Age of Modernity". *Substance*, p.251-64, 1998/1999.

"the experience that the interpretation is in part a projection". Once again, it will be through the ethical issue that Baumgartel will differentiate his analysis of performative *mimesis*, pushing me onto Fried's terrain and saving the notion of the loss that reconciliation with my perspective, he supposes, would entail. He doesn't quite put me, as he does Fried, in the common grave of "totalitarian ideologies" and a "narcissistic" analysis, but he perceives in the "pure *opsis*", which, as already demonstrated, is no longer in his reading an analytical resource and becomes something objective and harmful, "a subjectivity deprived of any historicity and intersubjectivity". As a consequence, my perspective of "performative *mimesis*" reaches a "spatial structure characterized by an interaction, but not by a common idea nor by a mutual intentional interest". To this he opposes an "idea of performative *mimesis* that is productive", free from "anti-theatrical error" and that manages to restore the "social and ethical force of both *mimesis* and performativity". It is assumed here that this "anti-theatrical error", at least as far as I am concerned, comes from the perspective of anti-theatricality perceived as effectively anti-dramatic, which Baumgartel completely refuses, given his clear interest in saving drama and its supposed historical substitute, epic theatre or one of its contemporary heirs. As he says, "from the standpoint of mediation, an abstract enigma that eludes any attempt to materialize an enunciation is not interesting, but the enigma that displaces the hegemonic enunciations that belong to the historical moment of the presentation of the work is". In this project, the "performative *mimesis*" will lack the mediation between the force of materiality averse to meaning and the "semantic context". It will be in the potentialization of what remains semantically from this confrontation and not in its elimination that the "transforming force of this poetics called performative *mimesis*" will emerge. I accept this comment as an important point, not without recognizing in it an aftertaste of devotion to the dramatic and essentialist in nature, specifically Adornian, which, ironically, would bring Baumgartel's position closer to Fried's, as both wish to preserve the ultimate essences of the respective fields that they defend, he, that of drama, and Fried that of modernist painting and sculpture.

My perspective of "performative *mimesis*" is less limiting. It considers the idea of an expanded scene without prejudices of origin and without defending impregnable territories. If it flirts with an unconditioned artistic fruition, it does so, as has already been argued, to enhance the aesthetic dimension of the relationship between work and viewer beyond rational or socially "productive" cognitions, and not to suppress them completely, or deny them at all. The best example I find to defend this possibility is evoking music, perceived since Aristotle, in *Politics*, as the most effective *mimesis* on the receiver as it bypasses the rational and intellectual planes and affects more through sense, auditory and animic perception. The German Romantic philosophers also chose music as the best possible means of transport to reach the intangible planes of metaphysics, whether the Idea, in Hegel, or the Will, in Schopenhauer. In addition, music itself, as a specific mimetic medium, has expanded and become generalized as a mode. The reception of theatrical and performative materialities, even when receiving some of the friction of opacities and semantic losses, comes very close to musical fruition in which the hermeneutic game of references and recognitions is much less mental and much more emotional, much more epidermic, even atmospheric, than a captive of contents, in its range of

affection. When the formulation “performative *mimesis*” was chosen, it was to mainly differentiate it from the dramatic or mimetic (Plato) *mimesis*, dominant in the realist tradition and whose crisis overshadowed and influenced all the arts in the 20th century. It is also undeniable that, despite all the anti-mimetism, *mimesis*, or the presentation of something to someone with or without a purpose, with or without recognizable content, remains potentially operative despite all efforts or defences that may have been used against it⁷.

Returning to the review, its argument moves towards proposing an alternative approach, from which, according to Baumgartel, even my specific analyses in the book would have benefited. One that would be more powerful to understand the phenomenon “not as (materialistic or symbolic) immediacy in action, but as an action of mediation”. A mediation that would produce, in addition to a hermeneutic understanding, an “efficacy of the performativity” of the work. It should be noted that the book discusses the idea of the performative as a more or less effective performance even though the review does not recognize it. The sense of efficacy in the book is not, in any case, what the review connotes, but it would have been interesting to oppose these different perspectives.

Having dealt with the “epistemological problems” that Baumgartel wished to point out in the notion of performative *mimesis*, dependent on the hyperbole of “pure opsis” to thrive, it remains for me to comment on the suggested alternatives to account for the “*social urgency*” that would justify the importance of contemporary performative *mimesis*. The review perceives in the “theatrical practices of more popular origin (grotesque, carnivalesque, mimetic in their various forms of distancing)” means capable of “theatrically exposing the tension between repetition and difference without resorting predominantly to forms linked to the current power, or to explicit statements about relationships with this power”. These practices, or forms of performative *mimesis*, bearers of the “contradictory dynamics” of the world “not in the enunciation of words” but rather in the “enunciation of its referential performative form”, allow for the coining of the term “parafigurative art”, an art that can be “not only formally, but tragically performative”. Here, despite the mysterious, almost enigmatic, character of the statement, it is worth recalling the fascination of Brazilian modernists with popular forms, seen as the strongest indicators of the modernist option for the theatre. If we no longer have Piolim as a paradigm, we would still have the pulsating materialities of peripheral culture in Brazil, which is becoming hegemonic in light of the rickets which the arts proposed by the dominant elites suffer from. Regardless of this evidence, shared here, Baumgartel’s proposition allows him to demarcate his refusal of the selection of Brazilian artists defined by the book, who would not be the best examples of important performative attempts in Brazil. Once again, the point in question is lost, and I am accused of not mentioning

⁷ Didi-Huberman's commentary on American minimalist artists is exemplary in this regard, even if he doesn't make use of the notion of *mimesis*. The purpose of their theoretical manifestos was to empty art of all connotation, and perhaps even see it “empty of all emotion”, but this “is not that simple (...) Donald Judd's cobblestone represents nothing, I said, does not represent anything as an image of something else. It offers itself as the simulacrum of nothing. More precisely, we will have to agree that it represents nothing insofar as it does not play with some supposed presence elsewhere – what every figurative or symbolic work of art strives for to a greater or lesser degree, and every work of art connected to a greater or lesser degree to the world of belief. Judd's work does not represent anything, it does not play with any presence, because it is given there, before us as specific in its own presence, its specific presence as an art object.” Didi-Huberman, Georges, *What We See Looks Back at Us*.

artists who could certainly be included in another book. The selection presented, in addition to not intending to be exhaustive, focused on those works that were clearly or tended to be anti-dramatic, which had characteristics in common with those observed in the foreign artists examined, and who helped to clarify the idea in question.

A final point in the review deserves comment: Baumgartel's treatment of the book's final chapter, "Cartography of the concept of *mimesis*: from similarity to difference and repetition". Here the reader is presented with a possible trajectory of the conceptualization of *mimesis* from Greek antiquity to post-structuralist currents. Here the intention was to give an overview of the bibliography covered and used to support the propositions and analyses carried out in the previous chapters, without the naivety of assuming this as a foundational "theory" of performative *mimesis*. Thus, bringing together well-founded opinions, I approach some changes in the sundry meanings that the idea of *mimesis* took on historically from the sixth century BC to the 20th century. In general, the use of *mimesis* was initially strongly associated with the idea of similarity, but already in Aristotle it paradoxically started to refer to difference, and, in the post-structuralist context, was identified with repetition. Well, once again in the review, Baumgartel starts from the presumption of a certain intention that will serve, later on, to confront the author based on a forced interpretation, which will disregard the presuppositions presented and the very function of this latter part in the whole of the book. He takes advantage of quotes by Derrida and Deleuze used there to mobilize them against a supposedly closed position that is generally defended. For Baumgartel, this position implies erroneously taking the interest of these philosophers in repetition as "difference without reference", or "difference without a concept", making a spurious use of their ideas. This happens, according to Baumgartel, due to the supposed thesis, allegedly proposed by me, of a desemantization, understood not as a rupture but rather as a gesture of supplementing the empirical status quo with an "enigmatic indefinite potency", which would make the ultimate horizon of the "possible invention" referred to be this status quo. As he says, in an ingenious checkmate, "even though the supplement may destabilize this status quo, it does not propose to articulate a transformation of this in order to overcome it". For Baumgartel, Deleuze and Derrida's interest in repetition is only tactical, to "undermine an essentialist understanding of textual or scenic writing and keep perceptible in it an empty gesture of non-referentiality but which is inseparable from the referentiality in which it acts with this undermining force". According to him, the "tension between difference and similarity, caused by the play of performative *mimesis*", only materialized in the open reception by the spectator of an unstable referential, would guarantee that this game does not become "formalism or an empty retroactive circle", or that it is interrupted and fixed in "a centre". Rather, it would "constantly displace this centre", without establishing "its own dynamics as the functioning of a new centre".

Well, in this argument, once again, in addition to the rectifying abduction of the notion of performative *mimesis*, bringing it to the just and non-degenerate path, there is, ironically, a rescue of the book's own arguments in favour of a reception that does not become bundled, or fit into a hermeneutic appeasement, now used to contradict it, articulating in this new onslaught the post-structuralist weapons against it. In fact, what was done in this last chapter, and not by way of conclusion, was to

include some of the considerations of both philosophers on *mimesis* to collaborate in this summary, and certainly precarious, brief history of the proposed concept. Above all, post-structuralism was located differently in regard to the moment, at that time already distant, of the modernist tradition of teleological rupture towards the new. In its disenchanted terms, in which repetition became the possibility of making holes in reality and emptying metaphysics of its contents, *mimesis* was still throbbing. This, like other understandings and updates of the concept of *mimesis* gathered in the research process and described there, did not seek more than to be, as has been said, continents in a cartography, offering the reader possible directions to approach the theme. However, Baumgartel's interpretation not only ignored this purpose but, even worse, attributed to it a non-existent purpose, in order to appropriate the book's arguments favourable to the acting spectator, the ultimate instance in the production of meanings, despite the opacity and hermeneutic inconsistency of the works, in other words, the same assumptions that he had frontally refuted.

As emphasized at the beginning, I believe that the critical eye that Baumgartel placed on the book is essential and invaluable, justifying the effort to have written it. However, I did not shy away from rebutting this criticism, especially when it seemed unjustified, attributing unfounded intentions to me and associating negative consequences and distorted conclusions to these intentions. In addition, the initiative to respond, besides repaying the kindness of provocation, marks the possibility of expanding the dialogue with this response and extending it to those voices who might wish to collaborate in the debate.

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