



## **Pain *versus* Pleasure: sexuality in women's performance**

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**ABSTRACT – Pain *versus* Pleasure: sexuality in women's performance** – This article investigates the opposition of *pain versus pleasure* in the performances in the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo collection, from 1972 to 2021. The performance works analyzed share, as a major attribute, a relation to extreme physical limit. This study correlates the concepts of pain and pleasure with the advances and setbacks suffered by women socially, politically, and culturally in order to understand who are these women received into the museum. Also, we discuss women's aesthetic construction in the history of art, considering the various intersections of gender, race, and class to comprehend the complex sexual web in women's art.

Keywords: **Performance. Museum. Gender. Sexuality. Pain.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Douleur et Plaisir: la sexualité dans la performance des femmes** – Nous étudions l'opposition entre douleur et plaisir à partir d'œuvres de performance du Musée d'Art Contemporain de l'Université de São Paulo entre 1972 et 2021. La principale caractéristique entre les performances analysées est le lien extrême avec la limite physique. Cette étude relie les notions de douleur et de plaisir aux avancées et reculs subis par les femmes dans les sphères sociales, politiques et culturelles pour comprendre qui sont les femmes accueillies dans l'espace muséal. Nous proposons la mise en perspective de la construction esthétique des femmes dans l'histoire de l'art, en concaténant les différentes intersections pour comprendre le tissu sexuel complexe dans l'art.

Mots-clés: **Performance. Musée. Genre. Sexualité. Douleur.**

**RESUMO – Dor *versus* Prazer: a sexualidade na performance de mulheres** – Neste artigo, investiga-se a oposição *dor versus prazer* a partir do acervo de obras de performance do Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC-USP) entre 1972 e 2021. As performances analisadas têm como principal característica a relação extrema com o limite físico, e este estudo relaciona os conceitos de dor e prazer aos avanços e retrocessos sofridos pelas mulheres nos âmbitos social, político e cultural para compreender quem são as mulheres recebidas dentro do espaço museológico. Ainda, coloca-se em perspectiva a construção estética da mulher na história da arte, concatenando as diferentes intersecções para compreender a complexa teia sexual na arte de mulheres.

Palavras-chave: **Performance. Museu. Gênero. Sexualidade. Dor.**

## Introduction

A woman's body is a body that screams, albeit in silence – such as the performance of John Cage (Schwarm, 2015), in which, even without playing a note, it was possible to hear all the sounds of the setting and of the human body in his *4'33'* (1952) of silence in front of the piano. Accordingly, so is the body of a woman in performance: she does not need to say a word or make a movement so someone can contrive a complete story about her based on her size, neckline, body fat, posture; or, also, it is easy to ignore her, if she wants to express herself on a subject that is unusual among people with her appearance. To recognize a woman is to recognize the cultural construction that precedes her uniqueness.

This body, within Western society, has always been in a position of friction of powers, struggling together with the formation of modern society for rights and independence. The use of the gerund is intentional, because this friction remains. In this article, we discuss the woman's body through performance, situating the artists' bodies within society, seeking to analyze sexuality and pain as opposites of pleasure in the reflections presented, examining this sexuality together with the construction of the aesthetics of women within the history of art. Performance functions as a means of vital transfer, enabling the transmission of memories, identities and cultural traits through that embodied body in action, be this action a choreography, a scene or a ritual. In addition, performance holds in its ephemerality the power of presence. Precisely for this reason, performance is also a methodological lens, since it is understood as an episteme, being simultaneously real and built (Taylor, 2013).

Precisely due to understanding the strength of ephemerality in this setting, an archaeology of performance was carried out within the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC-USP), in order to understand who is invited to inhabit the setting and how performance operates. Seeking a deep reflection to organize the objective elements in this construction, we systematized the artists by ethnicity, gender, nationality and theme, in order to facilitate the grouping of artists and understand who produces performance within the museum and which themes are most emerging. This objective analysis, although fundamental to reflect on the

object of the research, did not by itself reach the complexity of the variables in the field of performance: therefore, we collected accounts from other agents directly involved in the performances to compose the history. In the constant consideration of this archive, the common denominator found – pain – is the guiding thread of the development of this article.

In the MAC-USP performance archive, we quantified, up to 2021, a total of 35 performance actions with 98 artists involved, with 51.7% of these actions performed and/or led by women. We will work with the majority of women, totaling 14 artists and/or companies<sup>1</sup>.

That said, the theoretical foundations of this article include intellectual Diana Taylor, whose theories about performance guide our methodology; art critic Griselda Pollock, whose post-colonial feminist studies in the Visual Arts are important to understand the relation of women's sexualization by art, as protagonist and object; intellectual Lélia Gonzalez, essential for a reading *through* the archive gathered for doctoral research, raising questions in the hiatus of representation of this archive and pointing to rigorous paths for an analysis that aims to be anti-racist; anthropologist David Le Breton, through the studies on pain that feed this reflection; and, finally, intellectual Peggy Phelan, whose perceptions of performance as a means to reinvent the present are precious for this text.

The driving issue for this article is the perception that the overwhelming majority of these women present, in their actions, the extreme relation with the physical limit, be it by pain, extreme vulnerability, fatigue or self-mutilation. Thus, we investigate the concepts of pain in opposition to pleasure in correlation to the advances and setbacks suffered by women socially, politically and culturally, in order to draw dialogical points based on women's performative actions and the evocation of this borderline physical situation, mostly within the museum setting.

### **Becoming visible**

One of the excerpts from Peggy Phelan's book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* prompted the main study of this article when she pointed out that addressing the visibility of women in the narrative of a performance involves addressing more than the female body in the scene. Phelan (1996, p. 158-161) refers to the self-portraits of Cindy Sherman, in which

the artist manipulated her own image to make her issues emerge, or, for example, Yvone Rainer's film *The Man Who Envied Women*, released in 1985, in which the image of the woman never appears in the film; also, Lorna Simpson's 1988 work *Guarded Conditions*, in which photographic juxtapositions force the audience to face the backs of black women, without ever showing their faces. Thus, addressing the woman's narrative involves erasing her from the scene to, thus, enact her daily erasure; moreover, it requires manipulating opposites and overlapping markers such as race, territory and class, in addition to gender.

Women's narratives, thus, start to occupy a space of problematization of female existence, subjects that, before, were relegated to the shadows appear so as to expose truths through their protagonists,

[...] truths experienced in the daily life of female bodies that suffer secularly the attempted erasure by the structures and strategies of colonization, taming and conditioning of the body-mind; truths such as dehumanization, objectification and invisibility to which we are subjected, especially black women. And the art of performance holds the power to truly express this situation (Silva, C., 2021, p. 17, our translation).

Brazilian society, after obtaining the right to female vote in 1932<sup>2</sup>, undergoes intense transformations in the understanding of what gender is and how this marking relates in social networks. It is undeniable, also, the role of the feminist struggle in advancing the agenda for women's equity in society in all areas (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 140), especially with women occupying decision-making positions, as can be observed in this article through the admission of female directors and curators in MAC-USP.

Becoming visible, then, is a constant effort to occupy space. Museum spaces are no exception. That said, understanding the layers that permeate gender in the museum interests us in order to also understand which women are placed in this setting, for which women there is visibility within a university museum – therefore, committed to artistic experimentation, academic research and education. Former director of MAC-USP, Ana Mae Barbosa (1990, p. 7), in her management, tells us that the university museum needs:

[...] to be a communication channel between the university and the public, not only university public, but mainly with that public that could not get

into the university or has already left it. [...] We assume that all social classes should have access to cultural codes.

This thought of Barbosa, concerned with a democratic agenda, characterizes the museum with actions that embrace different forms of art, such as the exhibition *Carnavalescos* (1987), by Luiza Olivetto and Roberto Loeb, which caused repudiation of the press and artists of the university when they saw Escola de Samba carnival floats and scenic elements going up the museum street (Barbosa, 1990, p. 07, our translation).

Our museum model came from Europe and took root in Brazil in 1818, with the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, so it is based on documents and artistic expressions that fit in a certain order of importance. In other words, for a given class of people and for a given class of knowledge (Le Goff apud Abercrombie, 1998; UNESCO, 2002; Taylor, 2013), we understand that this model, as well as artistic practices and aesthetic conceptions, fluctuate according to the need of the *status quo*. When thinking about aesthetic reproduction and education more broadly, we understand that the Brazilian education system also addresses few female representations within textbooks, even with the vast academic research showing the importance of situating female figures in the center of their own stories. In addition, if the racial marker is added, such scarcity is even greater. Lélia Gonzalez (2020, p. 39, emphasis added, our translation), corroborating the thought of Abdias do Nascimento, points out that the “[...] educational system is used as an instrument of control in this structure of cultural discrimination. At all levels of Brazilian education – elementary, secondary and *university*.”

Through the female occupation of the positions of director and curator of MAC-USP, we see a significant increase in exhibitions with women in a prominent position (not only in performance, but in the visual arts as a whole in this space), with emphasis on the intervention with artist Barbara Krueger, *Seu corpo é um campo de batalha* (*Your body is a battlefield*) (1992), in the management of Ana Mae Barbosa (1986-1993); the series of exhibitions *Mulheres Artistas no acervo do MAC* (1996), in the first management of Lisbeth Rebollo; and the triad of exhibitions *Mulheres Artistas e a contemporaneidade* (2007, 2008 and 2009), in her second management (1994-1998; 2006-2010).

In order to understand the scarcity of women in prominence in the museum space, it is enough to check the exhibition catalogs, but such lack can also be seen in the speech of the then director Wolfgang Pfeiffer, during the exhibition *American Women Artists*, in 1980, collaboratively curated by Regina Silveira (Brazil), Glenna Park (USA) and Mary Dritschel (USA):

I find it very interesting to be able to observe how they work today, especially because I can make comparisons, also with the research and works of Brazilian artists. We have, precisely, in drawing and engraving, top-notch values among us. *Therefore, the fact that they are women who exhibit does not constitute an element of so much prominence or strangeness.* What we want to see is the expressiveness and quality of the work, even if in this act that, naturally, is of cultural and artistic exchange, a field that, unfortunately, for purely material reasons, cannot be cultivated, in a desirable way (Dimambro, 2018, p. 105, emphasis added, our translation).

The denial of the female gender as a marker of the exhibition, that is, affirming that the women present there are not there because they are women, evidences exactly the contrast of their presence (or lack) in this space. Moreover, to say that they are there only because they present *top-notch* works makes us ask: were not there women with a decent work before, so would that be the reason for the lack of female artists in the museum? Still, even with the increasing entry of these artists, as we indicated above, of which women are we talking about?

### **Of which women are we talking about?**

For the thesis of which this article is part, an archive was built to study the performances at MAC-USP, whose actions occurred from 1972 to 2021. Of this amount, women total 51.7% of total performances (MAC, 2021a; 2021b), where:

- i. It is considered performance what was done through the body and had its main action live, even if there is film or visual traces after the performance.
- ii. Works that were thought for video art, that is, whose performance is for video are not considered for this analysis, with the exception of three filmed dance works: *El Tango de Passilos* (1971), *Amálgama* (2020) and *Poeiragem* (2021)<sup>3</sup>.
- iii. It is also considered the performance of mixed groups whose composition has a female majority and/or are directed by women.

In this panorama of performances, the woman's body proves, most of the time, a borderline place, stretching time to the maximum, such as the performances of Ana Amorim, *Contar Segundos* (2018), and of Núcleo Pausa, *O que vemos quando olhamos dança?* (2019). It stimulates the body to the limit of tiredness, such as the performances of Marta Minujín, *Repollos* (1977), and of Juliana Morais, *Obra sem título* (2016). It presents denunciation, self-mutilation and position of extreme physical vulnerability, such as the performances of Laura Lima, Pilar Albarracín and Regina José Galindo in several actions within the exhibition *Mulheres Artistas: corpos estranhos* (2009), and of Andreia Yonashiro, *Uma baleia encalhada* (2016). There are also other female artists whose techniques of a dance mode place them in the position of *virtuoso*<sup>4</sup>, such as Analívia Cordeiro, *Uma linguagem de dança* (1974); Patrícia Osseles, *Tango del Pasillo* (2012); Ciane Fernandes and Coletivo A-fecto, *Cristal* (2016); Marcia Milhazes Cia. de Dança, *Cebola* (2016); and São Paulo Cia de Dança, *Amálgama* (2020) – as opposed to the space of pure experimentation often granted to men, without technical or final product requirements. In short, it is about the works of these 13 artists and/or companies that the article elucidates – there is also the exception, the 14th, as mentioned in the introduction, to which we will refer at the end.

### The opposition between pain and pleasure

What are these bodies whose spaces open up to scream their condition in agony? Tânia Modleski, pointed out by Peggy Phelan (1996, p. 149-150), says that the historical scandal for feminist writing is in the discourse centered on “talking men” as opposed to “mute women.” If this suggestion is correct, for performance, such opposition occurs in the “body that feels pleasure” *versus* the “body that feels pain.”

Claudia Fazzolari (2021), curator of the exhibition *Mulheres Artistas: corpos estranhos* (2009), told about the preparations for the performance *Juegos de poder*, carried out by Regina José Galindo, in which the artist asked for the

[...] context of a project that exhibited a frontally subjected, humiliated body. As we know, the body that agonizes in its performances and reaches almost unimaginable limits is always that thin body, of Latin American woman, of a Caribbean wandering that confronts oppression. *Juegos de*

*poder* is born as *Hipnosis* (in its pre-action script created by Galindo) and adjusts to the very compass of a complex existence, living the conflict of its own materialization.

From the decision-making space occupied by women arise painful themes for the female existence in society. Here we add a reflection to the dichotomy of pain and suffering, in which the difference is fundamental to our reflection, although often the two are treated as synonyms. Physical pain is a defense for the well-being of the body, since it warns us of a possible conduct that can harm the physical body, such as a skinned knee when we fall on the street, and this pain does not necessarily cause suffering. Another example, more complex, is labor, in which the physical pain felt does not need to have suffering involved, with some people even feeling joy at this time. Moreover, the rare disease of analgesia, that is, the absence of physical pain, does not mean the absence of suffering for the person<sup>5</sup>. In this regard, the very definition of pain postulated by the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP, in its English acronym) has undergone changes in its initial concept, shifting the perceived pain from the suffered pain, showing that pain is: “An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage. Through their life experiences, individuals learn the concept of pain” (IASP, 2020, n. p.).

Thus, when we talk about the opposition of pain *versus* pleasure, we point out the collective pain of women in society, the relation within the scope of affection, because, to feel pain, it is necessary to be affected by it. In the extensive work *Anthropology of Pain*, David Le Breton (1999, p. 09, our translation) says that

When feeling its horrors, this is not the passive receptacle of a specialized organ that records physiological impersonal multiples. The way man appropriates culture, the values that belong to them, their relation with the world, presupposes a decisive whole for their apprehension. Because pain is, first and foremost, a situational fact<sup>6</sup>.

It is also understood, with the anthropologist, that pain has different stages and even mild pain, if constant, can alter a person's relationship with themselves, separating them from their social relationships, as it happens with migraine and chronic pain. Getting used to pain shapes the way the

being behaves socially and has the power to displace them from society, as in cases of excruciating pain.

Accordingly, the opening of the museum space to these issues seems to reflect a state of society; however, detecting pain as one of the main characteristics in the women present leads to an indigestible question: would not our fascination in seeing women in limit situations be a fetish? Or, also, does not the resistance to pain, in these bodies, train us toward our own resistance to feel the suffering of women? That said, consistently with the idea of Le Breton (1999), pain leads us to a moment of epiphany in which, finally, we perceive ourselves as strangers to ourselves.

The relation with pain also approaches the relation with risk, another “natural condition of human vulnerability” (Leles; Camargo, 2022, p. 3). To think that the work of the creative process of risk domination could also be a way of repairing the constant erasures also broadens the concept of pain, giving dimensions of domination to protagonists previously dominated.

### **The deconstruction of beauty and sexuality**

To understand the complex web of female sexuality in art, let's build a brief argument about the beauty and the constructed image of women. Beauty and supposed femininity, which mark the reading of women in society, are constructions widely explored in the academic literature, but still predominantly experienced in their most stereotyped form. Griselda Pollock (2008, p. 168), in her work that reviews the historiography of the art of Impressionists and Pre-Raphaelites, says about the irony in the maxim of male discourse that postulates that beauty is a characteristic of all women. However, the ideals of beauty, which vary historically, are always connected to a *painful* physical ideal.

Thus, the denial to approach the image of the woman considered beautiful and sexual consists in the very liberation of the class for their entry into the labor market and universities, and also involves the dissociation of the delicate female figure, appendix of the man, in the shadow of someone. In addition, if, for white women, dissociating from sexuality was necessary to launch themselves into the universe of work and intellectuality, for black women, dissociating from sexualization is, rather, dissociating from hypersexualization, since “[...] sexualization as a biological characteristic of blacks

was disseminated in such a way that, even today, black bodies are marked by this constant representation” (Reis, 2019, p. 98, our translation, our translation).

Gonzalez (2020) points out that the black woman lives on a double image, sometimes within the myth of the “mulata” [female mulatto], sometimes as a maid. Thus, the author shows how the phenomena of racism and sexism directly influence the image of black women and their way of putting themselves in the world. Reis (2019, p. 98), when interpreting Gonzalez, makes a clear synthesis of the contradictions about the figure of the black woman when arguing that the myth of the mulata lies in the “[...] between parentheses of Carnival, the black woman is hypersexualized, and her body, desired. After this festive time, all this desire accumulated by the black body will be released in the form of violence, precisely in the figure of the maid.”

The opposition sexuality *versus* intellectuality becomes more visible through this construction. Thinking about such layers, revisiting the thought of Pollock (2008), is not replacing gender with class or gender with race; however, it helps us to decipher sensitive interdependencies in all forms in order to understand historical practices.

Barbosa, talking about his management at the museum, shows the fusion of aesthetic perceptions, mainly signaling the issue of the self (white with European roots) and the other (peripheral, with black roots):

The cultural policy that I adopted in the MAC, from 1987 to 1993, was feminist, ecological, critical, multicultural, and favored the visual culture of everyday life and the visual culture of the people. The exhibition *Carnavalescos* presented Carnival floats and scenic elements that commented on the universe of art. How does the visual culture of the people interpret art? The magnificent exhibition of Glaucia Amaral and May Suplicy, *Arte periférica: combogós, latas e sucatas* (October, 1990), was mistakenly interpreted as an exhibition of popular art, when, at that time, I was much more radical than today and did not even accept this designation, because it was created by hegemonic intellectuals to name the ‘other.’ Thus, we were showing the visual culture of the people; however, those who learned through the primer of European criticism were — and are — unable to recognize it as cultural production, let alone as art (Barbosa, 2011, p. 300, our translation).

From this perspective, psychologist and researcher Joana Novaes (2010), who coordinates the PUC-Rio Beauty Diseases Center, points out in her research set the difference in aesthetic perception between wealthy and peripheral women. Two main points are observed. The first point is that, while the wealthy population seeks a thin standard, the peripheral population favors curves. The second point shows us their perception of their own body, and the wealthy group understands being thin as elegant; the peripheral group understands that the curvilinear body is more attractive and the tight clothes show these forms.



Figure 1 – Excerpts from the audiovisual record of Pilar Albarracín.  
Source: *Lunares*, DVD 1'26", 2004.

The performance *Lunares* (2009), by Pilar Albarracín, also documented in video, subjects the artist to a pain caused exactly by the exposure of her body, her dance and clothes that highlight the curves of her body. The artist wears a typical flamenco costume, white, with a band that plays in the background and, while dancing, she pierces herself with a needle, forming moon shapes with red blood staining the clothes<sup>7</sup>.

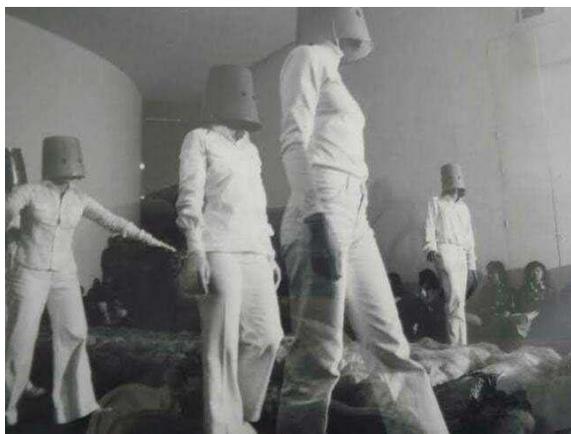


Figure 2 – Photograph of Marta Minujín's performance *Repollos*, 1977.  
Source: MAC-USP Collection.



Figure 3 – Photograph of Juliana Morais' performance *Obra sem título*.  
Source: Cais Produções (2016).

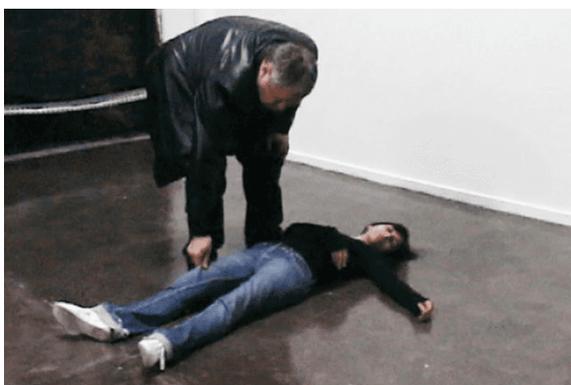


Figure 4 – Photograph of Regina José Galindo, *Juegos de poder*.  
Source: TV USP in MAC (2009).



Figure 5 – Photograph of the performance *Uma baleia encalhada na praia*.  
Source: Cais Produções (2016).



Figure 6 – Artist Ana Amorim in performance at MAC.

Source: Photograph published in SP-Arte and kindly provided by the artist (2018).



Figure 7 – Photograph of the show *O que vemos quando olhamos dança?*, by Núcleo Pausa.

Source: Sandro Miano, December 2019.

The museum gives space to the woman who responds to a certain dress code and, therefore, to a possible aesthetics. In addition, as in *Lunares*, the body that dares enter sexuality is marked by pain. In fact, widening the perspective, if we analyze performance as proposed by Judith Butler (2003), from a philosophical point of view that analyzes gender as performance in daily construction – that is, she observes cultural agency and subjectivity as a discourse that normalizes our gender identity –, we can affirm, when observing the photographs above, that the artist woman invited to the museum *performs* within the perception that is suitable for the intellectual woman, accepted by society, whose clothes reproduce the model also accepted by the wealthier classes.

Thus, it is not necessary to look far to perceive that female sexuality is in a place of opposition to the intellectualized woman, as if the perception of her own sexuality situated her in a state of social vulnerability or, even, as devoid of intelligence. Resuming the analysis of performance actions, in the installation *Dopada* (2009), Laura Lima presents a giant nightgown that connects to a red crochet tube in which a woman sleeps among the audience, vulnerable to what happens around her and to the public. The curator, Fazzolari (2021, n. p., our translation), says that the cast of women invited to feel the installation consisted of:

[...] actresses interested in the experience of a body understood as a particular material dimension of a work of art; Visual Arts students, motivated by proximity to the performance act in circumstances in which the creator herself does not experience immersion in her body, but enables ecstasy to another woman's body; Social Care professionals seeking to comprehend the vulnerability of a body exposed in a public place.

Women who have experienced *Dopada* can find similar experience in the daily life of Brazilian women who need specific laws, such as the Maria da Penha Law<sup>8</sup>, to protect their bodies from structural objectification in society.

A few days after submitting this article, we must emphasize, news emerged of the case of anesthesiologist Giovanni Quintella Bezerra, from the city of São João do Meriti, who sexually abused a woman he improperly sedated inside the operating room while in labor (Anestesista..., 2022). Filmed by nurses at the hospital, he was arrested in the act<sup>9</sup>. Convicted for the crime, the rapist was released pending appeal and is being investigated for another 40 possible rape cases. This case shows the extent to which the female body, regardless of race and class, is still sexualized and subjugated in any condition. The performance *Juegos de poder* (2009), by Regina José Galindo, scrutinizes exactly this relation of total subjugation of the female body. The artist says, in the script of her performance:

A professional hypnotist will put me to sleep. When I am in complete hypnotic trance, the hypnotist will give me a series of instructions to perform a series of absurd acts. The hypnotist will finish with the order or the clear instruction that I make myself dead. [...] The dominion of one over the other. Absolute repression. Loss of individual will as a metaphor for the loss of the will of societies. It is the others who manipulate us. An absurd game of

power that governs the relations of mankind in the world. A few give the orders, the rest complies (Galindo, 2009, n.p., our translation)<sup>10</sup>.

The woman whose body is distanced from sexuality, then, inhabits the space destined for intellectuality, and pain becomes a desperate request against daily violence against the bodies of women, opposing, in this socio-cultural construction, the body of women whose sexuality emerges through their clothes, from the apparent body and from pleasure (Novaes, 2010; Reis, 2019; Gonzalez, 2020).

### **The flesh that feels nothing**

The exercise of enduring pain – individual or collective – does not cease to seem like training, because, as we know, pain is only felt by those who can be affected by it: those who are able to feel something. A healthy living body is capable of feeling pain and pleasure. One or the other, only, makes the human experience incomplete or, even, puts the body in a state of feeling absolutely nothing.

When we think about the representation of this collective pain, the gradual increase in the endurance of physical pain has a price: the flesh that feels nothing becomes insensitive. Thus, the same carapace that is constructed in the physical resistance of pain can also act as a carapace for the sensitivity to pleasure. Le Breton (1999, p. 15, our translation) says, in this regard, that “If pain is an uncomfortable state, it is also an appreciated defense against the inexorable hostility of the world”<sup>11</sup>. In short, the body of a woman becomes a place for so many other women, so the performance, by the body of one, affects the body of all women – even if, for such, the body of this one becomes increasingly insensitive to its own physical pain. Considering this, would it be possible to feel the scream that reveals the femicide that so many women suffer daily in silence? In the performance (279) *Golpes*, presented in video (2009), Galindo does not name the 279 women killed in Guatemala between January 1, and June 9, 2005, represented on her naked back, in a dark room, but the sound of the whipping is a reminder so their deaths are not forgotten and, perhaps, so others are avoided.

In this sense, society is built as a place where the practice of violence against women – or people socialized as women for part of their lives – is naturalized, and the more intersection there is in groups of women, the

greater the gap between the rights that are established in society and those that remain in the limbo of oblivion. Pain, therefore, becomes a social construction, since human physiology does not start from a state of purity, as if the body was not part of history; the body is permeated by “social and cultural symbolisms” (Le Breton, 1999, p. 137, our translation)<sup>12</sup>.

### **Will we enjoy the future?**

This hunger for space so that art can denounce a state of violence and inequality for the female population incites other issues, such as the fetish of this woman who is always on the edge of something. Modleski (apud Phelan, 1996), when pointing to the challenge of the opposition *between pain versus pleasure*, also points to the challenge of a performative writing, which approaches a future in which women can feel pleasure.

The perception that different women have of their own body involves the perception of themselves and their relation with the space that receives them, because it is understood that there is an intellectual aesthetics within this setting – in relation not only to the themes of the works, but in relation to the artists present themselves. In addition, the perception of the hiatus of a certain group within the museum space is important for us to design a future in which women occupy the places of protagonism. To this end, we examine the construction of sexuality around them.

When we specify the issue of pain and sexuality in the performance themes presented, we do not refer to the artists’ sexuality individually, but to the perception of the (non) sexuality that the museum exhibits. In other words, we speak of the absence of pleasure as a theme in women’s works. In this respect, given our archive of performances, a woman who puts herself in the supreme condition of enjoyment seems to us the exception: who is afraid of a woman capable of feeling pleasure?

With a thematic exception in the milieu of high culture, as a light blow that raises the dust of red earth, projected on the walls of the museum, the work *Poeiragem* arises. The performance for video was part of the set of works *Trans lu(z)cidez*, of the national collective *Projetemos*, which was in the exhibition *Além de 2020. Arte italiana na pandemia*, curated by Teresa Emanuele and Nicolas Ballario, in 2021, at MAC-USP. The dance artist and sex therapist Preta Kiran is projected in a brief moment throughout the

walls of the museum with a breath of possible future. The work *Poeiragem* is the exception, the antithesis, of this set of works and women, with an artistic approach that speaks about identity, territory and nature through a clear relation of pleasure. The camera reveals the dust rising by the feet that hit the ground and then shows the artist's face, smiling, and there is the blossoming of a dance full of touches on her own body with tenderness and affection. Her gaze, which converses with the camera while facing it, is deep and serene. Thus, the artist investigates the theme *Image of the Afro-Brazilian Territory*, and her body, unlike the stereotypes embedded in culture, shows a woman comfortable in her skin.



Figure 8 – Frame of *Poeiragem*, by Preta Kiran.  
Source: MAC-USP (2021).

Of all the artists, Preta Kiran enters as a part within a collective that composes a collective exhibition. A small portion. By the projection that emanates from the body danced elsewhere, but unlike an unwanted ghost, the performance is transfigured into an omen of a lively future capable of feeling everything, including pleasure.

### Final considerations

A performance video or photograph is not the performance itself, so its ephemeral nature makes its duration limited. However, this does not mean that the traces of performance are dead, since they are breaths of memory that can reach the body of those who think about these events.

Then, to vent the reflections stemming from the set of performances, this text cited the works, but did not conduct a critical analysis of each of them. In fact, although arduous, this gathering of what was performed is absolutely necessary to understand, quantitatively and qualitatively, the stories told within the museum through performance, that is, to understand in which contexts the moving body becomes welcome in this setting, as well as what are the bodies that are there. Realizing that there is only a certain type of woman, of a certain race (white) and that is seen within the standard accepted by the current intellectual *corpus* (desexualized) seems to lead to questions that fall into a simple manichaeism between one or the other, what is legitimate or not. It is perceived to be more fruitful to know that, yes, there is a certain type of performance within this cultural space that is only exercised by women who correspond to this standard, and this perception urgently needs to lead to a more polysemic and heterogeneous space – because it is given that there is a current race issue and, often, a class that still has a homogeneous voice within the museum.

As Taylor (2016b, n. p.) reminds us, the performance that represents the denunciation, atrocity, testimony of an attack shows a marked asymmetry of power; however, it is impossible to standardize the performance or deprive it of singularity exactly because of its ephemeral presence, because, in this space of time, it is its singularity and collective pain. That is why we repeat: who is afraid of the woman capable of feeling pleasure? The presented set holds, even in its guiding thread through pain, singularities in the performance of different realities. Bringing up futures remade into enjoyment, through performance, is to put into perspective not only some reparation to the past – if it is possible – but the perspective of a present capable of feeling everything, especially pleasure. Such plurality puts in dialogue critical thoughts capable of formulating a future that embraces the complexity of multiple women and, perhaps, opens paths for aesthetic constructions favorable to all of them. Moreover, the exhibition of these different constructions in this museum space obligatorily confronts the homogenized to be understood in a space of identity creation, because what is dominant is never understood as a cultural portion, always as the whole.

The performance escapes the collectionist rule that governs the great art institutions: it cannot be collected, it needs the ephemerality of the present to

become potent. For the performance, that said, the museum would be a living space where people need to be active and attentive to what happens, with less mediation and more provocation. Moreover, it allows cultural singularities in its ontology, its ephemerality is the power felt in rituals, scenes, choreographies, improvisations, among others, without any connection with one another on the surface – whether technically, contextually or socially – but radically entangled in the root, whose maximum power is felt by those who are there, part of the performance and, therefore, performing.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The construction of this MAC-USP performance archive is part of the author's doctoral thesis, called *Memória encarnada: a performance a partir do Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo*, of the Interunit Graduate Program in Aesthetics and History of Art at the University of São Paulo, gathering an overview with primary data (interviews with artists and curators) and secondary data, together with catalogs and official documents. In addition, here we talk about number of artists, not number of works, because some of them had more than one work in the same space.
- <sup>2</sup> The right to vote is recognized in 1932, incorporated into the Constitution in 1934 on an optional basis and becomes mandatory in 1965.
- <sup>3</sup> The dance works fall into this overview, because the language of dance fits into the methodological view adopted. We understand that the filmed dances are traces for physical performance (restored behavior), in addition to enabling body learning through repetition – filming the dance enables a memory to be digitized and passed to another body, in addition to the training of those who dance (Schechner, 1988; Taylor, 2016a).
- <sup>4</sup> Artist who has achieved a very high degree of knowledge and technical mastery in the execution of their art; virtuoso.
- <sup>5</sup> Concepts of pain unveiled in the article *A dor*, by Manoel Tosta Berlinck (1999).
- <sup>6</sup> Al sentir sus horrores, éste no es el receptáculo pasivo de un órgano especializado que registra vaivenes impersonales de tipo fisiológico. La manera en que el hombre se apropia de la cultura, de unos valores que son los suyos, de su relación con el mundo, suponen un entramado decisivo para su aprehensión. Porque el dolor es, en primer lugar, un hecho situacional (Le Breton, 1999, p. 9).

- <sup>7</sup> It is important to note that Flamenco is an orally transmitted art, preserved by the Roma families of Andalusia, and studies that try to trace its origins find its traces in the mid-19th century (Grimaldos, 2010). Therefore, Flamenco is, within its territory, an art that arose from the social peripheries.
- <sup>8</sup> The Maria da Penha Law was enacted on August 7, 2006 by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. With 46 articles distributed in seven titles, it creates mechanisms to prevent and curb domestic and family violence against women as per the Federal Constitution (art. 226, § 8) and the international treaties ratified by the Brazilian State (Belém do Pará Convention, San José Pact of Costa Rica, American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).
- <sup>9</sup> Conclusion provided by police inspector Barbara Lomba, responsible for the investigation at the Police Station for Women and reported by most Brazilian newspapers. The verdicts are also being reported on the website of the Judicial Branch of the State of Rio de Janeiro.
- <sup>10</sup> Un hipnotizador profesional me dormirá. Cuando yo esté en completo estado de trance hipnótico, el hipnotizador me dará una serie de instrucciones para realizar una serie de actos absurdos. El hipnotizador finalizará con la orden o la clara instrucción de yo hacerme la muerta. [...] El dominio del uno sobre el otro. Represión absoluta. Pérdida de voluntad individual como metáfora de la pérdida de voluntad de las sociedades. Son los otros quienes nos manejan. Juego absurdo de poder que rige las relaciones de la humanidad en el mundo. Unos pocos dan las órdenes, el resto las cumple (Galindo, 2009, n. p.).
- <sup>11</sup> Si el dolor es un estado molesto, también es una defensa apreciable con-tra la inexorable hostilidad del mundo (Le Breton, 1999, p. 15).
- <sup>12</sup> Social and cultural symbolisms (Le Breton, 1999, p. 137, our translation).

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