

Epistemologies of Presence, *theorexperience*: women's production on Cultural Performances

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ABSTRACT – Epistemologies of Presence, *theorexperience*: women's production on Cultural Performances – This paper reviews women's theoretical production in the field of Cultural Performances, evincing that these scholars themselves have still not sufficiently referred to other women theorists' epistemologies. In this context, the work demonstrates how important it is for women scholars to make theory from *other* epistemological standpoints which include both their corporeality as researchers and the corporeality of knowledge in their studies. Being theoretical writing a form of *performative writing*, as a conclusion the paper considers this writing as founded on the shift of hegemonic writing codes in which academic research and practice, theory and everyday life experience work together.

Keywords: Cultural Performances. Women Theorists. Feminist Writing. Autotheory. Theorexperience.

RÉSUMÉ – Les Épistémologies de la Présence comme *théoriesvécues*: la production féminine dans le domaine des Performances Culturelles – Cet article revisite la production théorique des femmes dans le domaine des Performances Culturelles, en montrant que elles-mêmes, chercheuses en la matière, font encore peu référence aux épistémologies des théoriciennes. Dans le cadre de cette discussion, il est démontré l'importance d'une théorie à partir d'*autres* lieux de pensée qui incluent la corporéité des femmes chercheuses ainsi que des savoirs articulés au sein de leurs études académiques. Le article considère en conclusion l'écriture théorique comme une *écriture performative* fondée sur le déplacement des codes hégémoniques où la recherche et la pratique, la formulation théorique et l'expérience quotidienne se rencontrent.

Mots-clés: Performances Culturelles. Femmes Théoriques. Écriture Féministe. Auto-Théorie. Théoriesvécues.

RESUMO – Epistemologias da Presença, *teóricasvivências*: a produção das mulheres em Performances Culturais – Este artigo revisita a produção teórica das mulheres no campo das Performances Culturais, evidenciando que as próprias estudiosas ainda se referem pouco às epistemologias construídas por mulheres. Demonstra-se, no contexto desta discussão, a importância de se produzir teoria a partir de *outros* lugares de percepção que incluam tanto a corporeidade das pesquisadoras quanto a corporeidade do conhecimento articulado em suas pesquisas. Sendo a escrita teórica uma *escrita performática*, conclui-se que ela é presentificada no deslocamento dos códigos hegemônicos, em que pesquisa e prática, formulação teórica e experiência cotidiana se encontram.

Palavras-chave: Performances Culturais. Mulheres Teóricas. Escrita Feminista. Autoteoria. Teóricasvivências.



As a poignant concern that I have had since the first year of my doctoral program¹, the realization that women's theoretical production is still little referred to in academia came to me as an inevitable provocation that I considered, at the time, fundamental: to study this production more and more without parsimony. The doctoral thesis² that I had proposed to defend was, after all, about common-women-artists-citizens from the non-metropolitan areas of a Brazilian state (itself considered non-metropolitan), and my first decision was that I would need, at least, to dialogue with theoretical references other than those always considered as *the most recurrent* or *indispensable* to be included in art research.

Although, as a researcher, I had already taken upon myself the task of conducting a more thorough reading of the contemporary theoretical production, published mainly in national and foreign journals, it started there, in my doctoral process, a rigor-of-mine as to reading directed to the epistemologies of women authors — whose contributions were not only aligned to the field of Visual Culture, but were also situated in varied contexts of transdisciplinarity.

In addition to mapping the production of women theorists who could, in their analysis, consider the practice of women artists such as those with whom I was with during the preparation of the thesis, I also mapped this production in order to examine the imaginative experiences of these *other meaning makers* from a standpoint of criticality closer to their artistic creations. Certainly, it was thus established the approach between visual experiences — which, in the thesis, I call “visuexperiences” [visuaisvivências, in Portuguese] (in manifest analogy with the *writexperiences* [escrevivências, in Portuguese] of Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo, as I show below³) — and theoretical experiences (here referred to as *theorexperiences* [teóricasvivências, in Portuguese]). I, in fact, reserved the right to defend a *thesis based on metalanguage*, in which all references — artistic, theoretical and methodological — had been composed/performed/elaborated by women.

Having completed my doctoral program and already preparing to start the postdoctoral internship, the continuation of this basic research was then projected in the field of Performance Studies, whose epistemes I had been mobilizing for more than half a decade.

What interested me immediately was the possibility of following a doubt so as to prove or not my preliminary hypothesis: that the theoretical production on Cultural Performances is not necessarily mostly produced by men, but — as in practically all other fields of knowledge — the contributions most commonly referred to in our research writing is published by men.

This article is part of these studies I carried out during the postdoctoral internship, in which I was dedicated to mapping performance theorists through a broad bibliographic survey, but not disregarding the critical analysis of this production that I still consider poorly referred to in scientific writing. Based on a *corpus* delimited around four Qualis A Brazilian journals, I present and discuss below the results of this unprecedented research on women's theoretical production on Performance Studies and its consequent reception in academia.

Cultural performances on the horizon of limitlessness

At least since the 1970s, when it was established as a field of study in academia, performance has been analyzed not only as an artistic form immanent to the theater sphere, but also as a quotidian cultural practice, intertwined in a complex array of power that serves diverse cultural interests and that moves in contested territories, in which the senses are produced, compelled, repelled, (de)legitimized, demarcated or pluralized (Diamond, 1996)⁴.

This is how performance, nowadays, seems to us close to a space of negotiation and dispute of identities, in which it is increasingly possible to view cultural practices in their multiple and complex heterogeneities. From this *other* viewpoint, it is refuted, after all, that old notion of *theatricality* that was presumed only within the scope of artistic staging, as if the arts could be separated from social constructs or did not constitute only one of the myriad phenomena of imaginative construction and mobilization of experience.

From a similar perspective, Jill Dolan⁵ (2005) points out that performance occurs in the encounter, in the embodiment, in the presence⁶. The various *stagings* that it mobilizes are not restricted, therefore, to the historically legitimized representations that are installed in the spaces of the (auto)so-called “universal art” (Europeanizing, colonializing), but constitute,



before that and above all, *expressive behaviors* of people or groups of people — better said, of any person or group of people — involving a double drive: that of *performing* and that of *letting oneself be affected* (by the performative act). Therefore, it is more than imperative that the dimensions of human performativity be approached in a cross-cultural and transdisciplinary manner — given its condition of *border practice* in the multiple territories of knowledge⁷, or interfields — keeping in mind that the interactions between bodies (of those who perform and let themselves be touched by performance), space and time that produce the knowledge transmitted, as identity and memory, by/in the performative act.

Over time, we also came to create new parameters to understand the interaction between *textuality* and *performativity*, dismantling the dichotomous logic between “culture as text” and “culture as performance”. Jurgita Staniškytė⁸ explains that such shifts began to occur still in the context of the “modernist impulses of historical avant-garde performances and *performance art* practices transferred into postmodern territory via cultural studies and post-structuralist theories” (Staniškytė, 2021, p. 117)⁹. According to the author, what supported this “performative turn” was, in particular, the (post-structuralist) notion of “performativity”. According to her, the works of Austin, Searle, Derrida and Judith Butler, as well as the resulting reflections on representation, had an unquestionable impact on the new theories of performance. That was also the case with the reasoning developed by Schechner in the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, bringing to the center of the analysis the depuration of performative processes in order to subject them to a “de-representation” and the necessary dismantling of the Eurocentric logic rooted in the text and the theatrical events of hegemonic culture (Staniškytė, 2016)¹⁰.

Erika Fischer-Lichte¹¹ (2009) also employs the expression “performative turn” to refer to this change, more especially from the early 1990s onwards, in the acceptance-validation of the *paradigm legitimizing* European cultures (which self-identified as *superior* because of their *aptitude* to produce artistic textualities and artifacts) and quite *demarcating* as to non-European ones (to which the former attributed a list of *inferiorities* due to their ritualistic, *naturally* performative characteristics).

The potential of performance is evident, in this and in countless other senses, as argued by Lynette Goddard (2007)¹², both to reject the simplistic and stereotyped representations imposed on the experiences of historically subalternized populations and to destabilize the idea that micro-resistances do not constitute emancipatory practices with transformative power (Aston; Harris, 2007)¹³.

Certainly, although the concept of performance arose at the *cross-roads*¹⁴ of studies on ritual, theater and language, as pointed out by Luciana Hartmann and Esther Jean Langdon (2020)¹⁵, the notion of performance itself — whether it is under the scrutiny of this or that analytical sensitivity, in this or that (interdisciplinary) field of study — still points to a variety of uses and connotations that challenge the compartmentalization of the multiple domains in which cultural practices are situated.

In a 2006 essay, Bonnie Marranca¹⁶ points out that performance actually permeates, today, all contemporary thought about people and things, no longer mattering so much whether it describes a *live* event or an orchestrated/scripted acting-out, or whether it refers to history or therapy or the act of mourning, a pilgrimage; whatever they may be, the main issues of our time can be outlined in the terms or viewed through the lens of performance (Marranca, 2006, p. 3).¹⁷ The author then presents and discusses the work of a series of performers who, in the early 2000s, began to dilute the boundaries between experience and performative practice; among the numerous allusions to which she resorts, she cites the example of Linda Montano, a North-American artist of the so-called *Living Art* who witnessed the death of her father, in the interim of the years in which she acted as his caregiver, unveiling the entire ritualistic process involved there (Marranca, 2006, p. 7)¹⁸.

Authors such as Diana Taylor¹⁹ and Elin Diamond²⁰ also shift, in their formulations, the (artistic) theatricalities that once determined and limited the notion of performance to situate them closer to the *domain of (everyday) experience*, because it is in it, in fact, that the transmission of knowledge is articulated as *presence*. While Elin Diamond (1996) is dedicated to examining the features that every performance embeds from other performances, including gender conventions, racial histories, and aesthetic, political and sociocultural traditions, each containing “traces” of already disappeared

quotidian scenes²¹, Diana Taylor (2003) considers performances as *vital acts of transfer* that reflect the cultural and historical specificity existing both in the *staging* and in the *reception* – insofar as they act as living streams of memory transmitting a sense of identity; therefore, according to the author, it is about admitting that we learn and transmit knowledge through *embodied practices*, which is equivalent, in particular, to *giving body* to our own experiences.

In this case, in addition to constituting cultural practice, performance also opens up as an epistemic possibility, acting as a “methodological lens that allows researchers to analyze events *as* performances” (Taylor, 2013, p. 27, our translation). As a *choreography of meanings*, it provides a means of learning, which varies from community to community, recovering the importance of that necessary-urgent finger in the wound (opened by Eurocentrism): to constantly review our methodologies through the encounter with other persons-interlocutors, makers of other (many) meanings.

Faced with this urgency, our first role as women researchers may be to admit that knowledge is produced based on and in dialogue with so many other ways of *being present in the world*. Associated with this, the main challenge is to see that Performance Studies have gradually developed similarly to other fields of human knowledge, in a multifaceted context — of construction and reception of knowledge. And it is impossible to remove from this context the daily weight of the intersectional axes of subalternization of existence, whether it is being observed in any of its productive spheres.

There is, in other words, no way to think critically about the construction of knowledge (including theoretical, cultural, artistic knowledge) without considering the intersectional oppressions of gender, race, class, sexuality, locality and mobility, for example, as part of the equation of power that circumscribes us all. When a study — any study, in any area of knowledge, that proposes to be serious and complex, at the very limit of confrontation and restitution of humanities torn by previous practices and studies — neglects this, or allows itself to be inattentive to the intersectional oppressions that make our life move, it is subject to the enormous risk of representing a *disresearch*, of bringing to the public *an intellectual discontribution*, continuing to reproduce epistemicides²².

In practical and direct terms: in the same context where “the most important male authors” of Performance Studies were (self)defined, there was already a profusion of studies by female culture theorists and critics, many of whom with their long-standing publications in the interdisciplinary field of feminisms, in which the main issues of performance were addressed and elaborated. For example: almost a decade and a half before the publication of Richard Schechner's *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, whose first edition is of 2002, Sue-Ellen Case²³ (1988) had already released the book *Feminism and Theatre*, which, despite not presenting specifically already in the title the word “performance”, was introduced with an important consideration about the performances of contemporary women being considered as unprecedented, when, in fact, they echoed those of other performers of yore. The same situation, according to the author, can also be observed when it comes to the voices theorizing on performance, which remained (as many still remain to date) inaudible²⁴.

Similarly, another example that I can easily recall is the book organized by Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics*, of 1996, in which she and other essential women theorists of Performance Studies — such as Peggy Phelan (1988; 1993)²⁵, Lynda Hart (1993)²⁶ and Rebecca Schneider (1997)²⁷ — already asserted the importance of feminist researchers reappropriating performance as episteme, since many of the crucial problematizations in this field of research had also been established by them, and also a long time prior.

In this regard, I also note the work of Daphne A. Brooks, a professor of African American and Theatrical Studies at Yale University, in Connecticut²⁸. Published in the early 2000s, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* presents and analyzes the performative practice of countless African American women, still little known, from the mid-nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century. This is a broad, detailed and unprecedented research that also incorporates the contribution of black feminism theorists who “have opened up new ways of considering the representational politics of the black body in the cultural imaginary” (Brooks, 2006, p. 40)²⁹.

Several other female authors are added to the aforementioned scholars of performance — either as a cultural practice or methodological lens.

Their researches, most longstanding, as well as numerous, also move through several fields of knowledge, inspiring interdisciplinary approaches and being established on the threshold of the multiple languages and transiencies that embody performance analysis and theories.

What most of these women thinkers – if not all of them – have in common is the way their writings approach us, women theorists-researchers. Their contributions are, in other words, *gazes* into the performative acts of contemporary culture that theorize about them without separating them from our life experiences. A first plausible explanation for our *perception of proximity* comes certainly from a need that is still quite pulsating to happen in knowledge production systems: to *decolonize* epistemes, creating-spreading *others*. To speak of *decolonizing* is, above all, to speak of a procedural movement that goes from *defocusing* (the gaze) to *interrupting* (the senses of the world), culminating in the *restitution* of our humanities. *Defocusing*, *interrupting* and *restituting* are, therefore, at the core of what we understand as a process of decolonization — of the ways in which we see ourselves in the world and perform our visibilities within it.

Epistemic Standpoints of Production in Performance Studies

Respecting the varied fields of study and their corresponding approaches to the notion of *decoloniality*, a main idea circumscribes it: the problematization of the geopolitics of knowledge and of the epistemic standpoint of enunciation (involving the creation, circulation and reception of cultural practices).

Irit Rogoff³⁰, one of the most active theorists of Visual Culture today, in discussions about the *socialization of the gaze*, questions what it would be possible to see, beyond the surface, in the known demarcation of visibilities that constitute the “great narratives”, founded on a cultural order that we have already inherited ready (that is: male, white, wealthy, heteronormative and territorialized). In the important article *Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture*, the main answer found by the author for such questioning undoubtedly requires the *defocusing* of what we see-perceive. *Look away*, in other words, *avert the gaze* — delocalize, defocus. The author intends to understand how this defocusing can be — within contemporary culture — not only an act of resistance, but an alternative form of *appropriation*, to



which she also refers as *participation*. “What is it that we do when we *look away* [from hegemonic forms]? When we avert our gaze in the very spaces and contexts in which we are meant to focus our attention? [...] Or are we opening up a space of *participation* whose terms we are to invent?” (Rogoff, 2005, p. 126)³¹.

The reflections of the Spanish philosopher Marina Garcés (2013) help us to understand the importance of *rupture* as an ally of this movement of deviation described by Irit Rogoff: once defocused, our analytical sensitivity needs to dedicate itself to *interrupting* oppressive structures, which we will only achieve with what the author proposes as a *practice of affection*³², that is, that gesture-movement of letting *ourselves* be *affected by the world, disreproducing the hegemonies that do not engage us, that do not touch us, that do not affect us*. To discover, in other words, the potency that the — decolonial(izing) — gaze carries, so, then, it is possible to *interrupt the meaning of the world*, is equivalent to “[...] finding forms of intervention that allow our gaze to divert the focus — which directs and controls it — so it can perceive and question what eludes consensual visibilities” (Garcés, 2013, p. 111, our translation)³³. Note that this *affectionate engagement* with the world is that which will enable us — according to the author — *to bite reality, jumping onto it with our own meanings*.

Defocusing the manner of gazing at the complex network of contemporary cultural processes — to thus interrupt the oppressive experiences imposed on historically silenced-invisible populations — is that which will provide the *restitution of our humanity*, the creation, after all, of our own manner of seeing and showing, of learning and teaching, of building and spreading our own epistemologies.

In a first movement in this direction, considering cultural practices as everyday performances makes it possible to see them outside of that already dusty *ideal of humanity that produces knowledge* (which is assimilated, as a rule, as European) and more intimately as *composition*. The sense of composition, in this case, is essentially two: the relation that performance establishes with the world (in formal and affective terms, in the sphere of life experience) and, at the same time, its capacity — as a methodological lens and analytical sensitivity — to *unthink* this same world (and here we can imagine the *unthinking* as a decomposition-done-to-recompose).

Now, it is possible to decompose-to-recompose: theatricalities, textualities, sonorities and visualities, which integrate — so to speak — the *materialities of experience*. Such process includes addressing the complexity of the world without reducing it to a hegemonic imaginative repertoire (of fixed ways of gazing) nor to a pasteurized order (which refers to only a few of the various other possible perceptions). To think of experience as composition means, in short, that the multiple and endless performances that we trigger or witness are not limited to the (implicit or explicit) ways of understanding based on decision, judgment and determination parameters that the “modern reason” (that is, the colonial culture-expropriating reason) granted from the 16th century and still grants, in the 21st century.

This thesis — by Brazilian sociologist Denise Ferreira da Silva, currently a professor at the University of British Columbia in Canada — assumes, as a counterpart to the modern system of categories, the approach to a matter, so to speak, *in a raw state* when analyzing the performances of culture. The methodological path chosen is, in the field of theory and criticism, what she calls “poethics”, with a view to decomposing-to-recompose the value expropriated from colonized lands, enslaved bodies, silenced cultural practices, within the scope of *materialities* left outside of what is considered as cultural experiences by Kantian modes of racial and colonial subjugation that operate with full force in our global present (Ferreira da Silva, 2019, p. 46).

This perspective, according to the author, raises the possibility of a material and decompositive poetics (of interpretation), as a type of re/de/composition that no longer mobilizes the onto-epistemological pillars of modern thought (Ferreira da Silva, 2019, p. 48-49). What this means is that it is impossible (in the sense of being epistemologically impractical, or even ethically unsustainable) that the attribution of value to cultural performances that circulate in contemporary times (“forms of the object of art or nature”, in the Kantian terms recovered by the author) continues to be established under the aegis of a *determinability* based on this so-called modern reason (that is, again, colonial), as a standpoint from which a certain “subjective universality” is granted so as to achieve the knowledge, appreciation and judgment of these practices. To achieve, in a word, their *legitimacy*.



In the end, when she proposes to *decompose-to-recompose* the view when analyzing the performative acts of contemporary culture, the author is proposing to *restitute* from the very embodied experience, expressed there in the *matter* of the staging under analysis, its *humanity* – that is how these acts transmit memories, trigger political claims and/or manifest the sense of identity of a group, as argued by Diana Taylor (2013).

Where are the great women theorists in Performance Studies?³⁴

An immediate question that derives from the provocation contained in the subtitle above is: why, although “also several”, “also long-standing”, “also precursors”, and “also institutionalized” (as a brief reading, in the previous items of this article, through the theoretical-critical formulations of the authors mentioned here could suggest), why, finally, these female authors and other numerous women theorists who also actively publish still appear little in our reflections and in our texts on performance? This question unfolds in at least two male others: how do our work plans at the university still not embrace women's production to the same extent as they include that of female authors whose theories are always considered “pioneering”, or “indispensable”, or “the most relevant”? How, after all, can we dialogue more with women's theoretical production on Performance Studies, incorporating this production into our academic practice and our scientific writing?

Analyzing locally, as a way to bring closer our context of epistemic production, a brief survey on the diffusion of theoretical knowledge published by women who currently work in the field of Performances in Brazil — or in areas considered as related, such as Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Sociology and Visual Culture — sheds light on a situation that is, at least, intriguing. In examining, for example, the most recent articles published by women in the best evaluated journals in Capes Qualis (A1, A2, A3 and A4), aligned with Performance Studies or in dialogue with them, it is observed that the authors themselves, in their studies and writings, still make few references to themselves, preferring or reinforcing the canon (composed, as a rule, of men, whites, Europeans or Americans), or base their analyses, most often, on the formulations of male researchers, rather than female researchers.



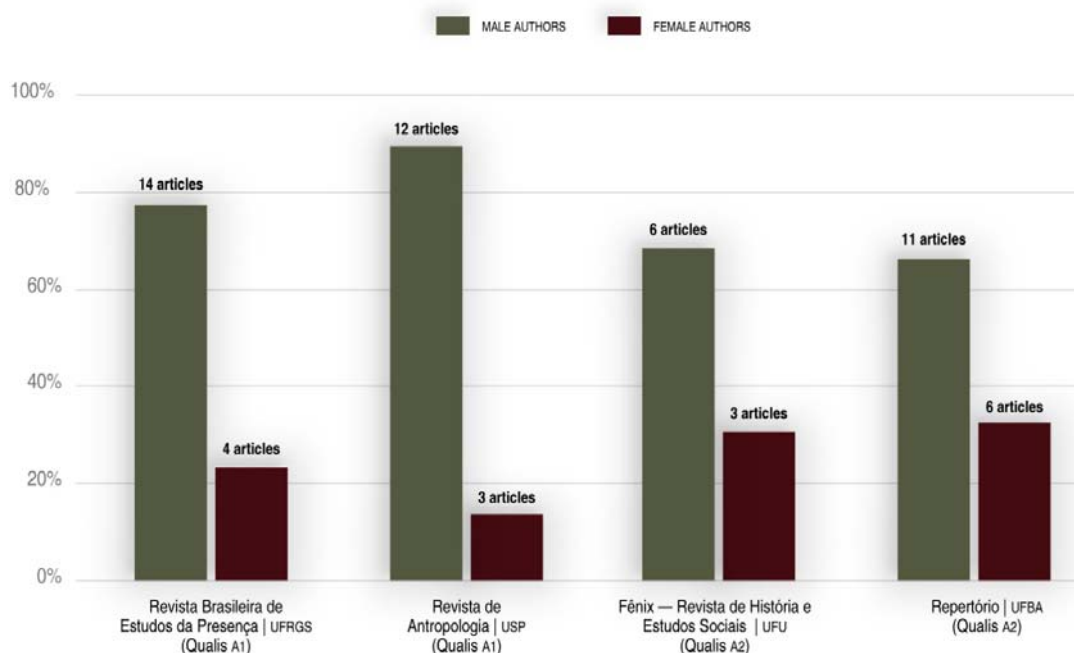
Of the ten articles published by women in 2022 in the *Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença* (Qualis A1), a journal of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul³⁵, in only three there were more references to female authors in the same text than to male authors³⁶.

A similar situation is observed in *Revista de Antropologia* (also Qualis A1), of the Universidade de São Paulo:³⁷ of the five articles published in 2022 by women, only two dialogue more with research by female authors than with research by male authors.

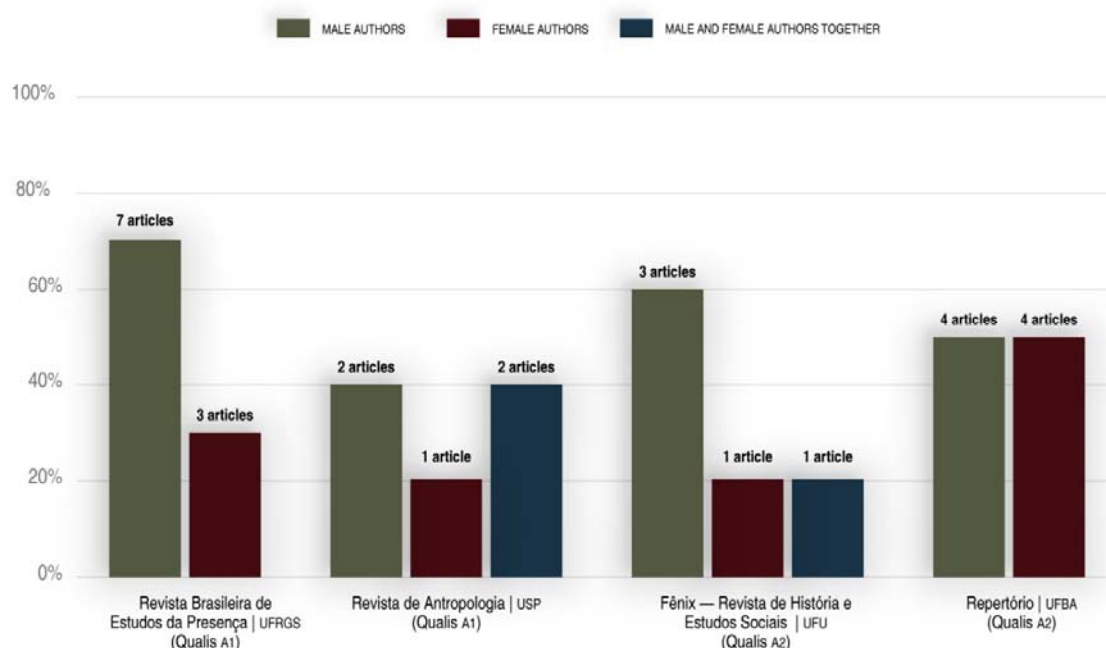
In turn, in *Fênix, Revista de História e Estudos Sociais* (Qualis A2), an interdisciplinary journal of the Center for Studies in Social History of Art and Culture of the Universidade Federal de Uberlândia³⁸, of the five texts by female authors collected for analysis that relate to Performance Studies, all from 2022, only one had more references to female authors than to male authors.

Finally, in the last edition of the journal *Repertório* (also Qualis A2), of the Graduate Program in Performing Arts of the Universidade Federal da Bahia³⁹, considering the eight most recently published articles written by women, there were only four texts with more references to research by female authors.

Fortunately, our current context is already better than that observed, for example, half a decade ago (Graphs 1 and 2). Considering the same journals examined, out of a total of 59 articles by female authors assessed in 2017, in only 16 of them there are more references to female authors than to male authors, which corresponds to a disappointing percentage of 27%⁴⁰, confirming that even female authors who write about performance refer little to themselves, since most still base their reflections on theories of male authors.



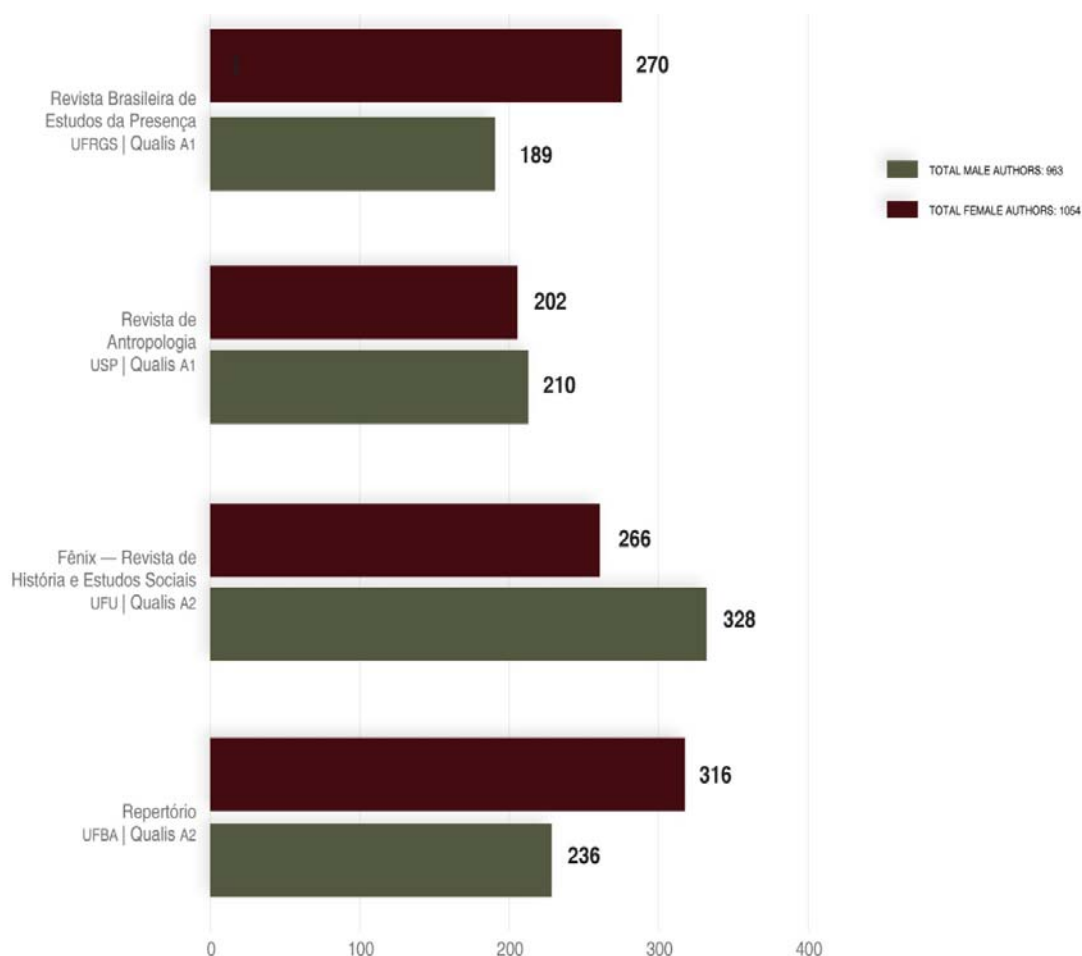
Graph 1 – References to female authors in 59 articles selected for analysis, all published by women, in four journals with an A rating in Capes Qualis – year 2017. Source: prepared by the author.



Graph 2 – References to female authors in 28 articles selected for analysis, published by women, in four journals with rating A in Capes Qualis – year 2022. Source: prepared by the author.

It can be considered, in view of these data, that more male authors have published in the main Brazilian journals aligned with the field of Cultural Performances, while fewer women have dedicated themselves to theo-

retical-critical production. Paradoxically, when we analyze the same four national journals selected here for examination, they show that women published more in the last decade. Between 2012 and 2022, out of a total of 2017 articles, 1054 were written by women (equivalent to 53%)⁴¹, attesting that female researchers have been publishing more than male researchers.



Graph 3 – Number of publications by female researchers compared to male researchers in the last decade, in four journals with rating A in Capes Qualis (2012–2022)⁴². Source: prepared by the author.

Evidently, an intersectional quantitative study would show more appropriate and therefore even more devastating nuances. This means that, in addition to gender, it would also be essential to assess its intersection with other categories of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, locality, institutional affiliation, among other social markers of difference.

Even so, considering only gender as analytical category of the present study, the structural inequality that still permeates the *reception* of women's theoretical-critical formulations is patent. Just as in the field of Anthropology

it seems “natural” to accept, without much questioning, the “greatness” or “brilliance” or even the “more abundant production” of authors such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Malinowski, Clifford Geertz, Marcel Mauss and, in Brazil, Darcy Ribeiro⁴³, in Performance Studies it is also customary to compile an analogous list of “main male authors”, or “pioneering male authors”, and so on.

Richard Schechner, Milton Singer, Victor Turner, Richard Bauman, John Dawsey, among dozens of others — not that they are not important authors or that their theoretical contributions should not be considered expressive, relevant, indispensable. The point is that, in addition to their capacity and the relevance of their works, what should also interest us is, firstly (immediately), the problematization of the limiting territorialities of such theories – from genderization to racialization, to other forms of hierarchical(izing) debasement.

The importance of autotheory as resistance and historical reparation

In one of her memorable articles, presented in 1975 at the 1st *International Symposium on Ethnopoetics*⁴⁴ and published the following year by the journal *Alcheringa*, the American philosopher and cultural critic Sylvia Wynter⁴⁵ reinforces the importance of detaching ourselves from the modern-colonial repertoires of knowledge, proposing this through an essential *epistemic rebellion*⁴⁶. The author revisits, in this article, the modern colonial course, in which Europe invented, from itself to itself, a concept of *otherness* to justify the logic of enslaving and dominating peoples and cultures, which basically included: the separation between nature and the notion of *human*; the association of non-European people to nature, in conjunction with their exclusion from the notion of humanity; and, finally, the creation of a narrative to naturalize such brutality (epistemicidal)⁴⁷.

However, if the language legitimized as *human* was not the language of that invented otherness and whose domination has been authorized since then, neither its narratives (involving everything: life, culture, arts, habits, daily life, history and memory) of knowledge of the world are those that concern this notion of humanity. From this perspective, Sylvia Wynter then concludes that we do not need an *ethnopoetics* — since, according to her, a

poetics of otherness would only reaffirm the segregation between *us* and *others*, and this will be a language that will continue to direct our gaze to the experiences of *other* people as apart. Instead, we need a language that connects us, that does not segregate *those who know* and *those who make (themselves) known*. We need, therefore, a poetics (and the author is talking about both a *poetics of naming*, through language, and a *poetics of performing*, with the body) that leads us to disregard the ways of imagining the world in order to inscribe in this same world *other* ways – our own – of learning about it.

This perspective is currently being revisited by women authors who are dedicated to thinking about epistemological construction as *autotheory*. According to Lauren Fournier (2021), for example, autotheory is a knowledge that flourishes in unusual spaces of written production, merging scientific research and personal narrative. Autotheory reveals, in this sense, “[...] the tenuousness of maintaining illusory separations between art and life, theory and practice, work and the self, research and motivation, just as feminist artists and scholars have long argued” (Fournier, 2021, p. 12)⁴⁸.

Accordingly, that is how I understand the writing of women theorists of performance as *embodied writing*, which arises in a space in which research and practice, theoretical formulation and everyday experience meet. This juxtaposition of critical study with *self-writing*⁴⁹ is, as Sara Ahmed (2022) recalls⁵⁰, what enables us, as women theorists, to produce a knowledge base provided by *experiences lived in the body*. That was how, in fact, as the author says, that she decided, a few years ago, that the theoretical work she would like to develop would be that in contact with the world, a work that would bring her closer than ever to everyday life. After all, if theory itself is usually considered abstract and if, therefore, “to abstract is to drag, separate, make apart, or divert [...], it may be necessary to drag it back, bring theory back to life” (Ahmed, 2022, p. 23, our translation).

From autotheory to theorexperiences: our (finally) place of healing

One of the most extraordinary pitfalls of language – in any of its manifestations – is its impossibility of being neutral. Materialized or still dreamed of as an image, word, noise and beyond, language is a *living heart inside the chest*. It performs (itself in) and pulsates hand in hand with history, choosing one side of the narrative, taking sides. And, then, by opening

up claiming presence, it will always be in a position to compromise or dis-
bey, torment or unburden. Political, poetic, theoretical, rhetorical, prosaic,
artistic – performative, language builds epistemologies. And epistemologies
concern not only the paradigms that validate our knowledge *about* the
world, but also – and perhaps essentially – the very world we create with
language. Therefore, more than ever we need to know how to speak the
language of the emancipation that we so demand. Speak exactly. Directly.
In specific language. Confronting, in the practice-we-want-as-presence, the
oppressions that continue to shape people's lives, our own lives.

Indeed: not long ago, I defended my doctoral thesis (Piva, 2021),
which, aligned with the field of Visual Culture and based on black and de-
colonial feminist studies, was intended both to listen to the narratives of
women from the state where I currently live and to see-recognize their artis-
tic creations as social practices, also *makers of meanings*. (Beyond, therefore,
the canonical configurations of view, which were historically imposed by
the pasteurizing-Europeanizing racist cisheteropatriarchy).

I remember again here that, at that time, among the many readings I
did in the zigzag-of-days-running, I sought to read one of the most beauti-
ful books (and the most recent novel) by the Afro-Caribbean-Canadian
writer Dionne Brand⁵¹. *Theory* presents a character who believes in *the cura-
tive power of knowledge*; immersed in the writing of her thesis, close to her
forty years of age, as I myself was at the time, the protagonist (left, purpose-
ly, unnamed by the author and deconfined, therefore, from the gender bi-
narisms that are also part of namings) lives her doctoral process while per-
forming, herself, her thesis (in) the life-life.

In the meantime of this writing, which has already lasted about fifteen
years, the narrator shares, each one having occurred in its respective time,
the loving experiences with three female companions-of-life: Selah, Yara
and Odalys (who is, by the way, who gives her the nickname of *Theory*)⁵².
While the novel discusses, before our eyes and through a clearly metaling-
uistic writing, the academic gesture of referencing the same authors (yes,
mostly white men, from the top of some luminous zone of power and pres-
tige), there are also two still-urgencies in the sphere of contemporary pro-
duction of knowledge: the expansion of space for women in academia, as



producers of meanings, and the dismantling of the false dichotomy between theory and practice.

Mainly from this point of view, Dionne Brand's *theorynovel* is very sensitive and reverberating. Starting with the opening note, "Occam's razor"⁵³, in which the narrator highlights the need to pause to better think about *her life-thesis* – that is, the whole process of living the experience of the thesis and writing the days in the days. It must be admitted, she says, that the best thing to do is to settle immediately, at least from herself to herself, an account still charged to her so disproportionately, starting with that obligation to attend to her unbearable male fellow researchers, with only half of her intelligence, going further than her in life.

In the course of the pages, *Theory* is woven as *performance writing*⁵⁴ in which research and practice, theoretical formulation and everyday experience meet. It is in this crossing of experiences that flourished the author-protagonist's projects for the creation of a new epistemology (so that women researchers like her make themselves visible in the "world of science"), while we also see the intensification of her daily struggle for the transformation of this same world into a place occupied by other voices and that can be considered from the perspective of other analytical sensibilities; a place, after all, where multiple *embodied practices*⁵⁵, which at the same time connect and fragment our experiences, give body to the varied phenomena of imaginative mobilization of experience, including academic performance.

This writing that creates new (counter-hegemonic) ways of seeing the world is the same that *performs an indispensable encounter* between aesthetics and politics; which faces and seeks to repel the contradictions of an "academic language" made to segregate, rather than connect; and which struggles to bring the "world outside" closer to our practical experiences.

I speak here of a writing that, when performing a repertoire that is inobedient and already aloof from that invented precision of "neutrality/impartiality in discourse", *teaches new worlds*, as recalled by bell hooks (2013) in one of her essays⁵⁶ on the importance of *other* scriptures; worlds, by the way, situated far beyond the colonialism that still operates within the scope of the language-which-is-intended-as-episteme-that-has-universal-knowledge-of-the-world. According to bell hooks, there is no way to theo-

size without stripping the writing itself of the historically imposed links between language and domination.

In another essay in the same book⁵⁷, the author is specifically dedicated to thinking about *theory as a liberating practice*. She begins the text by saying that she arrived at the theory because she was hurt, desperate, eager to understand what was happening “in the world outside” and within herself, that is, in connection with her own life experiences. As in the case of Dionne Brand, in the novel mentioned here, for bell hooks theory became *a place of healing*. “A refuge in theorization” is what she confesses to having found, since there, in that space where the hostilities of “unauthorized knowledge” disappeared, she found herself for the first time with the chance to imagine alternative and much closer futures, to understand what was happening before her eyes, to find “a place where life could be different”, and it was precisely in this place of healing that she accessed “this lived experience of critical thinking, reflection and analysis” (hooks, 2013, p. 85, our translation). In a word: theory.

Thinking about theory based on this reasoning, understanding it as an everyday social practice instead of being confined only to the meanders and sensitivities of the *archives* or those already well-established *repertoires*⁵⁸, which hardly consider that experience varies from context to context and from community to community; seeing, after all, *theory as one of the various vital acts of transfer* that boost knowledge, that is the crucial aspect in any movement of seeing and showing, of learning and teaching, of desiring and articulating, with one's own hands, the sensibilities with which one takes part of the world in which one lives.

As I was saying at the opening of this text, I have recently been dedicated to studying the daily performances that lead us to better know the imaginative experiences of people, a time when I developed a doctoral research that brought me closer to the creations of fifteen women artists from the state of Goiás, ordinary citizens not legitimized by the art system. Not their *works*, but their *visuexperiences* were what I considered as presentations of the imagination, and essentially that led to the analogy with the *writexperiences* of Conceição Evaristo becoming *presence* in the text of the thesis⁵⁹.

It occurred, then, that, even before defending the thesis, I gradually developed the desire to also revisit the ways in which we (women-

researchers-theorists) produce – or not, or perhaps still little – our own *epistemologies-of-looking* into cultural performances in contemporary times.

It was not a matter of this or that type of *essentialist binarism*, as I recently heard, during my presentation at a congress in Portugal, a male researcher referring — under the veneer of *productive criticism* — to the mapping of women intellectuals that I have been carrying out in the areas of knowledge through which I move and from which I write; nor is it a mere search for similarities and dissimilarities between the production of women theorists of performance and the (much better known) male performance theorists. It is — this intellectual exercise of mine — a proposal for *delocalization of the gaze*, with the consequent (and equally necessary, not to say pressing) studious dedication to the epistemologies produced by women, within the scope of what I have been taking the liberty of coining as *theorexperiences*.

I defend as unpostponable this movement in the field of Cultural Performances, since in it we also refer little, much less, or still very unsatisfactorily, to the formulations of female theorists compared to the references we make to the writings of male theorists. That does not happen, as it could be (and has been, incidentally, often) conjectured, because women write less, theorize less or publish less, but rather, properly speaking, because their theoretical writing is still not properly referenced, known or legitimized in comparison with that of the endless “fathers of such and such notion”, male “pioneers in such and such field of study”, “male coiners of this or that concept”.

As an analytical sensibility, performance inspires us to problematize this coloniality rooted in the epistemes imposed as “universal”. It also inspires us to observe how impracticable it is to talk about the issues that affect and interest us through *strange approaches* to our experiences, or based on narratives developed by *disembodied subjects*. As we learn and transmit knowledge through *embodied* actions (Taylor, 2003), we should also consider the role of the *doing body* in the construction of knowledge, as well as the spatiality and temporality of the epistemologies we create or use as repertoire in Presence Studies.

However, “in order to escape of [the] pitfall of the episteme of knowledge”, as argued by Suely Messeder (2020, p. 165), “we must im-

plode the epistemic map, question the privileged spaces, borders, flows and directions that structure it in this way, whose appearance is of a natural law”. And the role that the university must play in this construction is irrefutable.

In *Producing Knowledges That Matter: Practicing Performance Studies Through Theatre Studies*, Jill Dolan sheds light precisely on how the university can foster or obstruct certain knowledge. The author elucidates that, as an intellectual, her concern goes far beyond producing “marketable” knowledge nowadays as an academic; according to her, “[...] linking knowledge to bodies and therefore to history and materiality, to specific locations and contexts in which bodies and ideas move” is fundamental (Dolan, 1996, p. 10)⁶⁰. That is our greatest contribution as women scholars — producing *knowledges that matter*.

To think, in this context, of theoretical production as an epistemological construction consistent with our experiences (as women who still have somewhat secondary roles and an intellectual work that is almost always “non-voluminous” or “unimportant”) is to see the inevitability of the encounter between research and practice, theoretical formulation and everyday experience; the inevitability, after all, of a performative writing that concerns us; or, according to Suely Messeder (2020), of an *embodied writing*⁶¹ that includes not only our corporeity of women researchers, but also the corporeity of the knowledge produced in our research.

It is, finally, as *embodied women theorists*, that we come closest to this — feminist – horizon of the production of “blasphemous and decolonial epistemologies” (Messeder, 2020). To the horizon, after all, of our theorexperiences — and it is in it, only in it, that theory begins to be our *place of healing*.

Notes

- ¹ Developed between 2017 and 2021 in the Graduate Program in Visual Art and Culture of the Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), under the advisory of Prof. Dr. Alice Fátima Martins and with a doctoral scholarship granted by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Goiás (FAPEG).
- ² Titled (*as outras fazedoras de sentidos*) *imaginaturas e visuaisvivências das artistas de goiás*, the thesis is dedicated to presenting the artistic practice of fifteen wo-

men of Goiás based on another methodological possibility to approach the imaginative experiences of contemporaneity. Refusing repertoires and categorizations that tend to hegemonize our visual approaches, I look into this artistic production that is made in the necessary vulnerability of affection and delimits us towards an *otherness* that ceases to be “exotic” or “exceptional” conventionally to put itself before us as another that also affects us by embracing with the gaze. The artists – who in the thesis I call “the other meaning-makers” – are all ordinary women citizens who trigger transformative actions in their communities through art. Their practice does not rely on institutional gates and is established in what the Brazilian artist and researcher Renata Felinto calls the “urgencies of life”. Visual Culture is the place of theory that provides the conceptual and analytical repertoires that constitute the thesis, but other fields of knowledge are also presented as a conceptual-reflective contribution. It is, undoubtedly, a work on legitimacy, but also an attempt to present, against the grain, other *epistemologies of the gaze* to approach the artistic images that circulate in our contemporary Visual Culture (Piva, 2021).

- ³ See footnote 59.
- ⁴ Elin Diamond teaches in the Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies at the Institute of Science and Arts at Rutgers University (New Jersey, USA).
- ⁵ Dean of Princeton College, the undergraduate school of Princeton University (New Jersey, USA), and professor of theater at the Lewis Center for the Arts, at the same educational institution. She has numerous works in the field of Performance Studies, Feminisms and Gender and Sexuality Studies.
- ⁶ Original text in English: “[...] performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world” (p. 2).
- ⁷ It should be noted, in this case, the interfaces of Performance Studies with the Visual Arts. Josette Féral, a professor at the University of Quebec, explains that performative practices were never uniform or unambiguous, and cannot, even today, be compared with one another without the risk of false truths. According to her, performance has several affiliations – “both text and image, the formalism of the visual arts and interpretation, [not always being] easy to distinguish influences and ruptures” (Féral, 2008, p. 208, our translation). Considering the Brazilian context, Paula Darriba (2005, p. 134-135) alludes to a “period of experimentalism in the field of the arts [including the visual/plastic

arts] that was influenced by the counterculture and the hippie movement. Happening and body art were consolidated internationally and the merge of scenic language with the plastic arts crystallized new forms of expression and more conceptually elaborate proposals of performative art” (our translation). In addition, Beth Lopes – theater director, researcher, and collaborator of the Performa group – demonstrates that, here in the country, the field of Performance Studies is still closely linked to that of Visual Arts, which contributes, to a certain extent, according to her, to “[...] remove the borders of the languages, expand the space-time notions, and cause friction in the relations between the real and the fictional, incorporating emotional states, subjectivities and memories, creating a particular poetics” (Lopes, 2010, p. 135, our translation).

- ⁸ Lithuanian theorist and professor of Theatrical Studies at Vytautas Magnus University. She is the author of numerous publications on contemporary performance, focusing on the performative aspects of post-Soviet Lithuanian culture.
- ⁹ Original text in English: “[...] the performative turn initiated by modernist impulses of historical avant-garde performances and performance art practices transferred into postmodern territory via cultural studies and post-structuralist theories and at present occupies the discursive area of post-postmodern realities”.
- ¹⁰ In short, the “turn” can be described as a paradigmatic transdisciplinary shift in which performance came to be understood as a form of knowledge of reality. Original text in English: “*Performative turn*” can be generally described as paradigmatic transdisciplinary shift where performance as a form of knowledge making is confronted with representational forms of knowledge. Tantamount to a tectonic shift in the humanities and social sciences, performative turn encompasses various theoretical aspects and is developed, argued or critiqued by many scholars” (Staniškytė, 2021, p. 116).
- ¹¹ One of the most highly regarded contemporary theorists in theatre and performing arts studies. She is a professor at the Berlin Freie Universität and director of the Interweaving Performance Cultures International Research Centre at the same institution. As in the case of Elin Diamond (1996), according to Erika Fischer-Lichte (2009) performativity surpasses the aesthetics of representation, establishing itself on the plane of materiality.



- ¹² Professor of Black Performances in the Department of Drama, Theatre and Dance at the University of London. Author of numerous essays, articles and books on Contemporary Theatre and Performative Practices of Women.
- ¹³ Elaine Aston is Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Contemporary Arts at Lancaster University (Lancaster, England), where she teaches Feminist Theatrical Practices and Performing Art. Geraldine Harris is also professor emeritus of the same educational institution, currently teaching Drama and Performing Arts.
- ¹⁴ I borrow the notion of *crossroads* in the terms of Hartmann and Langdon (2020, p. 1-2). According to the authors, “[at] the crossroads (place of intersections, influences, divergences, splits, fusions, ruptures, multiplicities) between Anthropology and expressive forms in performance, dances, songs, music, narratives, games, child’s play, processions, dramatizations, parties and festivals, social and political manifestations, life and death rituals receive special attention, not only because of the interpretations or readings of the social aspect that they enable, but, above all, because of the symbolic, expressive, poetic, aesthetic, political and reflective aspects they evoke and produce”.
- ¹⁵ Luciana Hartmann is a professor in the Department of Performing Arts of the Universidade de Brasília (UnB), and Esther Jean Langdon, in the Anthropology Department of the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC).
- ¹⁶ Based in New York, she is the author of numerous works on performance, including the books *Theaterwritings* (PAJ Books, 1984), *Ecologies of Theatre* (PAJ Books, 1996), *Conversations on Arts and Performance* (PAJ Publications, 1999, in co-authorship), and *Performance Histories* (PAJ Publications, 2008). She is also the founding editor of the *Performing Arts Journal: A Journal of Performance and Art*.
- ¹⁷ Original text in English: “The word ‘performance’, whether it describes a live event or personal acting-out; the features of a car, a perfume, a sound system; and whether it refers to history or therapy or the act of mourning, now shapes contemporary thinking about people and things. Some of the chief preoccupations of our time—namely, spectatorship, identity, memory, the body—are framed within the terms of performance”.
- ¹⁸ Original text in English: “We have come so far from distinguishing between art and life, the personal and political. And yet, the performing body is real

and it is really there. What we have been witnessing in the arts in recent years is, I believe, a return to authenticity—to the real, the documentary”.

- ¹⁹ Professor in the Department of Performance Studies at New York University and founding director of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics in New York.
- ²⁰ See footnote 4.
- ²¹ “Every performance, if it is intelligible as such, embeds features of previous performances: gender conventions, racial histories, aesthetic traditions – political and cultural pressures that are consciously and unconsciously acknowledged” (Diamond, 1996, p. 1).
- ²² Sueli Carneiro (2005, p. 33 and 60, our translation) (philosopher, writer, activist of the black-Brazilian social movement and author of numerous publications dedicated to thinking about feminism) developed this concept of epistemicide in her doctoral thesis, to which I refer here. According to the author, it is “an operational instrument for the consolidation of the social hierarchies produced by it [...] manifested[ing] also in the dualism of militant discourse *versus* academic discourse, through which the thought of black activism is disqualified as a authority source of knowledge about [the black person], while the discourse [of the white person] about [the black person] is legitimized”.
- ²³ Professor at the School of Theater, Film and Television at the University of California, Los Angeles, and director of the Center for Performance Studies. She is the author of several books on performative practice and internationally recognized in the field of lesbian theory and criticism.
- ²⁴ In this regard, I also highlight the author’s explanation of how racist patriarchy operates to conceal the performances and narratives of poor white and racialized women, lesbians and those considered “unattractive” or “innovative/empowered”, who were left out of the history of theatrical and performative practices due to the hegemonic/canonical cultural codes. Even the work of the so-called “elite women”, recalls the author, has been poorly documented and is still little referred to today. Original text in English: “The performances and narratives of poor women, women of colour, lesbians, ‘unattractive’ women and innovative women, who may have experimented in forms suited to their own private world rather than those of the public patriarchal one, were not considered significant in the history of theatre by virtue of the dominant cultu-



ral codes. Yet even the work of the so-called 'elite' women is only scantily documented" (Case, 1988, p. 28).

- ²⁵ North-American theorist and professor of Performance Studies at Stanford University, California. One of the founders of Performance Studies International, an association established in 1997 to promote artistic and academic exchange between professionals and intellectuals dedicated to performance. She is the author of numerous publications, including books and articles of the most referenced, in Cultural Performances.
- ²⁶ (1953-2000) Performance Studies Theorist, feminist and one of the important American voices of Queer Theory. She was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, teaching the institution's first Queer Theory program, *Feminist Theory: Queering the Literary: Theories and Fictions*, in 1995.
- ²⁷ Professor of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies at Brown University and author of numerous publications in the field of performances. Her first book, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, of 1997, addresses feminist artists who use their own stages as a stage-space for their performances, emphasizing that women's performative practices, which she also calls *embodied actions*, cannot be seen as apart from gender, race and class prejudices, but as part of this oppressive gear that structures our social order.
- ²⁸ She is also the author of several articles on race, gender, performance and culture.
- ²⁹ Original text in English: "[My] study is inspired by the advances of black feminist theorists who have opened up new ways of considering the representational politics of the black body in the cultural imaginary".
- ³⁰ Professor in the Department of Visual Culture at Goldsmiths (University of London). She has produced numerous works dedicated to the *delocalization of the gaze* on contemporary visual culture and to the understanding of the production of images as everyday experience, no longer under the scrutiny of Art History.
- ³¹ Original text in English: "What is it that we do when we look away? When we avert our gaze in the very spaces and contexts in which we are meant to focus our attention? When we exploit the cultural attention and the spatial focus provided by, and insisted on, by museums, galleries, exhibition sites, and studios to cajole some other presence, some other dynamic in the space, into



being? Are we producing the ‘affirmation through negation’ [...], or are we opening up a space of participation whose terms we are to invent?”

- ³² That unfolds, infallibly, into two main meanings: as *affection* and as *relation* (that which concerns us, which *affectus*).
- ³³ Original text in Spanish: “Necesitamos encontrar modos de intervención que apunten a que nuestros ojos puedan escapar al foco que dirige y controla su mirada y aprendan a percibir todo aquello que cuestiona y escapa a las visibilidades consentidas”.
- ³⁴ I am always tempted in my writings to resume the famous question asked half a decade ago by the American art historian Linda Nochlin (1971; 2016) – *Why were there no great female artists?*. With this subtitle, I reconfigure, therefore, this same question in the scope of Performance Studies: after all, why did not “exist” – or even today do not “exist” – great women theorists?
- ³⁵ ISSN: 2237-2660. Available at: <https://www.seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/presenca/issue/view/3467>. Accessed: Sep 21, 2022.
- ³⁶ For this survey, the *corpus* consisted of articles in which only women were included as authors. Co-authorships were considered only in case of female authors writing together; texts in which women appeared as co-authors in partnership with one or more male researchers were disregarded.
- ³⁷ ISSN: 1678-9857. Available at: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/ra/issue/view/12182>. Accessed: Sep 21, 2022.
- ³⁸ ISSN: 1807-6971. Available at: <https://www.revistafenix.pro.br/revistafenix>. Accessed: Sep 21, 2022.
- ³⁹ Although edited at the end of 2021, the aforementioned edition was published on the journal's website in May 2022. ISSN: 2175-8131. Available at: <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/revteatro/issue/view/2253>. Accessed: Sep 21, 2022.
- ⁴⁰ Although still low, half a decade later, in 2022, this percentage is already 11% higher.
- ⁴¹ The data collected are from the last 33 editions of the *Brazilian Journal of Presence Studies*, the last 22 editions of the USP Anthropology Journal and of *Fênix – Journal of History and Social Studies*, all published between 2012 and 2022. As *Repertório* launched its last issue in 2021, I planned data collection between 2011 and 2022.



- ⁴² See previous footnote.
- ⁴³ That is when little, because, at most, they are referred to, without any problematization or modesty, as “fathers of Anthropology”.
- ⁴⁴ The event took place at the University of Wisconsin, in Milwaukee, USA. The title of the article is “Ethno or Socio Poetics” (Wynter, 1976).
- ⁴⁵ Born in Cuba in 1928, she is professor emeritus at Stanford University in California, USA, and one of the leading activists-intellectuals in the Caribbean English-speaking world today. Her theoretical studies are focused on reflecting on global anti-colonial movements in association with racial and gender studies. She is also a novelist and playwright.
- ⁴⁶ Which, apropos, she never gave up when talking about practically everything: from poetry, psychoanalysis and ethnography to journalistic facts, everyday episodes and events of contemporary culture. I emphasize, moreover, that although the author began to formulate the concept of “epistemic rebellion” and incorporate it into the practice of her writings since the 1970s, the originality of the concept “epistemic disobedience” was attributed to the Argentine semiotologist Walter D. Mignolo, one of the founders of the group Modernity/Coloniality.
- ⁴⁷ The reference here, once again, is to the analysis made by Sueli Carneiro (2005) in her doctoral thesis on *epistemicide*, which makes me emphasize, once again, the importance of this theoretical contribution in the context of feminist production in Brazil. The author’s main argument is based on historically legitimized practices of cultural whitening and increasingly sophisticated attempts at epistemological whitening directed at subalternized groups, including women and especially black populations.
- ⁴⁸ Original text in English: “Autotheory reveals the tenuousness of maintaining illusory separations between art and life, theory and practice, work and the self, research and motivation, just as feminist artists and scholars have long argued”.
- ⁴⁹ I refer here, by analogy, to the “adventure of self-telling” proposed by Margareth Rago (2013).
- ⁵⁰ Born in Salford, England, to a Pakistani father and English mother, Sara Ahmed migrated with her family to Australia in the early 1970s, where she grew up. She is a PhD in Critical Theory from Adelaide University, having started her academic career in the UK at Lancaster University, where she developed research in the area of Women’s Studies between 1994 and 2004. Author of

several books on feminisms and intersectionality, she is currently an independent researcher, also working as a speaker and organizer of seminars and *workshops*.

- ⁵¹ In addition to being a novelist, Dionne Brand is a poet, essayist, university professor, documentary filmmaker and film producer. She was born in Trinidad, a Caribbean island off the coast of Venezuela, in 1953, and moved to Canada (where she lives to date) as a teenager. “Diaspora’s black dyke”, as described by poet Tatiana Nascimento, one of her translators in Brazil, Dionne Brand won important international awards, such as the Governor General’s Award for Poetry (with the book *Land to Light On*, 1997) and the Toronto Book Award (twice, in 2006 and 2019, with the novels *What We All Long For* and *Theory*, respectively).
- ⁵² Which, in addition to meaning *theory* (critical-theoretical construct), properly, also goes back, through its Greek roots, to *the notion of spectator*. The narrator is constantly questioning the construction of academic knowledge, its forms of validation and circulation.
- ⁵³ This is the well-known “principle of parsimony”, or “law of parsimony”, according to which simpler theories should be preferred until another with greater explanatory power appears. In the scope of scientific knowledge, Occam’s razor is used in Dionne Brand’s novel in order to illustrate a kind of heuristic to guide scientists in developing theoretical models.
- ⁵⁴ When I speak of performative writing, I am thinking, especially, of language as a cultural practice intertwined, like all language, in a complex matrix of power that serves diverse interests. In other words, I am basically imagining: a writing that moves through other modes of perception of reality and that, with this, is presented as text from other perspectives; the procedural character of this writing, which, to me, is all the more equivalent to inscribing (oneself); the space that everyday life occupies in language and vice versa; and the shift of the hegemonic codes of writing (which, as a rule, hinders the creative possibilities of language, including academic writing).
- ⁵⁵ I refer, undoubtedly, once again, to the formulations of the American theorist Diana Taylor, according to whom, because they are embodied practices (whose transformative potential lies in the presence), performances transmit cultural memory and identity and, therefore, function as “ways of knowing”, revealing “the deeper, truer and more individual character of culture” (2013). Hence

being impracticable, for example, for them to be seen according to the binary (universalizing) logic of “a truer truth” here, and another less true there.

⁵⁶ “Language: teaching new worlds/new words”.

⁵⁷ “Theory as a liberating practice”.

⁵⁸ I refer here to these concepts as they are developed by Diana Taylor (2013) in the book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. According to the author, the archive refers to the idea of “supposedly lasting materials”, such as written texts, documents, buildings, archaeological remains, bones, films, CDs, etc. The repertoire corresponds to embodied practices/knowledges, such as performances – gestures, orality, dances, songs, movements, etc. There is, therefore, according to Diana Taylor, a notorious correspondence between archive and literate culture and between repertoire and illiterate culture; she also contextualizes such dichotomy in terms of other possible dualities: archival memory x cultural memory, universal/eurocentered/legitimized knowledge x peripheral knowledges, legitimized knowledge x subalternized epistemologies and, among others, traditional/disembodied performances x embodied performances.

⁵⁹ I considered as *visuexperiences* the presentifications of our experiences of imagining with images, in notorious connection, as I have already emphasized, with the term-concept *writexperiences*, coined by Conceição Evaristo and featured throughout her work. To speak of writexperience is to speak of a fictional and poetic composition from experience; it is to recover the self-writing and to make known a *writing of life experience*. When I took this concept to the field of Visual Culture, I proposed, with this, to think that, just as the idea of writexperience is related to a writing that has as its contribution the plane of experience to reverse the logic concealing and stealing the narratives of Afro-descendant populations (which the “official memory” and the “single history” brutally and cowardly did not acknowledge as legitimate), similar movement of restitution is more than essential also in the plane of production of images-visualities. This is an essential amalgamated juxtaposition that composed the theoretical body of my doctoral thesis, through which, incidentally, the entire methodological proposal of the research was also founded. Speaking of visuexperiences in that context meant creating a way to *defocus the gaze* (hegemonic, colonializing), projecting the perception of other forms of knowledge of artistic practices that pullulate in our daily lives as forms of socialization.

- ⁶⁰ Original text in English: “I’m concerned with how ideas extend somewhere outside this marketplace. I’m concerned with linking knowledge to bodies and therefore to history and materiality, to specific locations and contexts in which bodies and ideas move”. I’m concerned with the contributions we make to producing knowledges that matter”.
- ⁶¹ According to the author, “incarnate writing is the moment of encounter between the subject marked by their class, race, performative act of gender, regionality, nationality and the modulated incarnate researcher whose rules prescribed in scientific practice must be considered, but also opposed [...]” (Messerder, 2020, our translation).

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