

The Ministry of Culture, the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo and Itaú present

33 bienal/sp **affective affinities**

Invitation to Attention



bienal



A New Outlook

Created in 1951, for nearly seven decades the Bienal Internacional de São Paulo has played an essential role in the cultural and art scene in Brazil. It has brought together millions of people involved in the production of national and international contemporary art, connecting them to a normally little accessible world.

Its performance has therefore set benchmarks in regard to the perennial goals of cultural policy. It has enlarged access, shared stimulating experiences, contributed to enlarging the repertoire of many people, energized the art world, jolted comfort zones, sparked debate, and opened the doors of perception.

Now, in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, the Bienal is proposing new challenges: to reinvent itself, re-signify itself. In a context ruled by acceleration and excess, in which people are bombarded daily by a whirlwind of images and information, the Bienal is going against the grain of this trend. In 2018, its thousands of visitors will have a new and potentially transformative experience. The artists are beginning to take on a more central role in relation to the space and general experience of this edition of the Bienal, in which the task of conceiving the exhibition will be shared by the curator with seven artists. The main priorities are focus and attention. Without scattering. Without fragmentation. But with the same intensity as always. Reinventing oneself is an act of courage. Abandoning traditional concepts that were once revolutionary, sailing against the tide, running opposite to the spirit of the time to valorize the territory of art...

It is not easy. But it is necessary to dare to try. I congratulate the organization of the 33rd edition of the Bienal for, once again, investing

in difference. “Art is the experimental exercise of freedom,” as stated in an article by the great art critic Mário Pedrosa (1900–1981), whose work has inspired the title of this edition of the Bienal: *Afinidades afetivas* [Affective Affinities]. It is in art that we find the full space of freedom, in which constitutional principles of a vital character become objective, concrete, real. Art is also economy and development. We have intensely emphasized this dimension at the Ministry of Culture. It bears repeating, as not everyone is aware of this. The cultural and creative activities are vocations of this country and contribute much toward the generation of income, jobs, inclusion and happiness. And they are already responsible for 2.64% of the Brazilian gross domestic product (GDP), for about 1 million direct jobs, for 200,000 companies and institutions, and for the generation of more than R\$10.5 billion in direct taxes.

In this context, I invite everyone participating in this edition of the Bienal to reflect on a simple message: culture generates the future. This is the moment to give culture the place it deserves; to see cultural policy as a means for bringing about the development that we desire for our society.

A development that not only generates and distributes wealth, but which also transforms, stimulates, reinvents and potentializes individuals and the country as a whole – which is precisely what art does, with its symbolic and economic dimensions. And the Bienal de São Paulo contributes much toward this. To everyone, an excellent Bienal.

Sérgio Sá Leitão

Minister of Culture

Paying Attention to Life

Our era gives rise to dispersion – a profusion of information, data, and content impossible to take in. And what prevails is the sensation, intuition, traces of emotion, and we lack the time to deepen the feeling. The processes of change take place too quickly for us to revisit our own consciousness. The aphorism “know thyself,” has never been so current, since he who does not know himself will encounter difficulties in other spheres of relations: contact with others, with nature, with transcendence.

Getting closer to art offers an opportunity for this encounter with oneself. The affective affinities that arise as we approach the fruit of creative talent allow us to come to grips with the empathies, predilections and even the unease generated by these human manifestations.

After this experience, no one will be the same. A new and perhaps unexpected value will be added to the formation of the viewer’s personality regarding how to allocate time and to perceive that the instant of attention devoted to someone else’s work can lend solidity to the edification of one’s own, including the larger and irrecusable task of constructing one’s own history.

José Renato Nalini

Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo

Fostering the integral development of students, in all dimensions: intellectual, emotional, social, physical and cultural. This is the central aim of the activity of the Municipal Secretariat of Education of São Paulo, expressed in the guidelines of the new City Curriculum, which is beginning to be implemented in 2018. From the viewpoint of this new curriculum, interaction with all the forms of artistic expression and creation is understood as a fundamental part of an integral education, by dialoguing with many of the types of knowledge that guide our learning goals, including: creativity, empathy, problem solving, cultural repertoire, communication and openness to diversity.

By choosing as a focus the question of attention, in counterpoint to the dispersion caused by the volume of information by which we are bombarded daily in the contemporary world, the educational project of the 33rd Bienal proposes a starting point that is highly relevant to the educational context, thus fulfilling the Bienal's vocation as an institution that poses contemporary questions.

The Municipal Secretariat of Education is therefore very pleased to renew and reaffirm its links with the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, in the hope that education and culture, together, can help to open new avenues for the development of the country.

Alexandre Schneider

Municipal Secretary of Education





We believe that access to culture is essential for constructing the identity of a nation and leads to the advancement of active citizenship. For this reason we support and encourage a wide diversity of artistic and cultural manifestations, including the largest contemporary art exhibition in the southern hemisphere, the Bienal de São Paulo, which we are sponsoring for the fifth year in a row. People's worlds change with more culture. The world of culture changes with more people.

Itaú.



Culture and education form an inseparable duo. This idea is present in the action of various institutions whose work is focused on the field of art. We recognize the irreducible character of art in relation to other forms of knowledge and action when we observe its capacity to bring about transformations in the day-to-day life of people and collectivities, putting its educational potential into use.

Based on this premise, Sesc and Fundação Bienal de São Paulo maintain a productive partnership, an outgrowth of the compatibility of their missions for the spread and encouragement of contemporary art. In recent years, this partnership has been intensified and enlarged through formative actions of curatorship, open meetings with the public, seminars and the coproduction of artworks, culminating in the traveling of selected works to units of the Sesc network in the inland and coastal regions of the state of São Paulo.

The continuity of this cooperation is essential for Sesc's work, linking actions with a potential that should be leveraged in various ways over time. By fostering ways of understanding and cross-sections of reality that put the dominant notions of the world into perspective, the goal is for this work to constitute permanent platforms for educational processes.

Danilo Santos de Miranda

Director of Sesc São Paulo



By promoting connections, we bring distant elements closer together, enabling their contact and, often, creating something transformative.

Establishing connections that contribute to the development of the nation and society is the aim of our work. Sixty percent of the electrical power consumed in Brazil's Southeast and nearly 100% of the power consumed in the state of São Paulo flows through ISA CTEEP's infrastructure.

Our connections go beyond the interlinking of different points in Brazil through electrical power: our goal is to connect people. We are part of a whole, and this is why we want to leave a legacy to society and to future generations.

This concern for human development is aligned to our successful partnership with the Fundação Bial to promote access to art for an ever-growing number of people.

The company is proud to support cultural projects of this significance, which stimulate reflection and the development of citizens.

ISA CTEEP





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Introduction

**Fundação Bial
de São Paulo**



At the 1st Bienal de São Paulo, in 1951, the sculpture *Persian Cat* (1949), by Luciano Minguzzi (1911–2004), sparked an interesting controversy. This was one of the most discussed artworks at a roundtable held by the Debate Center of the School of Sociology and Politics of São Paulo, whose participants included Lourival Gomes Machado (1917–1967), then director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and responsible for the organization of the Bienal. At that debate, an audience composed mostly of students could ask questions about the exhibition, talking with the specialists present.

It is told how after a long explanation by Gomes Machado about Minguzzi's sculpture, a student continued to ask about the artwork's title: "But why *Persian Cat*, if we don't see the cat?" Another student who was at the debate said that he had circulated for nine hours through the Bienal to finally leave disappointed. Particularly impressed by the

painting *Lovers at the Café* (1950–1951), by Roger Chastel (1897–1981), for as much as he had tried to understand the work, he had not been able to “see” the two lovers.

The questions by these two students, their urgency to converse about what they had found at the exhibition, is at the origin of a specific relationship between the Bienal and its publics. The gap between what they saw, what they did not see, and what they had heard about the artworks, appeared there, probably for the first time, as a space in which the Bienal could operate.

Initially, this activity was considered educational, in keeping with what was believed to be the purpose of the exhibition: to present the history of modern art to visitors. This is what gave rise to the so-called “explanatory tours,” at the 1st Bienal, in which “explainers” led groups through the rooms of the participating countries, commenting *in loco* about the works on display. The tours were successful and were repeated at the 2nd Bienal (1953),

with more organization, with the training of the first group of “guides” for a Bienal.

With the passage of years, this activity was consolidated as an important space – but not the only one – of mediation between the artworks presented at the Bienal and its various publics. At the 3rd Bienal (1955), for example, a “Schematic Diagram of the Development of Modern Art” was prepared and made available in the exhibition space and printed in brochures. Presenting reproductions of artworks and key concepts, this material provided an outline of the art movements since impressionism, believing that it would thereby facilitate the visitors’ contact with the works on display.

As the Bienal gained significance, not only as a reference of what was being produced in art around the world, but also as an event with an educational character, the organization perceived the importance of developing specific actions for teachers and students. Over the years, contests were car-

ried out with students, “guides” gave lectures at libraries and visited schools, courses for teachers were given, educational film sessions were held, along with other actions that configure different strategies implemented by the Bienal to provide spaces of mediation between the artworks and the exhibition, teachers and students. The 1980s also saw the creation of the first workshops in the exhibition space, in which children could experiment with the artistic materials.

Besides these institutional initiatives, the Bienal also supported, though informally, the work of Prof. Antonio Santoro Junior, who between 1969 and 1979 developed booklets and other support materials for teachers who wanted to visit the Bienal with their students. He also distributed these booklets to the media and to contacts with the Secretariat of Education and with educational agencies in the city of São Paulo. Prof. Santoro Junior’s proposals were forerunners of the Bienal’s own educational materials, which it

began to edit and distribute only from the 24th edition, in 1998, onward.¹

Beginning with this first editorial experiment, various formats, contents and modes of relating education art have provided the basis for the educational materials of each edition of the Bienal. Throughout these two decades, at the same time in which repertoires and experiences were accumulated and reelaborated, many of them based on observing the use of these materials by teachers, there also arose the challenge to adapt, every two years, to a new curatorial proposal to develop the actions of the educational program.

* * *

1 This historical overview is based on: José Minerini Neto, *Educação nas Bienais de São Paulo. Dos cursos do MAM ao Educativo Permanente*. Doctoral thesis. São Paulo: Postgraduate Program in Visual Arts of the School of Communications and Arts, Universidade de São Paulo (USP), 2014.

The curatorial proposal of the 33rd Bienal emphasizes the potential of focusing one's attention on the art object, as a counterpoint to our scattered focus nowadays, engaging in countless tasks simultaneously. Attention is not a theme that organizes the show, but a current question to confront. Our challenge, therefore, was to conceive this publication, one of the main instruments of mediation between the Bienal and the teachers, as a set of exercises with a focus on attention.

We understand that the attention exercises presented here constitute a sort of mediation. With them, we seek to work on these practices concentrated on the contact between a person or group of people and art. We seek to valorize this contact and organize it, but without predetermining the result, believing in an open mediation.

This emphasis on openness guided some of the important approaches that define the structure of this publication. The first of them breaks away from a common characteristic in the educational materi-

als published by the Bienal: we chose not to include plates or posters with reproductions of the artworks by artists who participated in the exhibition.

In the most recent editions of the Bienal, the contact with artworks that enlarged the notions of what is considered an art object, ranging from a self-training course for educators to a sculpture in the form of a skateboard park in Ibirapuera Park, led us question the pertinence of plates bearing reproductions of artworks. If the photograph of a painting configures an experience very different from that of standing before the painting itself, the question becomes even more complex in regard to artworks whose photographic register offers only a fragment of the experience that they propose. On the other hand, we know the importance that the use of these plates have for teachers in the classroom. This leads us to a second prong of our approach.

With this publication, we assume that any artwork created to be seen, heard, touched or perceived

in some way can be an object of attention. We do not aim to offer examples of what is or is not art, but rather invite teachers, educators, and mediators to think about what can be art and in what place it can be. One of these places is the Bienal Pavilion, along with the other spaces where the artworks of the 33rd Bienal circulate. But these contexts and these artworks are only some, among many others, that can promote the encounter with art.

This publication recognizes and desires to dialogue with the diversity of what art can be, the many spaces that it can occupy, the broad range of ages and publics that it mobilizes, and the myriad modes of relating with art. It is the result of an accumulation of repertoires and experiences over the course of the last Bienals, in which we found ourselves constantly confronted with this diversity, in face of questions such as the accessibility of the exhibition, gender diversity, the conflictive ethnic-racial relations in Brazil, and the ways in which the public appropriates the exhibition. We

thus sought to combine this experience accumulated by the Bienal with the interest and thinking about attention, presented by the curatorial proposal of the 33rd Bienal.

Continuing a successful practice of the recent Bienals, we invited a group of 18 teachers, educators and researchers to collaborate with us in the elaboration of the exercises contained in this publication. Over the course of three encounters, we tested a series of prototypes created previously by the Bienal team and discussed their qualities, limits and potentials for use with different publics and in different contexts, whether in a classroom, in the Bienal Pavilion, or in other spaces of the city. From the graphic design to the writing of each exercise, the critical contribution of these professionals was decisive for us to confidently follow some paths and to rethink others.

Without the intension of reaching universality – which is far beyond the limits of this publication – we sought to make it as open and encompassing

as possible. Believing in the power of the affection that the encounter with art can produce, wherever this takes place, we expect that the exercises of attention contained here will contribute to structuring it, adapting it to the particularities of each context and each person.

Attention as a Curatorial Practice

Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro



The relationship between the visual arts and attention is obvious and inevitable: art exists to be seen, and looking requires attention. Yet if we observe how people flow through museums and exhibitions we often see the opposite, people wandering from object to object spending a few seconds on each before moving on. It would seem that exhibition-visiting as a habit has somehow eroded the possibility of meaningful encounters with the objects presented to us.

The proposal of the 33rd edition of the Bienal de São Paulo attempts to address this question head-on. The central concept of the exhibition, *Affective Affinities*, draws in part from the ideas of Mário Pedrosa, whose thesis “On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art” (1949)¹ is an interrogation of the ways in which art creates an environment of relationships and communication, from

1 In: Mário Pedrosa, *Forma e percepção estética: Textos escolhidos*, Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes (ed.), v. 2. São Paulo: Edusp, 1996.

the artist through the object to the viewer. As he said “the wish to communicate is, without a doubt, an absolute condition of every living being”.² The question for us is if we can somehow recover this sense of art as a forum for experience and communication, as a place where we can encounter something new, and learn from our experience with it.

The educational project for the 33rd Bienal is focused on questions of attention. This choice is two-fold: on the one hand, it aspires to find a meaningful way to structure the viewer’s encounter with objects that may be outside their normal range of experience. On the other, it is founded in a belief that attention is under attack today by the multiple forces of distraction epitomized in the smartphones, which most of us carry in our pockets, an endless source of seductions and demands

2 Mário Pedrosa, “Problemática da arte contemporânea”, in Lorenzo Mammi (ed.), *Mário Pedrosa: Arte ensaios*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2015, p. 262.

for our attention. In an age in which all human knowledge is available around the clock with very little effort (just “google it”), our society offers very few opportunities to focus our attention elsewhere, intentionally, without trying to sell us anything or convince us of anything. Some of today’s most successful companies (Facebook, Google, Apple) thrive on capturing and re-selling our attention, turning us from mere consumers to the product itself. It is perhaps telling that these companies have better understood what the artworld still struggles with: that attention is our most valuable asset.

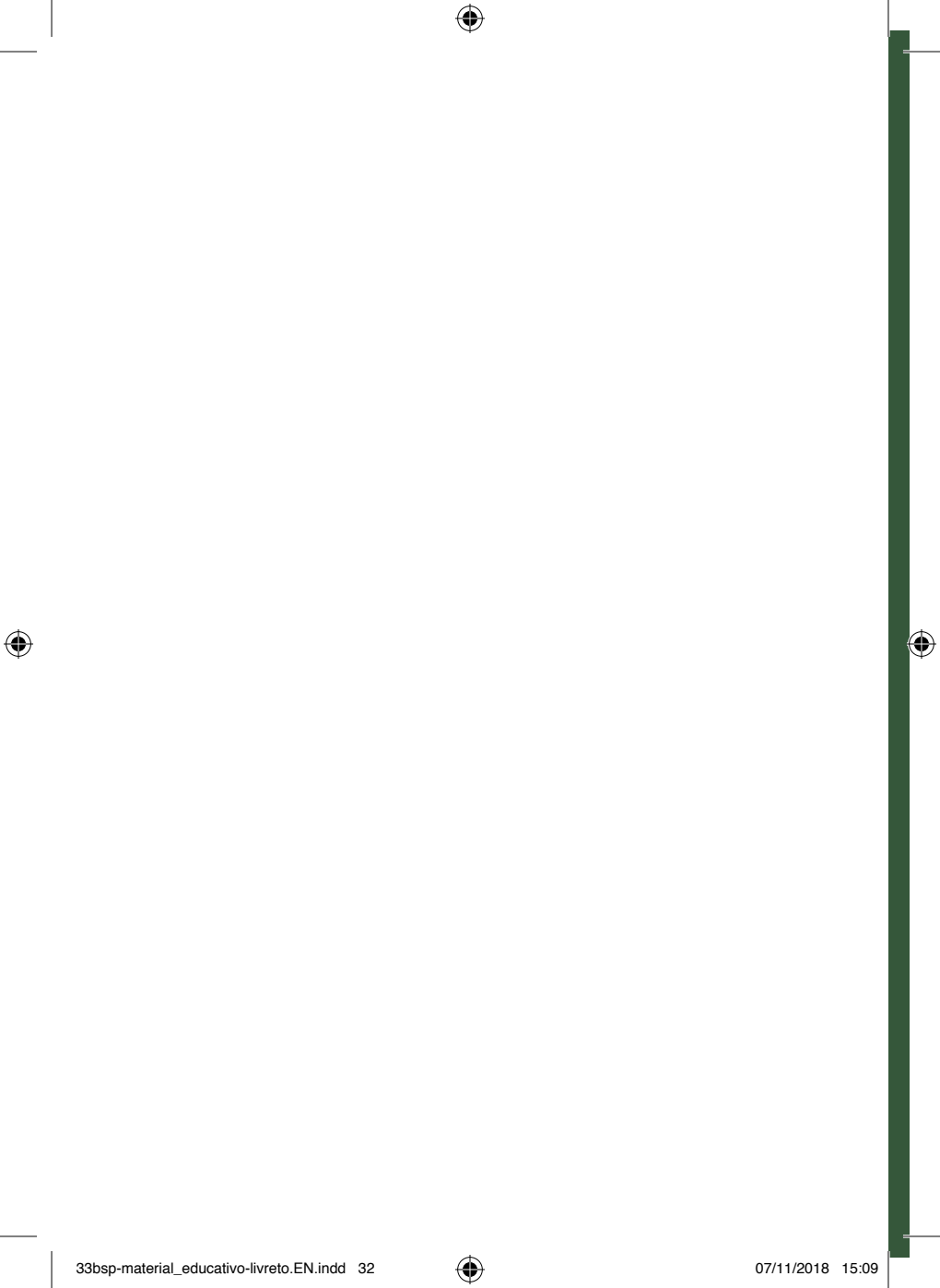
We believe that art offers a privileged situation for questions of attention, and that one of our central challenges is to provide the circumstances for this encounter to take place, and for attention to thrive. This concern with attention has informed every aspect of the curatorial program of the 33rd Bienal, from the choice of artists, to the physical design of the exhibition spaces. The aspiration is to create spaces that are conducive to slowing down,

observing, reflecting and sharing that experience. The education materials in this pack are designed to provide structured frameworks for attentional exercises, in the Bienal or elsewhere.

The 33rd Bienal does not have an overarching theme that could work as a justification for the artworks included in the exhibition, instead, the works present themselves to the visitor as what they are, hopefully without the need to be “de-coded” according to predetermined set of issues. In this way, the 33rd Bienal is an invitation to explore the works, to attend them, to reflect on them, and to share this experience with others. We hope that the materials and ideas presented here will provide helpful suggestions and paths along which to explore the many ways in which sustained and intentional attention can bring us closer to art, to ourselves, and to each other.

Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro is the curator of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo – *Affective Affinities*.





The Exercise of Attention

Helena Freire Weffort and
Lilian L'Abbate Kelian



The problem of how the object is grasped by the senses is the number one problem of human knowledge. The first scientific acquisition, the first philosophical acquisition and the first aesthetic acquisition are primarily united in our power of perceiving the things by the senses. [...] Everything in the world is there to be seen, heard, smelled, touched and felt – in short, perceived. This is the immediate experience. On this, humankind constructed the empires, built its monuments, organized life, developed science, invented religions with its gods, created art.¹

In light of the provocations that a curator's research raises, to us it seems interesting to understand the Bial as a platform on which various segments of the public encounter works of art. The activ-

1 Mário Pedrosa, “Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte”, in, *Forma e percepção estética: Textos escolhidos*, ed. Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes, v. 2. São Paulo: Edusp, 1996, p. 107.

ity of the Bienal's educational teams has been to perceive, investigate and conceptualize these ways in which the various segments of the public enter into a relationship with artworks, and to propose concepts and devices that can affect it. In the specific context of the 33rd Bienal, "to affect" means enlarging the possibilities of this relationship, as there is no presupposition of there being a "true" or "correct" meaning for the aesthetic experience.

Attention was the starting point for the investigation that constructed the educational meaning of our proposal. We accepted the invitation from curator Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro and undertook an experimentation with exercises of focusing attention on the art objects.

This publication, therefore, is conceived above all as a platform of exchange with the educators. But how to name the educational practices in relation to which we want to make this exchange? As we imagined, the exercises of attention imposed the centrality and potential of experience.

We underwent the profound tension that exists in the educational activity, oscillating between the senses of cultivating or inculcating values and knowledge (Latin: *educare*) and of leading the subject to the outside world (Latin: *educere*). Or the paradox contained in the condition and purpose of education: the experienced generation teaching the new generations to live in a world that is still being generated, a world that we get to know while simultaneously transforming it, even while it transforms us. This tension can also be translated in the distinction between intention (*educare*) and attention (*educere*).

Although there is no aim to resolve the tension between intention and attention, since it is profoundly constructive and essential to the educators, and being simultaneously aware of the clear power that “education of intention” has in the contemporary world, we undertook the task of “educating the attention,” that “leads to the outside world.” The understanding of Timothy Ingold guided us:

In the passage of human generations, each one contributes to the knowledgeability of the next not by handing down a corpus of disembodied, context-free information, but by setting up, through their activities, the environmental contexts within which successors develop their own embodied skills of perception and action. Rather than having its evolutive capacities filled up with structures that *represent aspects of the world, the human being emerges as a center of awareness and agency whose processes resonate with those of the environment.*²

But What Happens When We Pay Attention?

In the Portuguese language, the word “attention” has two principal meanings that are superimposed on one another: the concentration of the mental activity on a determined object and the concession of

2 Timothy Ingold, “Da transmissão de representações à educação da atenção”, transl. José Fonseca. *Educação*, Porto Alegre, v. 33, n. 1, pp. 6–25, jan./abr. 2010.

care, kindness or favor. Although the verb “attend” is transitive, that is, a verb whose meaning is only complete in the presence of an object – in this case, the artwork – the main effect of our being attentive takes place inside of ourselves. We do not wish to say by this that the artworks are secondary, but rather that, above all, the experience of attention in and of itself, already in its first moments (of availability to attend or remain in a “state of attention”), profoundly transforms the subject. On the other hand, the pulsing indetermination of the aesthetic fact and the multiplicity of perceptions that it evokes is what sustains this state of the subject’s transformation.

What Are the Protocols?

In our research concerning attention, we practiced and analyzed some exercises that are called protocols. *Protocol* is a word from Greek that means “glued in first place” and refers to the initial writings (such as title and author) on a papyrus. This word, however, expanded its semantic scope until reaching its mean-

ing as we know it today, of the sequence of standard procedures, or, in a figurative sense, of formality or ceremony. In computer science, protocols are the conventions that allow communication between two systems. For us, the protocols are a set of instructions that enlarge the exchanges between publics and artworks and, in some cases, the exchanges among publics about the artworks. Recovering the original notion of the word as “that which comes before,” it can be said that the protocol in art is that which precedes the formation of a judgment on the work.

In the “protocols of attention” studied for several months, we were able to recognize a general structure. The exercises were always carried out collectively, and began with the invitation from someone who had realized a determined protocol. This person would gather a group of five or six people and choose an artwork to be observed. Based on this, the experience was structured in four moments: a time devoted to the **encounter** with the artwork in the space in which it was situated;

a moment of prolonged **attention** to the chosen work; a moment of individual **recording** of that which was perceived in this relation; and, finally, the **sharing** of the experience of each person, without the debate of the individual impressions.

After this period of experimentation, we began to investigate the relation existing between this structure and the experience of contact with the artwork. If we wish to intensify this experience, why follow a protocol? Doesn't its fixed structure hinder the singular path that each person should take in his or her relationship with the work? What is the relation between freedom and the proposed procedures?

We observed that, contrary to what may appear at first sight, these protocols enlarged the experience with the artwork. We perceived that, by relating with the artwork based on stimuli different from those with which we usually approach art, the main effect reached was a sort of decentering. And, perhaps, this decentering was responsible for the enlargement of the experience.

The first effect of being submitted to the determined protocol is the suspension of judgment and/or taste, and the deactivation of the cognitive automatisms. Keeping on the path suggested by the instructions contributed toward achieving an opening of body and mind and, in this way, exposing oneself to the encounter with the artwork and to the encounter with oneself.

We recognized that the attention achieved did not bear a relationship with any aim, with knowing where to arrive. The attention brought the observer to his or her relationship with the artwork and not in the direction of some certain understanding or perception considered more suitable. “Attention does not offer us a perspective, but opens to what is presented as evidence. Attention is the absence of intention. It concerns the suppression of judgment and also requires a certain sort of waiting.”³

3 Jan Masschelein; Maarten Simons, *A pedagogia, a democracia, a escola*, transl. Walter Kohan et al. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2014, p.48.

The protocols furnished time and space for the experience. The different suggestions of exploration that composed them seem to have the single aim of offering time, the necessary time for the subject to displace him or herself and, eventually, to unmake the relationship of mastery or knowledge that we currently establish with the object.

French philosopher Simone Weil (1909–1943) affirms that the condition for attention is a gaze and not a strong attachment.⁴ And, in fact, the interpretive position of the subject in this state of attention becomes, somehow, “weakened,” diluted, suspended. Occupying this position can be somewhat uncomfortable or bothersome. After all, we remain searching, without guides, without explanations.

But it is in this state of exposure that it is also possible for one to be surprised. In this condition

4 Simone Weil, “A atenção e a vontade”, in *A condição operária e outros estudos sobre a opressão*, ed. Ecléa Bosi. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1979, p. 388.

it is possible to leave aside, at least temporarily, that which we believe, like, and know, to enter into contact with the artwork in another way.

An important relationship is established here in regard to the observer's "passivity" and activity," implicit in this structure. The observer does not decide the path, but rather yields to the experience based on the resources offered (the suggestions to explore it, the time of prolonged observation, the context of sharing).

It can be said that the logic that is at play is not that of action (of the subject evaluating his or her conditions to act on an object), but rather that of passion. And the "passional subject," as presented by Jorge Larrosa, is not merely passive, obedient. The passion-al subject is "patient," and "in passion there is an assumption of suffering, as in living, or experiencing, or enduring, or accepting, or shouldering the suffering that has nothing to do with mere passivity."⁵

5 Jorge Larrosa, "Experiência e paixão", in *Linguagem e educação depois de Babel*, transl. Cynthia Farina. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2004, pp. 163–164.

This patient or attentive state drives an important inner development. And we think that it is from here that the freedom offered by/in this structure springs: from the tension between the stimuli, which are external to the subject, and the unique reactions of each observer.

It is precisely this “suspension of the self” that places the subject into contact with the work, which makes it possible for the observer to also perceive the way he or she is observing, as throughout the exercise he or she establishes relationships, as his or her attention is deflected or attracted.

The opportunity to share one’s experience of contact with the work and to perceive how others also relate with it only tends to intensify this metacognitive process, since by being encouraged to record what we experienced, we observe what became the focus of our attention, of the associations and of the paths of our observation.

This metacognitive process reveals something fundamental that is at play in this exercise: based

on the attention to the artwork, it becomes possible to understand the relationship that one establishes with it. It is possible to become aware of the way in which one perceives the object. This experience enthused us and encouraged us to create structures for attention.

The way in which professors Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons present the idea of protocols of attention developed in field work with university students helped to organize some of these ideas:

The protocol is a clear orientation, which the individual follows various times, but which does not have a clear “end,” no destination. It is a sort of “way” that does not lead to anything, it is like a cut that opens to the world. Following this path does not signify realizing someone’s intentions or responding to someone’s expectations, but it is rather a path that implies senseless, mechanical repetition and regularity, precisely to decentralize our attentions, to push the subject off the path, so to speak, or at least

to expose him. The protocol helps to suspend overly familiar histories; it helps to install a determined discipline of the body and mind, trying to open a space that allows for experiences, a space for [...] the individual to expose him- or herself, so that, as Bergson said, we will not see what we are thinking, but rather think about what we are seeing, to expose our thought to what is happening (expose it to the present) and to overcome our own reflections, to break them. This requires an art of being “there,” which transforms a there into a “here.”⁶

We followed this path and decided to begin a process for the creation of exercises. For this, we considered that the different effects that we had experienced were very desirable in an experience of attention and contributed toward achieving an opening and presence in relation with the artwork. We then began to think about exercises of

6 Jan Masschelein; Maarten Simons, op. cit., pp. 23–24.

attention that could mobilize the effects discussed up to here and which we decided to name as: the “emotion of encounter” (not knowing the identity of the artwork that would be observed put us into a state of alert, preparing us for the experience); the “suspension of taste” (leaving aside our previous preferences and classifications); the “immersion in the artwork” (made possible by the time of attention to the artwork and by the immersion that the entire experience induced); the “narcissistic displacement” (opening to an experience in which the observer does not occupy the central place) and the “inversion of the subject-object relation (perceiving the artwork acting on oneself).

But a perturbing question nearly prevented us from going ahead and conceiving the exercises: Is everyone able to dedicate attention? Is it necessary to be “educated” in the sense of possessing some references and some resources or of retaining the nearly ceremonial discipline of concentration? Is it necessary to have a certain temperament, a certain patience?

We do not have a definitive answer to these questions, but we believe that any person can be educated for attention. And something that the protocols immediately show is that they break down the hierarchical relationships that we have with knowledge. As the exercise frees us from thinking about our relationship with the work in other ways, it provides interpretive freedom. Therefore, what is shared is not information, references and concepts about the artwork, but rather the experience of each person. Thus, both for the people who have had little experience with this relation as well as for those who are already very familiar with it, each exercise of attention is singular and, if it is repeated with the same artwork, will produce singular effects.

These lengthened times before the artwork always appear to us as the main challenge in relation to the wide range of publics. Who would have patience to spend so much time there? Are there in fact enough things to investigate? The beautiful thing to experience in this lengthening of times, perhaps the

main element of the metacognition, is that we discover our inner movements. We perceive ourselves in dissolution, we perceive ourselves as multiple people who come together within ourselves and establish affinities with the artwork. For this reason, the experience is never boring, always opening a spectrum of various, often ambiguous feelings; it always determines countless questions. By placing ourselves before the movement of our desire, the attention we focus on a world that is not yet ready reminds us that we are also unfinished beings.

The cultural institutions are always faced with the challenge of promoting equality of access to cultural manifestations and to both recognize and support their plurality. Meeting this challenge requires us to advance beyond the discourses on identity toward the construction of contexts that allow the observer to carry out singular readings on the objects observed. One of our primary aims is for people to be able to recognize the singular relations that are established with the objects of attention and to per-

ceive how they are constructed. The comprehension of the meanings that emerge from these relationships is a fundamental aspect for the development of more democratic links, insofar as such comprehension allows the individual to see him- or herself as an other.

This dissolution of the identity that the attention is able to operate is transformed, to a larger or smaller degree, in an opening to other points of view. To us it seems that the permanent construction of democracy is directly linked to this possibility for different and unequal people to produce something in common. For Larrosa, “the common is nothing else than that which is offered to the thinking for it to be thought in many ways, that which is open to questioning so that it can be questioned in many ways, and that which can be stated so that it can be stated in many ways.”⁷

7 Jorge Larrosa, “Sobre a lição ou do ensinar e do aprender na amizade e na liberdade”, in *Pedagogia profana. Danças, piruetas e mascaradas*, transl. Alfredo Veiga-Neto. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2003.

Presentation of the Attention Exercises

After practicing the protocols and researching their structure and effects, we began a process for the invention of our protocols of attention. We freely developed new exercises and sought for analogous effects of the suspension of judgment, of emotion, of immersion in the artwork, of the displacement of the subject and of the inversion of the subject/object relationship. We experimented with these protocols, and, perceiving their limitations and possibilities, we reformulated them; then we experimented with them again, once again reformulating them.

With dozens of exercises created, we could have considered the conception as finished, but how would we provide the various segments of the public with some structure for navigation? How to create a materiality that would not lose sight of the affective relation that accompanied us at every moment? How to sustain an openness for the people to feel welcome to develop their own researches about

attention and to elaborate exercises that would dialogue with their contexts?

In our analysis, we had identified a structure and returned to it in search of criteria for navigation. The idea of the deck of cards with its different suits served as a generative and organizing structure. The steps of the protocols were separated and formed the following suits: “finding an artwork”; “focusing attention,” “investigating the experience” and “sharing.” The playful element seemed to create an affective environment akin to an invitation. The random choosing of a sequence of instructions could be a way of injecting curiosity and emotion, dialoguing with the idea that we do not choose the path. The random character and multiplicity of combinations in steps 1 to 3 seemed to represent well the notion that there were different ways of relating with the art and we could experience different shifts in this relationship.

We then developed instructions so that the cards could be used individually by a single person, or by a group. In the second case, the expectation

is that a person assumes the mediation and evaluates the degree to which the exercises are possible for the different segments of the public, in their various educational situations, and can adapt them or even reinvent them. We noted, for example, that with groups of children, the time of observation can be increased little by little, according to what is considered sufficiently challenging. To us it appears that the only fundamental condition for anyone to create or adapt an exercise of attention is that he or she has had a direct experience with it.

Spanish artist Antonio Ballester Moreno, one of the artist-curators of the 33rd Bienal, showed an interest in accompanying this educational process that bears a great deal of relation with his work and with his curatorial concept for the exhibition. At our invitation, Ballester Moreno created four collages for the cards, which help to distinguish the four steps of the protocol.

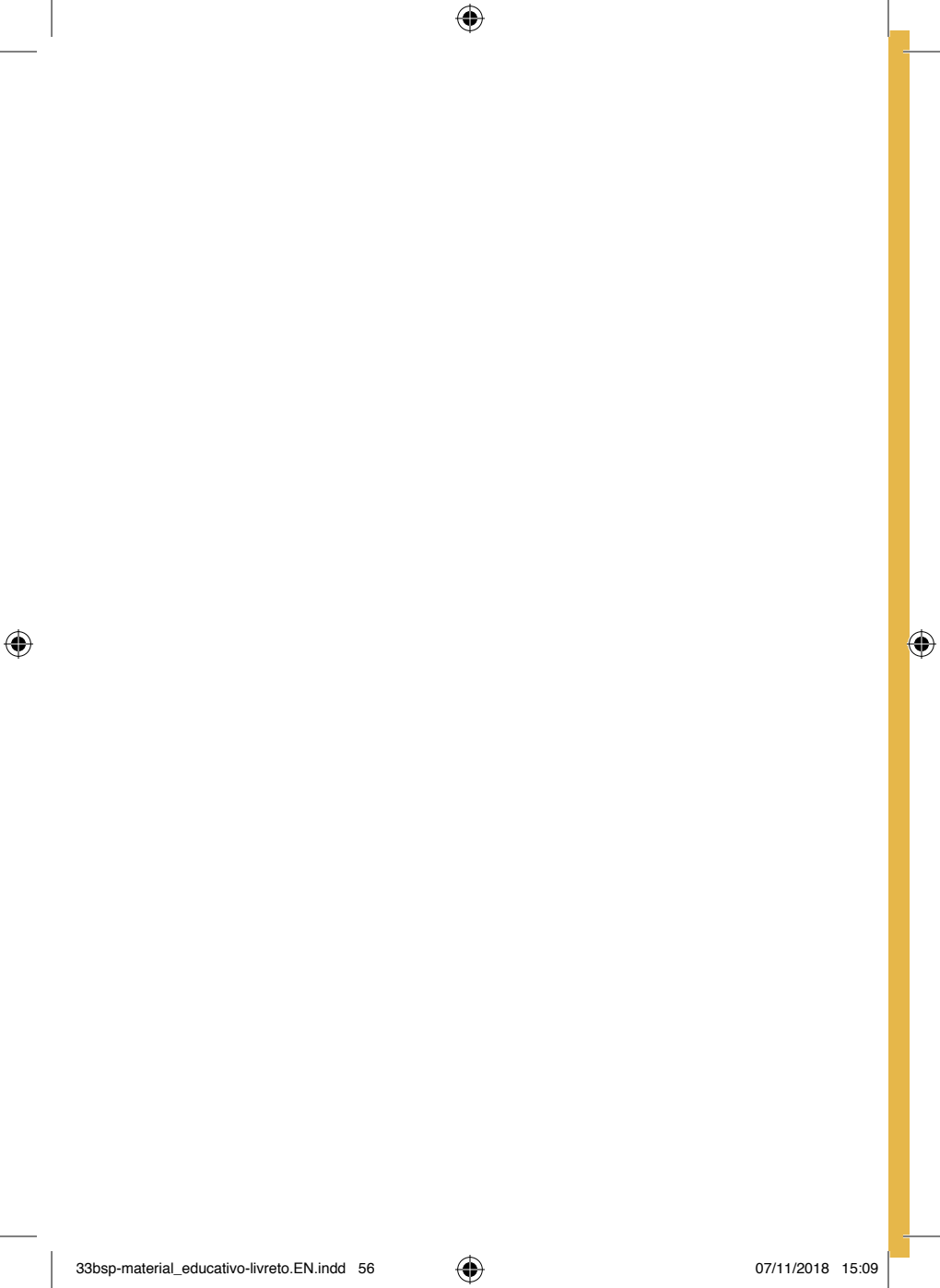
Rafael Sánchez-Mateos Paniagua, also a Spanish artist invited to the 33rd Bienal, presents in the fol-

lowing text a provocative reflection about the social construction of perception and how the feelings give shape to the world, offering multiple elements for reflecting on attention. We invite the reader to deepen some of the questions posed, considering the social and political scenario presented by Paniágua and, thus, to seek an *emancipated experience* in which the attention allows us to recognize one another.

We hope that this set of exercises of attention will stimulate education professionals to investigate not only the affective relationships with art but also the structures that contribute toward promoting attention.

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Sense in **All the Senses**

Rafael Sánchez-Mateos
Paniagua



In order for technical progress and capitalist modernity to take place, it was necessary to reconfigure the system of how we perceive the world, things and ourselves. For example, it was necessary to make long, difficult and monotonous work days tolerable to the senses, compensated by the dream of a “happy life” supported by economic benefit, achieved through an activity that is sometimes alienating and brutalizing. It was also necessary to develop techniques to make the myriad products of merchandise desirable to our eyes, capturing our sensorial attention and fascinating us, driving our necessity, desire and opinion, thus dissimulating the extent of exploitation or pleasure that its fabrication conceals. Moreover, it was absolutely necessary to eliminate the perception that we had of the earth itself and of its linked material of life and death; to distill it from its magic, so that it could be exploited and dominated *without contemplation*. Something which, in part, can be obtained by submitting women — *mater*, *materia* [Latin: mother, matter] and their reproduc-

tive power — *crear* [Spanish: to generate, feed, take care of, educate], *crear* [Spanish: produce, invent] — to that same destiny. Our sensorial faculties should be captured, administered and put to work in favor of a system of relations based on interests, on the lack of confidence in oneself and others, on the lack of empathy and of imagination, on isolation, on indifference and on total inattention. And the truth is that we did not put up very much resistance to all of this... But who is favored with this perspective?

If it were at some time possible to leave in the world some mark of complicity, today, most the time, there are only empty, absent gestures and we have the sensation that what is important never truly happens where we are, but in some of our digital “homes” which can hold nothing more than a (complacently self-exhibited) ghost of a life and of a body which, for us, is increasingly strange and uncomfortable. The days, which are always new and unknown, seem old when we abandon our experience to the first automatism or inaction acquired. Who decides

the meaning and the *sense* of things, and how is it decided? Is it the erudite specialists who, with their knowledge, free us from the ignorance with which they characterize us? Or is it the economy with its calculations that make us debtors? Or is it the powerful people with their coercive laws who act as our guardians? Who, after all, imagines the lives that we live? It is important that we ask ourselves this, because the response will determine the relationships that we develop in the world. Equipped with a complex perceptive apparatus always in evolution, in the contemporary societies we lack any notion of where the ideas come from and nearly everything that could unite the *sense* (meaning) to the *senses* – taste and knowledge, paying attention and understanding, image and magic... – has been separated, leaving us in a depressed state of affective illiteracy and experiential atrophy.

It is very contradictory how we, the adults, diagnose the “attention deficit” of the children when they do not adapt well to the difficult world in which we

insert them! What do we want them to pay attention to? Actually, it is from the children (or from everyone who is treated as such, whether to incapacitate them or govern them) that we can learn something and recover the sensibility to live in a free experience of the world – which today we contemplate with disenchantment, harassed by a predetermined existence, revealing us as unaware beings full of prejudices.

In fact, the children are perhaps the only and true serious resistance to this general and global pattern of somnambulism and vital disconnection, even though this affirmation is always confused at a time and in a society in which childishness reigns in the benefit of those who hope that, as children, we simply obey. We can learn from the children, however, their willingness to live experiences and their capacity to perceive, feel and imagine, taking *everything for certain* without taking *anything for certain*. Children, absolute strangers before what looks fully homologated and normativized, are open to recognizing themselves and discovering themselves in

everything they are not, and, therefore, are willing participants in the game of *what they could be*.

Although there are those who benefit from this scenario, certainly all of this emptying occurred in a short time, with our conscious and unconscious collaboration. We pay attention to what interests us and ignore what does not interest us, forgetting that the result of our dedicated attention, which we render to this inactivity, is what matters. It is therefore decisive that we ask ourselves about the gaze we lay on the world and on things, and about the effects and affects that these things rouse (in us), since they lead to different ways of our relating with them and with this world, and, by extension, with ourselves and with other people.

If we are careless about our sensorial capacity for entering into contact with “reality” – and, therefore, for transforming it – we should remake our link with it, getting closer so that it can be sensed and, at the same time, it can sense us, making us able to operate in it in all its nuances.

Because the world, the things and the people continue *here*, even if it is in the form of fragments or ruins that hope to acquire new life. Each happening, each living form has its origin in a gaze laid on the world, which continues emitting its signal. In some way, *there is no place that does not see us*. What does it say to us? What do we hear? In this era of emptying, it is important to renounce and suspend every preconceived focus and be willing to live a different, disruptive experience, through which we can re-learn and re-signify the most basic gestures of existence.

This will be possible if we assume the pleasant effort of recovering our sensibility for life, if we *work to intensify it instead of merely living it*, if we conjure and conspire for a fullness that defends *what we still conserve as unalienable*: our free capacity to become impassioned, to imagine, to identify ourselves in affinities, to make realizations.

Attention is not an instantaneous, spontaneous or immediate reconnection with the objective, the

real or the true, but rather the arduous and generous gesture of putting ourselves in suspension before the indetermination in order to imagine new senses. Perception – affected by the memory and by desire – creates and transforms the material reality. It does not reveal its transparency to us, but inserts us actively in its density. Perception gives form to the world. The senses are not only receptors, but also emitters and change in accordance with cultures. For example, he or she who possesses the sense of the wonderful will certainly have experienced how this sensibility impregnates his or her actions, as it reverberates in the world of the happenings and of the forms, in the others and in life in general. A look, a caress, do not signify the same thing in different cultures. It is not only the senses that are transformed; the things also change according to how we perceive them. The city in which we live is different in accordance with what we pay attention to and depending on who looks at it, and, nevertheless, appears the

same. If to our eyes the other people appear as competitors, we compete. If we observe them as equals, we cooperate with them. If we perceive the diversity of society – in terms of race, culture, gender, age, etc. – in a discriminating way, this will give rise to a likewise discriminating gesture and we will thus endorse exclusion and inequality.

This excluding experience of the world can be reoriented if we enter into an *emancipated experience* which, through listening, dialogue and attention, allows us to recognize ourselves in others. It is necessary to discover the collective in the singular, the strong in the fragile, the beauty in what was discarded, the thin thread that connects the things and the lives. A free and liberating experience that results not in a new explanation, interpretation or theory, but in a practical sense that is simultaneously emancipatory and helps to break down the walls that limit the sharing of experience; that transforms the world into a more habitable place; that helps one to grow in a true way and

have a good and beautiful life which allows one to laugh, cry, rest, discover, play, prefer one gesture to another, one word to another.

To know without dominating. To touch without wounding. To love. Is there a better way to awaken the senses? Love requires generosity and confidence, recognizing vulnerability so that distinct existences link their longstanding essence and their momentary state to invent something new that did not exist separately. Attention, like love, requires confidence, slowness, care, the dedication of time, “spending it” on something that leads us somewhere we cannot foresee. This is a time, however, obtained forever, a time gained for all the people and for life, including after the experience has ended.

Attention, care, sensitivity and boldness to live new experiences, the observation of what is important, of the expectations and the possibilities that exist in each thing are qualities of who does not believe that the world is already given, defined, closed and organized around certain ideas or al-

ready conceived and fossilized rules. It is a quality of rebellious and untamed lives that they seek something different from what exists; that they wish to interrupt the order imposed under the pretext of its being “natural.” This is also the quality of children and of people who create, even though, unfairly, they are not identified as artists. They are always incited by the *wisdom of not knowing* and by an unrestrained desire and need to give form and expression to their perception – finally rescued from the merely visual – whose effects and affects promise to be unforeseeable, since the field of the possible is totally open.

If we try “to perceive with art,” what we call art will be an immense laboratory of gestures, of forms and meanings. Its infinite sensorial diversity spurs the imagination and mobilizes the creative force which reminds us that we are not only creatures, but also creative existences. Art as an opportunity to cultivate attention, to reorganize it around new corporeal dynamics, to consider our senses and

disseminate them, is a way of recovering ourselves from uneasiness, from isolation and from indifference. Re-equipping our sensitivity to the world in order to situate ourselves in it in a more vivifying way is the invitation that we receive at each moment, in each situation, at each encounter, before each form of the world which, based on its configuration and its always shifting meaning, asks us “what do we need” A world worth asking what it might need from us.

Rafael Sánchez-Mateos Paniágua is a student, professor and invited artist at the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo – *Affective Affinities*.



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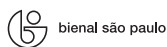
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