

Vanessa Seves Deister de Sousa

### **Teeth, soap and crystals. Reflections about the contingency in the poetics of the Brazilian artist Tunga 2025**

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# Teeth, soap and crystals: Reflections about the contingency in the poetics of the Brazilian artist Tunga

Vanessa Seves Deister de Sousa

## Abstract

Das Ziel dieses Artikels besteht in der Analyse der Kontingenzen, die den kreativen Prozess des brasilianischen bildenden Künstlers Antônio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão (1952–2016), international bekannt als Tunga, durchdringen. Der Künstler arbeitet mit verschiedenen Materialien und künstlerischen Ausdrucksformen, wie Fotografie, Zeichnung, Installation, Performancekunst, Malerei, Skulptur und Video. In diesem Artikel wird insbesondere untersucht, wie Tunga die Themen „Zeit“ und „Körper“ in einigen seiner Werke visuell erforscht, insbesondere in dem Kunstbuch mit dem Titel „An Eye for an Eye“ (2007). Wir verstehen, dass wir durch die Untersuchung der Poetik eines der wichtigsten brasilianischen bildenden Künstler in einen Dialog mit der kritischen Debatte der globalen zeitgenössischen Kunst treten. Als theoretische Grundlage heben wir die Beiträge von Yuriko Saito (2017) hervor, die durch das Thema „aesthetic of the familiar“ stehen.

This article's objective consists in the analysis of the contingencies that permeate the creative process of the Brazilian visual artist Antônio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão (1952-2016), internationally known as Tunga. The artist works with different materials and artistic languages, such as: photography, drawing, installations, performance art, painting, sculpture and video. This article will investigate specifically the way Tunga visually explores the thematises “time” and “body” in some of his works, especially the artwork-book entitled An “Eye for an Eye” (2007). We understand that by studying the poetics of one of the most important Brazilian visual artist, we dialogue with the critical debate of the global contemporary art. As a theoretical

basis, we highlight the contributions of Yuriko Saito (2017) about the “aesthetic of the familiar” thematic.

## 1. Introduction

In different Brazilian dictionaries of the Brazilian Portuguese language, the usual meanings that are found related to the term “contingency” are: 1. Something uncertain; 2. An unexpected fact; 3. An eventuality or a possible occurrence, however, unpredictable. Therefore, in this article, the premise is that thinking about the “contingencies” of the contemporary Brazilian artistic images refers to the exercise of investigation about the unpredictability that is present both in the materiality of the artistic object and in other factors that surrounds it. Consequently, the specific objective of this article consists in the analysis of the contingencies that permeates the creative process that constitutes the poetics<sup>[1]</sup> of the Brazilian visual artist Antônio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão (1952-2016), internationally known as “Tunga”.

It is important to highlight that most of the researchers that study Tunga’s work come across a first major challenge: the methodological choice. Since Tunga’s poetics is not (only) about bidimensional images, but also about objects, actions, installations and hybridizations among different art languages that render impossible to adopt a traditional methodological approach or a merely iconographical one. Analysing Tunga’s production requires from the researcher the development of new methodologies, new approaches focused on the artistic object in dialogue with both the history and the critic of art and not on choosing only one theory or concept that could be inflexibly printed on the study of his works. In other words: the best method to research Tunga’s poetics focuses on the challenge of identification and systematization of its contingencies.

So, we will use the same methodological approach of the doctorate thesis<sup>[2]</sup> nominated “Life and death on the poetical board: Tunga in Thanatos”<sup>[3]</sup> (SOUSA 2023), presented to the Institute of Arts of the University of Campinas (Post Graduation Program in Visual Arts - São Paulo State, Brazil).

The thesis rationale was developed from a qualitative and exploratory approach, oriented by the bibliographic revision and the in-depth analysis of Tunga’s creative process. Amongst the studied references were interviews

1 For this paper, the term “poetic” will be applied as a translation of the term “poética” to refer to the set of characteristics that are most remarkable and recurrent on Tunga’s works (the same way that the term is usually applied in articles written in the Brazilian Portuguese language).

2 It must be emphasized that the present paper is composed by the free translation and adaptation to the English language of many of the arguments elaborated in the thesis, as well as the proposition of new theoretical expansions carried out for this journal.

3 The thesis was oriented by Ph.D. Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto.

granted by the artist; artwork books published by Tunga; artist's notes found on his notebooks and shared in different medias; artworks analysis made by art critics; curatorial texts of individual exhibitions; etc.

We understand that when we investigate the contingency that permeates the poetics of one of the most important Brazilian visual artists, we are also dialoguing with the critical debate about relevant issues on the global contemporary art. Such as: 1. The multiple possibilities of interaction between the image and spectatorship; 2. The new possibilities of critical analysis of art works in face of the everyday aesthetics; 3. The complexity of the autofictional creative processes before the idea of authorship and originality and; 4. The artistic representation of sensible themes, such as death.

## 2. About Tunga's poetics

Tunga's artistic production was marked by the plurality of supports, materials and languages, as well as the constant dialogue with other fields of knowledge, such as physics and biology. Being a notorious personality of the contemporary artistic scene, Tunga was born into an erudite family. His father, Gerardo Mello Mourão, was polyglot and acted a journalist, translator and Brazilian politician. His house already had a vast interdisciplinary library and was frequented by artists and intellectuals that were relevant to national culture (e.g. the artist and civil rights activist Abdias do Nascimento and the modernist painter Alberto da Veiga Guignard). Biographical factors had deeply influenced Tunga's intellectual formation and artistic repertory, whom from a very young age started to develop an interest for the visual arts field.

In 1973, Tunga graduated in architecture and urbanism and, newly formed, had the opportunity of making his first individual exhibition named *Museu da Masturbação Infantil* (Museum of Childhood Masturbation) in the famous Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. From the suggestive title, the exhibition already presented bold experimentations in drawing and painting for the historical context, since Brazil was living in a military dictatorship. And since then, the artist kept immersed in an intense and continuous creative process, mostly in the Rio de Janeiro city, the location where he also set his home-studio.

As a result of intense experiences with the artwork materiality, Tunga's artistic production is relevant and very peculiar. The artist explored the plastic possibilities of attraction and repulsion in the magnetic field of magnets in artworks such as "Palindrome Incest" (1990). He also investigated artistically the sculptural possibilities of full and empty spaces in installations made with crystals, trays, laboratory flasks that allude to alchemy, such as the artwork "Cooking Crystals Expanded" (2010). He not only explored these relations among uncommon

materials but also performed unusual actions (named by him with the neologism “instaurations”<sup>4</sup>) with the objective to unite his performances with his installations (such as the work “Mimetic Incarnations”, 2003).

Beyond the specificity of the actions and materials utilized by Tunga, another central element to the understanding of his artistic production is the way he plastically develops the thematises of “body” and “time”. In the body theme, we find imagery representing the human and non-human body in drawings and paintings to the use of the body itself in individual and collective performances. It is from this understanding of the “body” that sexuality, reproduction, eroticism, aging, finitude and all the phenomena related to corporeal life and death are the great themes worked by Tunga. Themes that clearly refer to the contingent nature of his images. A characteristic that builds a complex and particular iconography around the artist, on which these images, actions and objects are constantly transforming, since they evaporate, oxidize, melt and overflow.

According to Suely Rolnik (ROLNIK 1998: 2), Tunga’s artworks explore “a potência de contaminação de tudo. O universo inteiro. Work in process. Arte, vibração e crítica de mundo”<sup>5</sup>. This quote by Rolnik also helps us to understand the theme “time” in Tunga’s work, since a certain shape (in the visual configuration sense) of the same artwork reappears in different moments of his artistic career, as reference or reinterpretation. That is: Tunga develops a work that is also auto-fictional, auto-referential and autophagic, by blending his personal biography with his invented stories, turning it into text, photography, sculpture, drawing, performance-art, painting, video, etc.

For that matter, we dialogue with the premise of the book “The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art” (2003) in which Martha Buskirk clarifies that the contingencies that refer to contemporary art are found from the materiality of the object to the reception of the work by the spectator. To the author, such contingencies can also be found on the register (by film of photography) of ephemeral actions/performances, as well as on the complexity of the contemporary debates about authorship, appropriation and technical reproducibility of the art works.

To the author (BUSKIRK 2003: 9), in the contemporary context, even “chocolate is one such material” since the utilization of “unexpected materials, particularly ones that carry cultural associations that extend beyond the museum’s walls” became increasingly commons since the 1950/60 decades. An issue that compels

4 4 Tunga preferred to use this expression in different ways, depending on each context, because to the artist “a instauração não é uma figura de linguagem estável” (in a free translation, “the instauration is not a stable figure of speech”). Tunga commonly used the term when referring to a performatic action that occurred in an artistic installation. Or, also, a performatic action with different sculptural objects that were left in the exhibition space, transforming it into an installation (LAGNADO 2001: 371-373).

5 In a free translation: “The contamination power of everything. The whole universe. Work in process. Art, vibration and critic of the world”.

the art critic to constantly rethink the limits and contaminations that are susceptible to the materiality (or dematerialization) of the contemporary artistic object. Also, for Buskirk, the ephemerality of some of these objects and performative actions also end up changing the visual registers into a secondary object: “established a series of options that includes the document of work, the document in the work, and the document as the work” (2003: 223). That is a factor that also deeply affects the understanding, both of the critic and the spectator, about the artwork, since some of them start to be known only by the mediation of the filmic and photographic registers.

In the same book, Buskirk also emphasizes that the contingency of the contemporary art object goes through the matter of the authorship as far as the relations between artwork and context are constantly transformed by the choices of its curators (amongst them, the artist himself). In other words, because the contemporary artist has freedom of appropriation and citation of his images and the images of other artists, the spectator (the curatorship and the critic) starts to interpret the same artwork in distinct ways according to their different contexts. A factor that generates countless contingencies, both in the logistic scope (for instance, the assembly of an artwork in a specific exhibition) and the theoretical/conceptual scope (for instance, the adequacy of a different curatorial text for each presentation of the same exhibition when done in different locations). That being said, when we look to the images generated by Tunga, we can easily foresee all of these contingencies, enumerated by Buskirk, that are typical of the contemporary art.

### 3. The sculptural time of crystals and soaps

The artistic time proposed by Tunga is eternal walking into the “*Ão*” (1981) “*Toro*” (Torus), “day and night, night and day”, as its soundtrack suggests: circular, continuous, calm and endless. But, if in “*Ão*”, the time is inspired in the calmness of the pulsation of eternity, there are other artworks that break this cadence, such as in “*Palindrome Incest*” (1990)[6]. Since for the artist, as well as

6 In this paragraph, two Tunga’s artworks were quoted: *Palindrome Incest* (1990) and “*Ão*” (1981). “*Palindrome Incest*” is an installation of huge proportions that is part of the collection of the “*Tunga’s Psychoactive Gallery*”, located in the Inhotim museum (MG-Brazil). This artwork is composed by the sculptural representation of thimble, hairs, needles (amongst other shapes) that refers to the fictional story “*Capillary Xiphopagus Between Us*” published on the first Tunga’s artwork-book entitled “*Barroco de Lírios*” (1997). As for the video installation “*Ão*” (which is also part of the Inhotim’s collection) is a filmic pellicle exposed in an interrupted circular perimeter of projection. When walking through the “*Ão*”, the spectator verifies, projected on the wall, a small film that registers the passage through the curve of a tunnel that never ends. Therefore, it is possible to notice that the curvilinear drawing made by the physical pellicle refers to the eternal and phantasmagorical curve projected on the wall. The *Ão*’s soundtrack is a very brief cut of the song “*Night and day*” by Frank Sinatra, as described in the paragraph. Among the researchers of Tunga’s poetics, it is usual the interpretation that the sum of all these elements of “*Ão*” refers to the geometric form known as “*Torus*”.

how the weather elements are part of the physical processes that affect the artworks, the unpredictable thematic of death is part of the contingencies of the images' "life".

Therefore, inspired by the maturation time of the crystal in the core of the Earth, in the sprouting of the corn during thirty days of performance<sup>7)</sup>, or in the oxidation time of the metallic alloys, Tunga's poetical time is also the time of discovery and experimentation<sup>8)</sup> of unusual materials. Elements that transform with the passage of time, but in a time that is too long for the human being to witness its sluggish process of mutation. Some examples are the milk teeth or the bones, which look resistant, but that one day, will finally turn to dust. That way, the artist puts the spectator in front of contingent objects and concepts, which emanate this geological, cosmological and almost eternal time for the common perception:

"Recentemente, eu construí uma garrafa de cristal, como as que estão expostas em São Paulo, só que feita de cristal de rocha. No interior desse cristal, há uma gota d'água que tem bilhões de anos. Imagine você olhando para essa gota d'água da Pangeia que viu o sol nascer antes de o homem ter existido. Imagine essa gota d'água dentro de uma garrafa do mais fino cristal à sua frente. A capacidade de ver, numa gota d'água, tanta história é a tarefa que me interessa. A tarefa do artista é a capacidade de remeter isso não a um fatogeológico, mas de fazer você viajar, ou seja, experimentar essa possibilidade de um planeta antes da existência de um ser humano" (TUNGA 2010)<sup>9)</sup>.

Facing these temporal paradoxes, Tunga is inspired by artistic readings about chemistry, biology and alchemy. He redraws his own geography and defies the laws of physics and mathematics. His transdisciplinary work is capable of reinventing time, placing the spectator in a constant sensitive confrontation with all of these immeasurable contingencies. Confrontation that can be interpreted

7 In this paragraph, I refer to the action "Untitled" (2014), executed in the exhibition "Made By: Feito por Brasileiros", where fifteen women take turns during more than thirty days threshing corn and sewing pearls on the cobs in the middle of Tunga's installation. On the following paragraph, I will quote the series of sculptures entitled "From la Voie Humide" (2014) on which the artist utilizes materials such as crystal and pearls, clay vases, paintings, fossilized logs, etc. I published a deeper analysis exploring the connections between these two artworks on the article "Made By: Feito por Brasileiros and From La Voie Humide: An Analysis About the Body in Transmutation on Tunga's poetics" (2018).

8 Or, in Tunga's words (2016): "Desde o começo, eu me interessei em ver a arte como um processo de transformação contínua e que a grande transformação da matéria passava por mutações paulatinas. Nessas pequenas alterações podemos encontrar a metáfora de uma transformação maior que é contínua e peremptória dos elementos da obra" (In a free translation: "Since the beginning, I was interested in seeing art as a process of continuous transformation and that the great transformation of matter would go through gradual mutations. In these little alterations we can find the metaphor of a bigger transformation that is continuous and peremptory of the artwork elements").

9 In a free translation: "Recently, I built a crystal bottle, like the ones that are exhibited in São Paulo, only this one is made by bedrock crystal. In the interior of this crystal, there is a drop of water that is billions of years. Imagine you gazing at this drop of water on the Pangaea that saw the sunrise before men existed. Imagine this drop of water inside a bottle made with the finest crystal before you. The ability to see, in a drop of water, so much history is the task that matters to me. The artist's duty is the ability to refer that not to a geological fact, but to make you travel, that is, to experiment this possibility of a planet before the existence of a human being".

as an extraordinary event (or a great “aesthetic experience”) before an equally impactful “artwork”. On the other side, contradictorily, according to the artist himself, it is also possible to find a plastical-temporal sculpture in the monotony of the simplest actions of the human routine:

“Na minha primeira exposição no Museu de Arte Moderna no Rio de Janeiro, nos anos 80, uma classe de estudantes ficou surpresa com o repertório de materiais que eu expunha. Eram latas de sardinhas, cera derretida, marteladas, enfim, coisas um pouco bizarras para a época. Tentei explicar perguntando para uma turma de alunos do Segundo grau se eles lavavam as mãos com sabonete todo dia. Pois é. “Vocês lavam as mãos com sabonete e estão fazendo escultura”, eu disse. Uma pessoa que faz escultura pega um pedaço de pedra, tira uma quantidade. A parte que sobrou é a escultura. Quando você dissolve o sabonete na água com as mãos você está fazendo o mesmo processo. O seu olhar sobre o sabonete tem que mudar. Se ele virar o depositário de um pensamento, de uma intencionalidade sua, aquilo é uma escultura (TUNGA 2010)”.<sup>10</sup>

From the directing of the Rio de Janeiro’s students perception to the sculptural time of the soap, or the plastic possibilities made by chance on the daily cleanliness of the hands, we can state that Tunga has offered an important lesson: to understand many of the creative processes of the contemporary artists, it is also essential to pay attention to the contingencies of the “aesthetic of the familiar”.

On this matter, Yuriko Saito (SAITO 2017: 03) states that every day aesthetics requires just that “we pay attention to what we are experiencing rather the acting on autopilot”. In other words, for the author, “such experience of the ordinary is also captured by attending to the aesthetic experience of doing things, such as cooking and laundering”.

Insofar as Saito (2017: 115) validates “the most ordinary and mundane activity as a worthy subject of aesthetics discourse”, the author also argued that the aesthetic of the familiar is not necessarily about an extraordinary insight originated by a mundane humdrum action. That is, the ordinary experiences with the flow of daily life can provide this kind of “familiar as familiar” aesthetic.

Just as the Japanese American author, Tunga doesn’t eliminate the existence and importance of the aesthetic experiences resultant of the artistic intentionality by molding a material or the discovery of the extraordinary (aesthetic) in ordinary actions. He also doesn’t seem to refrain from admitting the role of the great aesthetic experiences acquired through the contact of the spectators with

10 In a free translation: “In my first exhibition at the Modern Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro, in the eighties, a class of students was surprised with the repertoire of materials I was exhibiting. It was sardine tins, melted wax, hammerings, anyway, things that were a little bizarre for that period. I tried to explain asking the high school class if they washed their hands with soap everyday. So, ‘You wash your hands with soap and you are making sculpture’, I said. A person that makes a sculpture takes a piece of stone, takes a portion. The part that is left is the sculpture. When you dissolve the soap on water with your hands you are making the same process. Your vision over the soap has to change. If it turns into the depository of a thought, an intentionality that is yours, that is a sculpture”.

acclaimed artworks or sculptures made with uncommon materials, like the ones utilized by Tunga. However, Tunga's observation and Saito's explanation (2017: 24) converge as far as both see the possibility of experiencing the "ordinary as ordinary" just "paying attention and bringing background to the foreground". In other words: to both of them, still paraphrasing Saito, "putting something on our conscious radar and making something visible does not necessarily render our experience extraordinary".

That being said, Tunga's lesson can be interpreted in a way that is more extensive and addressed to anyone, on any banal context. It can be concluded that for Tunga, in a certain way, all of us can develop a relevant creative process, since we remain on the "rigor of distraction"<sup>(11)</sup>. For the sculptural time of the soap can only be found on the monotonous handling, but aesthetically careful, of common materials and action, such as taking a shower or laundering.

#### 4. The organic time of teeth

In "The Rigor of Distraction", Tunga's creative process also leads us to the perception of another intimate time that remains hidden inside our mouths: the time of birth and fall of the milk teeth. For Tunga, our body sculpts the teeth, which die at birth, at the same moment they fall from our mouths.

"Curiosamente, ao inverso dos processos escultóricos, na perda de dentes, preservamos e cuidamos das partes do processo (gengiva, maxilar, nós mesmos) desprezando a parte que gerou maior esforço de criação, a saber, os dentes, estes as verdadeiras esculturas. Não é portanto absurdo o resgate deste tema enquanto esculturas" (TUNGA 2007).<sup>(12)</sup>

This citation was taken from the artwork-book<sup>(13)</sup> entitled "Olho por Olho" (2007), in which Tunga presents a series of artistic works referring to the teeth theme. The book is composed by sixty-five pages richly illustrated with

11 Phrase found by the curator Luisa Duarte (2018) in a notebook of the artist and which entitled an individual Tunga's exhibition at the Art Museum of Rio (RJ-Brasil) in 2018.

12 In a free translation: "Curiously, on the inverse of the sculptural processes, in the loss of the teeth, we preserve and nurse parts of the process (gum, jaw, ourselves), neglecting the part that caused the biggest effort of creation, namely, the teeth, these being the true sculptures. Thus, it is not absurd the retrieval of the theme as sculptures".

13 Tunga's books reveal the desire for creation of an auto-fictional universe, open to multiple sensorial experiences (that should transcend the paper's surface). As a result, Tunga idealized the photographic record of his works and supervised the diagramation of these publications, since he treated them as artworks (and not like the traditional art catalogues containing texts and photographs of the exhibited artworks). "Olho por Olho" (An Eye for An Eye), for instance, is one of the books that compose the "Caixa Tunga" (2007). The Caixa Tunga (Tunga Box) is formed by six books and a poster containing records of a great portion of the artist's projects since the mid-nineties until its release date. The books of Caixa Tunga are in very distinct formats, textures and diagramations. Some of them have notes and poems constructing a non-linear narrative. Moreover, in each new reader-spectator that manipulates this book box, there is a reorganization of the order of all of these elements inside the box, creating new possibilities of reading and relations among the stories and images displayed.

photographs, drawings, records of sculptures, photo-performances, fictional narratives, poetry, etc. At the beginning of the book, Tunga describes his reunion with an object containing the teeth of a friend. According to the story (auto-fictional), the teeth are transformed by Tunga into a jewel and returned to the friend who becomes happy, causing jealousy in other friends of the artist. Tunga, then, creates new jewels with other teeth to present these friends while he digresses about life and death, childhood memories, ancient rituals and notes about the contemporary art.

As we page through the book, little by little, Tunga reminds us that the teeth are essentially dead parts of the human body and that usually become uncomfortable to the see for being emissaries of the passage of time (*memento mori*). Paradoxically, the artist also states that teeth were not always seen in this dreadful way, since once they arouse “*sentimentos míticos poderosos*” (powerful mythical feelings), transforming into actual “*troféus*” (trophies). In another passage, Tunga suggests that nowadays it would fit into the poetry branch to create a new “*estatuto para os dentes*” (statute for the teeth) and to introduce a “*terceira dentição*” (third dentition). Once we (human beings) should be “*algo além de sorrisos e mastigações*” (something beyond smiles and mastication), on a clear reference to art as the catalyst of images and trivial actions (TUNGA 2007).

Here we should recover once more the work of Luisa Duarte in face of Tunga’s notebooks: thus, according to the author (DUARTE 2018: 16), the phrase ‘the rigor of distraction’ appeared next to another, in which we read ‘the logic of play’. Therefore, Duarte elucidates that “in Tunga, we can note, the paradox is never contradictory”. Because as much contingent that Tunga’s ideas and artworks appear to be, there are some common threads that guide his creative process: clearly, one of them is the universe of dream, of the uncanny or the grotesque, as explored by Duarte in the following pages of her curatorial text.

On the other side, another common thread of Tunga’s creative process (that may go unnoticed) is exactly the matter of the everyday aesthetics. Therefore, it would not be exaggerated to state that, for Tunga, the true artist is that individual capable of putting himself on the almost impossible exercise of carefully observe the daily actions, but without losing the levity in which children do the same. It is in the monotony of the everyday actions in dialogue with its infinite contingencies that the contemporary artist will find, playing, his raw material.

This discussion materializes in every image present in the book “*Olho por Olho*”. Amongst them, we emphasize the sculpture entitled “*Bibelô*”<sup>[14]</sup> that appears on page eleven. “*Bibelô*” draws the spectator’s attention as long as it

14 The four volumes of *Bibelô* that are not symmetrical were obtained through the junction of molds of the hollow parts that between the teeth and the tongue, inside our mouths. The object was a prototype of the installation with major proportions nominated “*Afinidades Eletivas*” (2001) which also appears in the book.

merges the beauty, the brightness and the vivacity of a jewel with the teeth's morbid presence. The aesthetic of the small and unsettling object can refer to the mourning jewels<sup>151</sup>. Nonetheless, it is worth to reinforce that in Brazil it is common the habit of mothers to convert into pendants their child's milk teeth, culminating a sentimental object that reminds a time of the children's joy and innocence and not necessarily to a memento mori.

Through "Bibelô", Tunga shuffles the traditional notions of reception of the artwork, once the spectator starts to know a sculpture only through a photographic record, inside an artwork-book full of stories that mix Tunga's biographical reality with his invented narratives. Resuming some of Martha Buskirk's (2003) arguments, the authorship, the appropriation and the technical reproducibility of the artwork herein transform into different contingencies typically found in the contemporary creative processes.

Through the works as the aforesaid, Tunga also invites the spectator to turn into some kind of co-author of his stories (and even his pseudo-biography). Bearing in mind that each individual's subjectivity starts to be a fundamental factor for us to try to interpret academically the reception of Tunga's work as an aesthetic experience, we once more come across incommensurable contingencies. Here, the same artwork-book, in different hands, and in different exhibitions, embraces contradictory critical interpretations. In this regard that Buskirk advises us about the contingent object of contemporary art in the face of the specificity of each context of exhibition, completely tearing with the former idealization of a uniqueness enshrined in each artwork.

## 5. Conclusion

Investigating the way that Tunga visually represents body and time, we face some of the particular contingencies of his auto-fictional creative process. Simultaneously, it is through the analysis of this singular creative process that we observe more overarching and recurrent matters on the contemporary artistic poetics, such as the complexity of the concepts of authorship and authenticity.

In Tunga, the milk teeth images transform into sculptures and the body, the gum and the tongue are activated through poetry. The contingency in Tunga's work incites us to develop a gaze guided by the "rigor of distraction" and by "the logic of play" before the academic challenge of systematization and scientific analysis of the contemporary art.

151 Mourning jewels [...] preserved hair, tooth, bit of ribbon, etc, are relics of someone not present; They speak of their intimate connection to the wearer. Without the wearer, they are mere curiosities and seem doubly disconnected – from the body to which they belonged and from the individual who misses that person" (BACHMANN 2017: 84).

The Brazilian artist is capable of finding in the ordinary experiences with the flow of daily life the raw materials of his images. Tunga leads us, simultaneously, to see a time of geological duration inside a crystal beside a sculptural, monotonous and ephemeral time that is present in a regular bar of soap. Through his contingent images, Tunga drills the spectator's subjectivity as far as he dialogues with the tiresome and repetitive routine that each one of them (bearing in mind that "they", in fact, are all of "us": citizens that are many times incapable of turning of the autopilot).

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## About the author

Vanessa Seves Deister de Sousa is a PhD and Master degree in Visual Arts by the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), with graduation in Artistic Education with licentiate degree in Visual Arts by the Universidade Estadual de Londrina (UEL). Currently, she works as a full time professor on the licentiate degree in Visual Arts at the Universidade Estadual de Maringá (UEM). Her interests are on lines of research that study History, Theory and Art Critic, specifically on the investigation of the 'expanded field' of the Brazilian contemporary art tendencies. Vanessa is also interested in studying death and mourning representations in contemporary Brazilian Art's History.