

# Choreography of a temporary teaching

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# **ABSTRACT**

This essay uses an autoethnographic approach (FORTIN, 2009; DANTAS, 2016) to narrate a set of teaching experiences lived by two temporary professors in the undergraduate courses in Dance at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), both available degrees, from September 2021 to September 2022. It uses the textual structure of letters to establish communication between the two authors and to relate questions raised by them in their passage through the referred courses. Traveling through the field of Academic Pedagogy in Dance, they dialogue on topics such as: construction of the teaching-learning practice, students' educational background repertoire, interpersonal relationships and specificities of the university path in contact with students. Considering their own educational backgrounds to observe the scenario studied, the authors address situations experienced in the teaching routine, also bringing episodes starring students to compose pedagogical dialogues and point out elements pertinent to the universe of teaching in higher education.

KEYWORDS dance; teaching; undergraduate course; university.

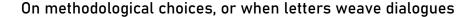


# Choreography of a temporary teaching

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This essay uses an autoethnographic approach (FORTIN, 2009; DANTAS, 2016) to compose narratives experienced by two temporary professors in the undergraduate courses in Dance at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), both available degrees, from September 2021 to September 2022.

From the concept of autoethnography presented by Fortin (2009), generally used in the field of Dance to address choreographic creation processes, we point out the possibility of this writing as an emerging element from the experience in the universitary classroom. According to the author, autoethnography (close to the concepts of autobiography, reports about oneself, life stories and anecdotes) is characterized by a writing of the self that allows the transit between personal experience and the cultural dimensions surrounding the subject, in order to resonate their sensitive perspectives on an event.

As a writing of an autoethnographic nature, rather than a predominantly ethnographic one – in which the reports would seek to be guided by issues necessarily of a sociocultural nature (Fortin, 2006; Dantas, 2016), the data presented here come from the empirical view of the authors on the observed events and ambiences, in this case the university classrooms established in the UFC Dance undergratuate courses, and more specifically those of the disciplines taught by them as temporary professors of the referred courses.

In this sense, the fact that they are directly inserted in these environments of professional performance, in teaching positions of transitory duration, as well as their speeches, perceptions and unique perspectives, constitute the main data to be produced in this writing (Dantas, 2016), which finds in the format of letters the means of gaining body and putting into dialogue the points of view of two artists, researchers and university professors, each with their previous educational background (formal and non-formal), but with the position and academic experiences in common.

Thus, based on the above, the letters exchanged between the authors in 2022 are presented below, covering classroom

episodes, personal thoughts and problematizations regarding their periods of work in the academy.

### Fortaleza, May 22nd, 2022

My name is Thiago. I am ending a period as a temporary professor in the undergraduate courses in Dance at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), in which part of my academic educational background was constructed: a bachelor's degree. A curious case of a former student who gets his bachelor degree and has the possibility of returning to the courses in less than 10 years of their existence<sup>3</sup>, to put his teaching into action. Today, Sunday, I have received the work of a student named Ana Clara Magalhães, whose curricular component in which she was enrolled is called 'Performing Arts and contemporary dramaturgies'. I read the text of two pages and, in the exercise of looking attentively, I start to cry with her words. It was kind of a written-sharing. A work whose words claimed a space of freedom for student practice, since during the classes Ana Clara avoided to talk out loud about issues brought by me oncontemporary dramaturgy in dance. Ana Clara's written sharing was sincere and the way in which she chose to create meaning in the text articulated her artistic process, understanding, even in her recent third semester journey, how dance dramaturgy chooses to say 'Hello! I am here!' in their educational background process.

Fellipe and I have joined the Institute of Culture and Art (ICA<sup>4</sup> – Instituto de Cultura e Arte) as temporary professors for the undergraduate Dance courses in the 2021.2 semester. In this space, we talk a lot about our classes and students in common,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The undergraduate Dance courses at the Federal University of Ceará, modalities teaching degree and bachelor degree, were created in 2010, having their first class in 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The UFC's Institute of Culture and Art, in which the Dance undergraduate courses are allocated, is also composed of undergraduate courses in Theater, Gastronomy, Fashion Design, Publicity and Propaganda, Journalism, Philosophy, Cinema and Audiovisual, Music. It also has the Postgraduate Program in Arts (Master's), Professional Master's in Arts, Postgraduate Program in Communication, Postgraduate Program in Philosophy, Professional Master's in Philosophy and Postgraduate Program in Gastronomy.

since we teach the same disciplines for different periods. We often catch ourselves talking about themes that refer to the classroom environment. As if they didn't end, for example at 5:30 pm, but lasted longer and continued to reverberate over the hours, extending in another regime.

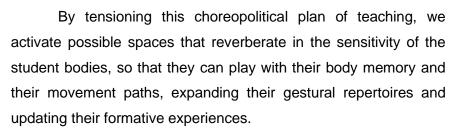
Much more than a chronological time, the practice of teaching seems to gain new and other lines of meaning, tensioning subjective spaces of teaching in Dance and of the perception of time as an event and as work. With that, when we leave the classes, these temporalities are not interrupted in our bodies and continue to operate in other frequencies, smaller, but not imperceptible.

With that in mind, we intuit that teaching in the Arts area requires a complex management of times and relationships, a ground on which a choreography of teaching-learning attitudes that we choose to put in the classroom unfolds. Everything we think of as a teaching plan reverberates as a possible teaching choreography proposed to the classes, a set of choices about movement techniques, problematizations and concepts that are put in contact as in a choreographic composition.

In this meeting, dance bodies are articulated, whose actions call for a possible choreopolitics of movement, a concept proposed by the American theorist of Dance and Performance André Lepecki (2013). Thus, operating in a choreopolitical layer of teaching, this teaching choreography puts in contact realities from different fields (race, gender, socioeconomic profile, etc.), revealing

[...] uma atividade particular e imanente de ação cujo principal objeto é aquilo que Paul Carter chamou, no seu livro *The Lie of the Land*, de "política do chão". Para Carter, a política do chão não é mais do que isto: um atentar agudo às particularidades físicas de todos os elementos de uma situação, sabendo que essas particularidades se coformatam num plano de composição entre corpo e chão chamado história. Ou seja, no nosso caso, uma política coreográfica do chão atentaria à maneira como coreografias determinam os modos como danças fincam seus pés nos chãos que as sustentam; e como diferentes chãos sustentam diferentes danças transformando-as, mas também se transformando no processo. Nessa dialética infinita, uma corresonância coconstitutiva se estabelece entre danças e seus lugares; e entre lugares e suas danças. (Lepecki, 2013, p. 47, grifo do autor).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> [...] a particular and immanent activity of action whose main object is what Paul Carter called, in his book *The Lie of the Land*, "politics of the ground". For Carter, the politics of the floor is nothing more than this: an acute attention to the physical particularities of all the elements of a



It is important to point out that in this sensory-technical-political work proposed to the students, it is hoped that they will be able to recognize and exercise their body, their dance and the ground they step on, knowing that this requires a unique exercise of detachment. Such a game summons a sensitive disposition, an openness to the unknown, a perception of oneself as a body that choreographs – in the broadest sense of choreography – policies of stepping on the ground with oneself and with the world.

They are teaching works that, both in the degrees of *licenciatura* and *bacharelado*, claim spaces of autonomy in the students in their dances. In this perspective, I bring a thought with contemporary dance proposed by the Brazilian artist and researcher Thereza Rocha (2013, p. 46), who points out:

Tal como a dança contemporânea, a autonomia é o meio, não é o fim e depende de um trabalho constante sobre si. Trata-se de uma qualidade de percepção de si no/com o mundo que, uma vez experienciada, acompanha, em estado de latência, o aluno por toda vida - uma vida artista baseada na autonomia, na capacidade de pisar o chão a partir de si. (Rocha, 2013, p.46).6

Stepping on the ground from the movement itself is what we also try to do, Fellipe and I, when we provoke the classes we teach in this period at UFC. A work that proposed to perceive the different

situation, knowing that these particularities are co-formatted in a plane of composition between body and floor called history. That is, in our case, a choreographic policy of the floor would pay attention to the way in which choreographies determine the ways in which dances plant their feet on the floors that support them; and how different floors support different dances transforming them, but also transforming in the process. In this infinite dialectic, a co-constitutive correspondence is established between dances and their places; and between places and their dances. (Lepecki, 2013, p. 47, emphasis added) *Our translation*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Like contemporary dance, autonomy is the means, not the end and depends on constant work on oneself. It is a quality of self-perception in/with the world that, once experienced, accompanies, in a state of latency, the student for a lifetime - an artistic life based on autonomy, on the ability to step on the ground from within. (Rocha, 2013, p.46) *Our translation*.



temporalities in the understanding of what dance can be, its context in history and critical thoughts that are formulated by the danced movement, knowing that this event for some people is constituted at the moment of the class and in others, perhaps, at the end of the course or even after leaving the University.

# Fortaleza, May 24nd, 2022

I read these words and put myself in a state of attention, recalling things that are dear to me on this journey: the whole and the going together. So, I introduce myself: my name is Fellipe, and just like Thiago, I had my first teaching experience in higher education teaching as a temporary professor for Dance undergraduate courses at UFC.

Also having a degree in an undergraduate Dance course from Reuni<sup>7</sup>, in this case, with a teaching degree, I add my voice to Thiago's by reiterating the symbolism of a former student with a degree from a federal educational institution returning to perform teaching, directly experiencing what is said by students as the "other side", in reference to the perspective occupied by the professor.

In a class of the subject 'Internship: Contextualizations', scheduled for the seventh semester of the course, I was talking to the student Isabella Nantua about the common sensation of feeling nervous every time I was about to start a class. Isabella asked me: 'Do you still get nervous?', for what I replied: 'Every time!'. And I added: 'I think it's like being on stage, there's always a certain degree of adrenaline close to the unknown', even though we have a good idea of the script or the choreographic cues to be danced. At the time Isabella shared with me how anxious she was also feeling, because in a few weeks she would be conducting in a public school in Fortaleza, for a High School class, which she mentioned

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Reuni – Support Program for Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Federal Universities, was a program implemented in 2007 during the Lula government, which resulted in many undergraduate courses in Dance in the national territory, including the ones at the Federal University of Ceará and the course at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), educational spaces in the which Thiago and I have gotten our degrees, respectively.

as being the 'first class of her entire life!'. Although with textures of novelty, there was a notion of durability in that phrase, and this gave a tone of readiness for the craft that Isabella would come to perform, both in her internship and in her coming conclusion of the course and professional practice as a undergraduated person in Dance.

The perception was very vivid to me, that both Isabella – when trying out lesson plans with her classmates, and I – in that being a temporary professor, we were operating layers in common of a teaching action in Dance. Each one, in their own way, then leaves the behind the scenes and, occupying their stage, summons a very particular repertoire of gestures, arguments and proposals for their teaching choreography.

In this scenario of possible analogies, I find it pertinent to borrow from the reflections of the Brazilian artist and researcher Luciana Paludo (2015), when she proposes the notion of choreography as a device of visibility for something. A powerful notion for this writing, which I believe we experienced with the students of UFC Dance courses, in different disciplines in which choreography was a highlight. Showing students' intimate issues and their formative paths, each and every one, with particular concerns, gradually appropriated their compositional desires, making visible a diverse web of contemporary themes and agendas.

Still holding hands with peers from our field, I resort to a thought that Brazilian artist Jussara Miranda (2019) shares: that dance can be understood as a pretext to exist in the world, and choreography, in turn, as a means of communicating with it. Inspired by the power of this phrase, I identify it as something palpable to be observed in the course of many students in Dance undergraduate courses at UFC. These, while trying to accommodate the volume of new proposals arising from the curricular components of the courses, often want to give vent to their dance productions, valuing their educational backgrounds and territories of belonging, with sometimes a certain tension and negotiation between both sides.

Still groping through the steps of this temporary teaching choreography, I now understand more clearly that the interpersonal relationships established along this path underline how important it is to exercise an active listening in the face of the multiple universes

that each student presents when arriving in the classroom, and also when leaving it.

Together with Thiago, I try to find the measures for this teaching game that sometimes asks us to welcome, sometimes to provoke. Without definitively existing a route without errors, we also see ourselves in a training course. As much or more destabilized than the students, we mediate curricular components and direct propositions guided by the desire to instigate autonomy: this that already operates so much in their niches and circles of friendship to which they already feel belonging.

The relationships established with academics show us an opportunity to operate the *affective rigor*, as Brazilian artist and researcher Mirna Spritzer (2019) would narrate: being firm, but also a welcoming space, testing ways of producing knowledge collectively, through the body and inspired by it, with all that can dwell therein.

### Fortaleza, June 05th, 2022 or September 27th, 2021

Fellipe, when you talk about Isabella and her nervousness when entering a classroom, I remember my first day as a professor in the Dance undergraduate courses. It was Monday morning and we were in remote mode. I enter the virtual room and people start arriving. Some turned on the camera, others didn't, but they always activated the microphone to say good morning. With this scenario, I noticed that many people who entered, because they already knew me, created a certain expectation.

The class was part of the curricular component 'Analysis of the Elements of Choreographic Composition', which emphasizes the study of choreography, its fundamentals and spatio-temporal structuring strategies. Since the creation of UFC Dance courses in 2011, this discipline had been taught only by Professor Paulo Caldas, with whom I even studied the component, when I was a student in 2013.2. But now, instead of teaching, I was the one who taught it.

Although I felt a certain nervousness, I activated a place of scenic quality that went through the state of presence, bringing to that moment of remote class a sensitive attention to my gestures, speeches and looks.

Still, I felt a lot of expectations placed on how I was going to teach. The class, which welcomed me very well, awaited every word I would say, knowing that they were the words of a former student of the courses returning as a professor. A background curtain insisted on staying: 'And now? What experiences did he keep with him and how is he going to articulate them now as a professor?'. Questions that were easily answered with a 'I don't know yet, let's find out with me?'. Instigating a possible state of presence in the classroom, I accessed this teaching choreography assuming its layers not yet discovered. So I was able to reflect that also for teaching

O tempo da criação [...] é a duração do desdobramento daquilo que está por vir. Criar não trata do que alguma coisa é no agora, ou mesmo sobre o que não é ainda, mas do processo de transformação em alguma coisa que não chegou ainda. (Bleeker, 2016, p.157).8

In this sense, composing reflections in the classroom also inhabits the place of uncertainty and of becoming. Knowledge, in this case, deviates from previous planning and it is formed by negotiation between the parts involved, by listening and making decisions at the time of the action, of the event.

### Fortaleza, June 05th, 2022 or December 13th, 2021

As I follow your writing, Thiago, I update my memories of the first classes I conducted in UFC Dance courses, still in that emergency remote format due to the isolation and suspension of some activities, foreseen during the Covid-19 pandemic.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The time of creation [...] is the duration of the unfolding of what is to come. Creating is not about what something is in the now, or even what it isn't yet, but about the process of transforming it into something that hasn't arrived yet. (Bleeker, 2016, p.157) *Our translation*.

On the occasion, I taught the first class of the discipline 'Dance – Technical Investigation: Perception', in the presence of students of the bachelor's and teaching degrees. Doubts crossed me and configured a state of alert. Some of them pushed me towards a question that I believe many professors followed during the most critical phases of the pandemic, such as: how will I be able to adapt my propositions to this two-dimensional model of teaching-learning relationship? How to access the other and cause an effect of presence from technological devices that, although advanced, do not replace (and do not intend to) human touch, the vibration of the voice and the atmosphere of physicality in the regime of face-to-face meetings?

From following your writing, Thiago, I remembered a concept that speaks directly to our paths. Much of what we have done, intuited and negotiated in our time as university professors has been, it seems to me, the exercise of a *dramaturgical craft* (Nolasco-Silva, 2019), a composition of worlds every time we enter the teaching space, in this case, the university classroom.

This notion by Nolasco-Silva (2019) presents part of what we experience in this teaching-learning pedagogical space. This is because it minimally presupposes the sensitive exchange between two people who coexist there. It is there that, in my view, the fabric of knowledge comes into being, at this point of contact, where the exchange is materialized and updated in the body of the subjects involved in that action: professor and student.

In a textile metaphor of dramaturgical craftsmanship imprinted by pedagogical performance, Nolasco-Silva also proposes a notion of the professor as someone who unravels yarns. In this sense, and I speak here for myself and Thiago, I believe that in our time as temporary professors, we were able to dance teaching choreographies in which we unveiled important lines of some student skeins.

Through our encounter with the students, through the specificities of each discipline/teaching plan, we follow the tracks of a teaching practice attracted by "pulling a small thread that apparently comes loose and weaving with it discursive movements

that are supposedly uncompromising with a final form" (Nolasco-Silva, 2019, p. 204).

Interested in reading the emerging issues brought up by the students, we move towards getting closer to their universes. Not exactly like calculated planning, but something more intuitive and triggered by the simple coexistence of perspectives put into play: professor and student. In this way, dramaturgical craftsmanship is designed as a set of devices used by us, not only in the period in which we are inside the classroom, but also in those beyond it, in the relational layers that flow in the corridors, buses, gazes, hugs and other symbolic spaces that teaching allows you to create.

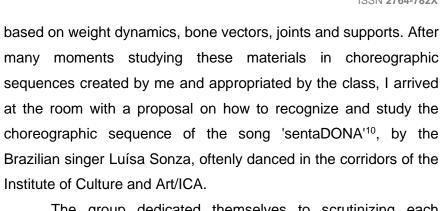
### Fortaleza, June 06th, 2022

Lately I have been thinking about how the students' training path in Dance is articulated with the propositions of a political pedagogical project and what comes out of this encounter. Fellipe and I have participated in some moments of the PPPs<sup>9</sup> update of the Dance courses, projects which are currently undergoing revisions and structural reformulations. In some of the discussions we talked about how the students' dance experiences and their socio-political contexts strained the teaching-learning proposals offered in undergraduate courses.

An example of this occurred in the disciplines 'Seminar 4: Stories of Dancing' and 'Dance – Technical Investigation: Basic Elements'. In Seminar, I proposed to the class a choreographic investigation starting from their own formative trajectory, more specifically a fact that occurred and very remarkable in life, so that from it and with it a narrative was proposed in the form of a danced conversation. In this investigation, the aim was to make their choice raise socio-political questions in order to make visible dances that do not appear in official books, but which, when told, articulate another notion of archive and memory.

In 'Dance – Technical Investigation: Basic Elements', in turn, some body recognition and perception procedures were addressed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Acronym used for Pedagogical Political Project.



The group dedicated themselves to scrutinizing each fragment of the choreography and together they listed and discovered its technical aspects of, for example, how to work on the support of the tibial bones (leg) when they performed a certain movement of falling to the ground, or what the intentions of each vector used, bringing an expanded thought about what can be understood as a dance technique, analyzing and criticizing its structure without ceasing to dance 'sentaDONA' in the corridors of the ICA, or to use judgments of taste between the dances.

In this movement, we seek not to reinforce hierarchies or discourses that would dictate that a danced conversation between Klauss Vianna<sup>11</sup> and Luísa Sonza. In this regard, it is reiterated that:

Precisamos criar acontecimentos. Fazer de nossas vidas em sala de aula acontecimentos. Isso só é possível experimentando-nos, colocando-nos em risco, em estado de atenção. Para tanto, nosso compromisso é diante da vida. Ele não se resume a apreender o conhecimento, em termos de ensino, centrando-se num certo cultivo do saber, como algo a ser transmitido, à mercê do que já foi pensado. Mais do que um saber constituído que objetiva uma realidade e a interpreta desde suas categorias, é preciso, além disso, viver a dança produzida pelo sujeito, em seu próprio ato de construir-se a si mesmo, viver a experiência de pensamento no próprio pensamento: um aprender como exercício de si sobre si mesmo, singular, mas nunca solitário, não mediado apenas por formas transmissíveis, porém, sobretudo, por uma espécie de convivência, por um estar junto. (Primo, 2015, p. 204). 12

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> SentaDONA (Remix) s2'# produced by Luísa Sonza, in partnership with Davi Kneip, DJ Gabriel do Borel and Mc Frog in 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Klauss Vianna (1928-1992): important and recognized dance artist in Brazil who systematized his technique with a sensitive approach to movement and expression, listing recognition procedures for another body anatomy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> We need to create events. Make our lives in the classroom events. This is only possible by experiencing ourselves, putting ourselves at risk, in a state of attention. Therefore, our commitment is to life. It is not limited to apprehending knowledge, in terms of teaching, focusing on a certain cultivation of knowledge, as something to be transmitted, at the mercy of what has already been thought. More than a constituted knowledge that objectifies a reality and interprets it from its categories, it is also necessary to live the dance produced by the subject, in his own act of building himself, to live the experience of thinking in his own thinking: learning as

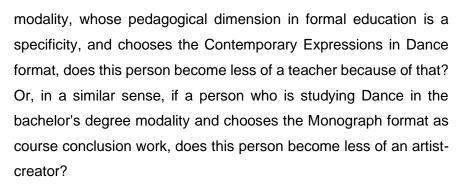
It is through these pedagogical strategies that Fellipe and I have been thinking about our journeys, every time we enter the classroom and in our conversations outside of it. Nowadays, unlike 2011 (first year of UFC dance undergraduate courses), the questions may be different, as well as demands for a different way of teaching. Observing this, we, as temporary professors, try to draw bridges of approximation with the generations of today, so that at the end of their undergraduate course, when they reach the 'Experimental Project Guidance' component (discipline prior to the course conclusion work) classes do not feel limited by thoughts like 'my dance is not welcome at the university' and 'I don't know what to do in the course conclusion work because I have no affinity with contemporary dance issues'.

### Fortaleza, June 08th, 2022

In the discipline 'Experimental Project Guidance', students from different semesters enroll in search of instrumentalizing resources and understanding basic elements for the construction of a research project. This component is configured not only as a continuous writing workshop, but also as a space for receiving doubts accumulated by academics in relation to their thematic affinities, fears and insecurities in the field of academic investigation.

The UFC dance courses foresee as possible formats of a course conclusion work the categories: Monograph (in which the textual dimension of the production is emphasized) and Contemporary Expressions in Dance (in which the dimension of scenic event and construction of a poetics are emphasized, independently of assumed support and aesthetics).

Faced with these two ways, some recurrent questions are brought up by the students. Some of them concern the following panorama: if a person who is studying Dance in the teaching degree



In front of these questions, the answer is no. However, in the course of the discipline, this attitude of self-sabotage is often still evident. So I come across students who are generally anxious and insecure about assuming more firmly one of the facets of their education, among the many that make up their dancing trajectory.

On the other hand, some reports allowed us to infer that, for the first time, some students were allowing themselves to recognize their dances as the engine of their course conclusion work's research: a panorama that, fortunately, seems to be establishing itself.

### Final choreographic scores

Taking the words together, we assumed a spoken *duo* at this moment. More than assuming answers or solutions, we set out to narrate in this essay a set of situations experienced in the classroom, as well as a series of reflections triggered by them. In this choreography of a temporary teaching, we do not shy away from employing an attitude of attentive work: flexible, yet incisive, sensitive, yet judicious.

In the same way that we seem to have left some seeds and provocations, we leave this moment with our own educational backgrounds crossed in levels that maybe we haven't even realized yet. In this choreography, no step is guaranteed, and the teaching process is not a room with predictable scripts. We remain attentive and porous to this making-teaching dance, which is constituted at each time and space experienced in and with the body.



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Anda associação nacional de pesquisadores em dança PPGDAN UFRJ REALIZAÇÃO **UFRJ**