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Livro de Dançar for Im- provising and Composing: expanded and connective (choreo)graphic dramaturgy - from book to action

*Livro de dançar, Improvisar e Compor: Dramaturgia
(coreo)gráfica expandida e conectiva*

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ABSTRACT

This article refers to the experience of Mulheres da Improvisação concerning the writing and different uses of the *Livro de Dançar: Cartas para Improvisar e Compor* (*Dancing Book: letters to improvise and compose*, 2022). Its writing was based on the connection between distinct investigative interests, and from this unfolds the multiplicity of its uses, emerging expanded and connective dramaturgies when the cards are tried (Araújo; Didonet, 2021; Vieira, 2021; Santana; Mascarenhas Et Al., 2021; Tourinho, 2021; De Laet, 2018). We discussed these developments of the *Livro de Dançar* on various occasions with predictable or unpredictable uses. Different formats of releases and classes in other cities and occasions triggered differences in how the book can be read and performed. We reflect on how new study interests, archives, corporealities, and technical and aesthetic repertoires are connected, through which the text becomes experience and dramaturgy expands spaces and times.

KEYWORDS: dance; improvisation; dance composition; expanded dramaturgy; connectivity.

RESUMO

Este artigo refere-se à experiência das Mulheres da Improvisação na escrita e diferentes usos do *Livro de Dançar: cartas para improvisar e compor* (2022). Sua escrita foi composta a partir da conexão entre interesses investigativos distintos, e disto se desdobra a multiplicidade de seus usos, surgindo dramaturgias expandidas (Araújo; Didonet, 2021; Vieira, 2021; Santana; Mascarenhas Et Al., 2021; Tourinho, 2021) e conectivas (De Laet, 2018) nos modos de experimentar as cartas. Discutimos estes desdobramentos do *Livro de Dançar* nas ocasiões em que foi acionado para os fins a que o elaboramos e outros imprevisíveis. Houve formatos distintos de lançamentos e aulas em variadas cidades e ocasiões, que deflagraram diferenças quanto à leitura/ação do livro. Refletimos sobre como são conectados novos interesses de estudo, arquivos, corporeidades, repertórios técnicos e estéticos, através dos quais o texto se torna experiência, e a dramaturgia expande espaçostempos (Araújo; Didonet, 2021).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: dança; improvisação; composição em dança; dramaturgia expandida; conectividade.

Livro de Dançar for Improvising and Composing: expanded and connective (choreo)graphic dramaturgy - from book to ac- tion

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Introduction

The book entitled *Livro de Dançar - Cartas para Improvisar e Compor* (lit. transl. *Dancing Book: cards to improvise and compose*, 2022) was written for students, researchers and producers of dance, drama, visual arts, cinema, circus etc., as well as for the general public. Its organization counts on 49 colourful cards (seven for each writer) and each of them presents different instructions or propositions for body-work, improvisation games, and proposals to improvise, compose and perform interventions in public spaces.

The book was peer-reviewed, approved by the publisher (*Editora Anda* – a Brazilian association for Dance researchers), and published in 2022. Since then, it has been launched in several academic and artistic events in different parts of Brazil, which opened for its wide distribution. In this manner, this situation favoured different ways of applying the book, considering that its use is also linked to the operational context.

We would like to highlight that the *Livro de Dançar* emerged as a joint creation of *Mulheres da Improvisação* (M.I.)⁶ (lit. transl.: Improvisation Women), a group of professors from Brazilian federal universities whose purpose is to build a space for reflections and practices of dance and art by engaging them with everyone's personal and professional realities⁷. When it started in March 2020, M.I. was teamed by Ana Carolina da Rocha Mundim (Universidade Federal do Ceará – UFC), Carolina Natal Duarte (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – UFRJ), Ivani Lúcia Oliveira de Santana (UFRJ), Lúcia Losada Tourinho (UFRJ), Líria de Araújo Moraes (Universidade Federal da Paraíba – UFPB), Roberta Ramos Marques

⁶ <<https://mulheresdaimprovis.wixsite.com/impromulheres>>. Accessed on: 19 Nov. 2023.

⁷ Considering that the group was formed during the Covid-19 pandemic, we invited the PhD candidate Tania Marin Perez (PPGAC/UFBA), supervised by Ivani Santana, to join M.I. It was a way to welcome her as she had just arrived from Uruguay when the pandemic crises started and was isolated in Salvador, Bahia.

(Universidade Federal de Pernambuco – UFPE) and Tânia Marin Perez (Universidade Federal da Bahia - UFBA). Since then, M.I. has produced and applied several working methodologies based on discussions and reflections of real artistic practices. There are three main axes that guide the M.I. processes: studies related to improvisation, feminisms and digital technologies.



Fig. 1. Images of several cards from *Livro de Dançar: cartas para improvisar e compor* (M.I.). Source: Personal archive. Image: Roberta Ramos Marques' personal archive.

More specifically, M.I. is a connection between artist-researchers who dedicate themselves to studies on perception, states of presence, interaction, and dance productions - especially if developed in real time - in different contexts and spaces with different characteristics. M.I.'s working processes are linked to several fields of knowledge and artistic practices beyond dance, such as music, philosophy, performance, art media, drama, and so on. From its beginning in 2020, several performative actions have been taking place in academic and artistic events. Such events are all part of this reflection that joins theory with practice.

In the next topic we discuss how *Livro de Dançar* was conceived through writing exercises proposed by each author of the

book from their individual practical research focuses. The book suggests (in the wake of other dance projects) to destabilize the book *Graphocentrism* (Marques, 2021) as well as its possible uses. Therefore, the question arises: how is the relationship between choreographing and writing dance? What is actually dance writing? Are there different ways to write dance?

Bearing these questions in mind, the book was written by the author's connections with investigative interests. In the multiplicity of its uses, therefore, we can perceive the emergence of expanded dramaturgies (Araújo; Didonet, 2021; Vieira, 2021; Santana; Mascarenhas et. al., 2021; Tourinho, 2021) and connective dramaturgies (De Laet, 2018) among as many subjectivities as possible to experience with the cards.

Thus, in this article we discuss the consequences of *Livro de Dançar* both in situations used for our initial purpose and in situations that we did not predict. We exemplify them through the book launches and other occasions where the book was used. Depending on the context, *Livro de Dançar* could represent several perspectives, such as a meeting of people experimenting with behaviours outside their daily habits, dance artists investigating improvisation actions a little deeper, and children enchanted by the colours and plasticity of words and possibilities of action.

There were different formats of launches and classes in different cities and occasions which triggered different reading/actions of the book. In such developments, we reflected on how new study interests, archives, corporeality, technical, and aesthetic repertoires are connected. It is when the text becomes experience and dramaturgy expands the space-time of its event (Araújo; Didonet, 2021, p. 37) in a way that expanded and connective dramaturgies are woven, triggering the very action of improvising, in a playful game, atmosphere among readers/players. So, these *cards to improvise and compose* may also be thought as a choreographic device.

We also expose how the work process among M.I. members happened to create these cards, which are dance writing. *Livro de Dançar* is a (chore)graphic writing because it is a result of dance and improvisation practices proposed in this connection of

female researchers and because its writing result is dance movement, creation, improvisation, and composition. In this perspective, the book destabilizes the grounded and understood notion of what a book is according to Graphocentrism. In a similar view, there are also other projects as, for example, the Biblioteca da Dança⁸ (lit. transl.: Dance Library) that expands the idea of what a book can be. Moreover, by granting this prerogative to the performers who compose its choreographic installations, it expands the purposes and uses of the library space (Marques, 2021).

The working context established by M.I. It was through weekly remote meetings mainly held during the global Covid-19 Pandemic. At a certain point, we realized that the group investigations and practical research involving the three axes –improvisation, feminism and digital space – reached a considerable material and a repertoire of experiences. They were recorded in videos, graphics, logbooks, keywords related to each proposition and meeting, cards exchanged amongst us, and in memories recorded on the body.

In this scenario, the members proposed to focus on the creation of *Livro de Dançar* by comprehending both individual and collective investigations. In other words, they gathered each member's method of working as well as the diversity that such connection embraces, precisely in this intersection of women who contribute with their powerful creative, gestural and cognitive individualities.

In this sense, we launched the purpose and challenge of creating the book of propositional cards based on our research and practical experiences. The researcher Roberta Ramos took the initiative and provoked us for an improvisation-composition game with very well-defined coordinates. To this end, using the title of the book and stating how it is reflected in our actions and research, the image that permeated the construction of the book propositions was governed by the mode of interaction that is established among those who write and those who read the card.

⁸ Founded by Jorge Alencar e Neto Machado, the *Biblioteca de Dança* is a choreographic installation where artists occupy the library and transform their bodies into dancing books (<<https://www.jorgealencar.com.br/copy-of-astroneto>>. Accessed on 19 Nov 2023).

The way in which Roberta Ramos thought of these propositions for the other members of the group was by observing the material from our own proposition archive (organized through log-books, keywords, graphics, videos, and photographs) in order to enhance and instigate the specificities, subjectivities and abilities of each research object.

Based on exercises that restricted the number of words in order to destabilize linguistic habits (sometimes 9, sometimes 12, 30, or 45 words, including articles, prepositions, pronouns, numbers, etc.), the exercises requested each woman to activate this archive of propositions. The instructions for writing required strategies such as meditating on a word cloud automatically generated from the list of keywords recorded daily and mentioning the specific elements that were part of the practices conducted by each researcher for fully individualized writing proposals. Here is an example of each researcher/artist/author's work in this kind of exercise:

Líria: Write a proposition about walking in a **specific way** (it could be related to the look, speed, it may be in a specific or even unusual space, with specific clothes, and so on) indicating that it establishes **connection** with imitation or opposition of things, means of transport or people in just **25 words** (including articles, prepositions, pronouns, numbers, etc.). [...]

Lígia: Write a proposition for a **moving and documenting laboratory** that **intertwines actions of speaking, dancing and writing** (of course, not necessarily at the same time, but you can if you want it) in just **25 words** (including articles, prepositions, pronouns, numbers, etc.). [...]

Carolina: Write a proposition of **interactive performance** in a **virtual environment** (you can mention the use of a platform if you want) involving ideas that are relevant for you (ritual? presence? narrative?...) in just **25 words** (including articles, prepositions, pronouns, numbers, etc.). [...]

Roberta: Write a proposition of **improvisation** involving different relations with the **archive** and **composition** in real time in just **25 words**.

Ivani: Write a proposition of movement that includes **objects for personal use** in an **action of repetition** and an **action of undoing** the previous action in a digital format and in just **25 words** (including articles, prepositions, pronouns, numbers, etc.). [...]⁹

⁹ Registrations from the writers' personal files translated into English.

In these statements extended to all authors, the strategy aimed to instruct the card writing with different purposes: body preparation; movement based on improvisation; intervention in a public space; connection between movement and image and/or digital environment, etc. In this way, the set of seven cards from each of the seven women presents peculiarities: on the one hand it is related to the resumption of practices guided by each researcher and the singularity of understanding and translating the proposition into writing; on the other hand, it establishes a connection among the researchers themselves. Therefore, all sets are connected by these common purposes and by a connective memory among the writers that started with the practices experienced in each meeting and ended up in the process that now transforms praxis into (choreo)graphic writing.

Cards on varied grounds: disclosing, dancing and playing with *Livro de Dançar*

In Fortaleza, the state capital of Ceará, the book was launched during the *V Seminário Internacional das Artes e seus Territórios Sensíveis / II Seminário TEPE: Encontro Internacional de Performances Expandidas* (lit. transl.: V International Seminar on Arts and their Sensitive Territories / II TEPE Seminar: International Meeting of Expanded Performances) on 19th of May 2022 at the Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC). The *Temporal* research group, led by professor Ana Mundim (one of the authors of *Livro de Dançar*), invited the seminar participants to the book launch which worked as a kind of a game. While some of them watched, the others experimented propositions. In the first part of the event, the authors Ana Mundim and Líria Morays explained the idea of the book and how it was developed. By this time, all cards were displayed and organized by colours in a circle. The participants approached to get acquainted with them and their possibilities. After some time, the participants were organized in seven groups –according to the amount of colours available and their different propositions and ignitions to compose. Then, each group chose two or three cards within their respective colour to read.

After experimenting these two or three cards in a collective way, we suggested that the groups could compose something to share among all of us. Besides the seven groups, there were people watching the process of experimentation without experimenting it, which was amusing, since everything happened within the same space, at the same time with everyone acting together –each with their own group. After some time for preparation, one by one the groups presented their final compositions. One of them was performed outside the dance space (on the street in front of it) and the others in the dance school, where the event took place.

The audience was diverse; there were art researchers, dancers, the university dance students, and also people interested in the book. However, considering that the event was held at a dance space, most participants who experimented this dynamic had some sort of relation with movement and choreographic composition after receiving some information from *Livro de Dançar*.

In Recife, the state capital of Pernambuco, the book was launched on 9th and 10th of September 2022. The former took place at the *Centro de Artes e Comunicação - CAC / Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE)* and the latter at the *Eufrásio Barbosa Market*, in the historical town of Olinda, as part of the *Jam no Eufrásio* Project carried out by the *Coletivo Lugar Comun* (lit. transl.: Common Place Group). Both events counted on the presence of the book writers Líria Morays and Roberta Ramos.

The launches were organized in particular ways, each with different activities that indicated different possibilities for experiencing *Livro de Dançar*. The first, which was held at the university, was entitled “Four cards up in your sleeve”. The purpose was to enhance different relations with the book by bringing four different people and proposals to use, improvise and compose with this book/game/tool, all based on bodily experiences, areas of knowledge and activity, and different perspectives.

A dance student from UFPE, Nadja Reis, linked her proposal for the card exercise with the topic she had been researching at that time. She focused on black dance productions, its urgencies, subjectivities, and decolonial epistemologies as a motto for creation and resistance. In this perspective, her suggestion of composition

was to explore subjectivities, memories and the history of herself from the cards of *Livro de Dançar*.

The artist, researcher, performer and musician Conrado Falbo, from *Coletivo Lugar Comum* (Recife-PE), built his provocation to use *Livro de Dançar* through the following question: “how to create dances through sounds and lines?”. By exploring the action stages presented in the cards as well his listening, imagination, visualization and realization, he proposed to improvise with all the senses, exploring all possible manifestations of dance.

Based on the investigations proposed by *Livro de Dançar*, the substitute Dance lecturer at UFPE Jefferson Figueirêdo and the student Kailah Rebeca put forward a game of experimentation and expansion of each participant's movement repertoires based on their dance modality/style. Thus, each player investigated “the possibilities of movement within the context of their technical-creative experience in dance based on the cards and propositions of *Livro de Dançar*, establishing a relationship among space, bodies in action, and their dance memories and trajectories.”¹⁰.

Finally, the last proposition in this occasion came from the *coletiva/labEshu* (human sexuality laboratory/PPGPSi/UFPE), composed of Karla Galvão, Amanda França and Karolina Pereira. They proposed an approach to Psychology: the experience used participatory methods, theatrical games and art therapy in a countercolonial and feminist perspective.



¹⁰ This excerpt was translated from the summary sent by the proposers for their experience with *Livro de Dançar* at the UFPE launch.

Fig. 2. Parts of the participants' bodies observing one of the cards at the launch of *Livro de Dançar: cartas para improvisar e compor*, in the Dance Programme at the UFPE. Photograph: Roberta Ramos Marques' personal archive.

The other launch that took place in Recife (10th of September 2022) was a partnership with the *Jam no Eufrásio Project* (from September to December 2022) of *Coletivo Lugar Comum*. There, M.I. members Líria Morays and Roberta Ramos offered a workshop for the *cards to improvise and compose* to be used in a circle similarly to the exercise carried out in Fortaleza. The difference was that this time the dynamics was supposed to be a link with the partner project. The set of cards, then, worked as a trigger to this day's *jam session*.

In Rio de Janeiro, the book was launched at the *Conferência Internacional 22 + 100 Laban e o Projeto Modernista* (lit. transl.: 22 + 100 International Conference Laban and the Modernist Project) at Casa França-Brasil, from 22nd to 25th of June 2022. In this occasion, there was no exercise proposition to use the book. The M.I. members who attended this event were Carolina Natal, Ivani Santana, Lígia Tourinho and Roberta Ramos.

A different experience took place at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) a year later (June 2023): professor Ivani Santana's proposed a specific workshop for her graduate and postgraduate supervisees. She introduced *Livro de Dançar* to them and resumed our writing strategies, described in the previous topic. This time, however, the students had to be based on their own research themes in order to stimulate summarized discussions on their research objects and the aspects they had been investigating through writing performative propositions experienced at the university. At the end, new cards were produced.

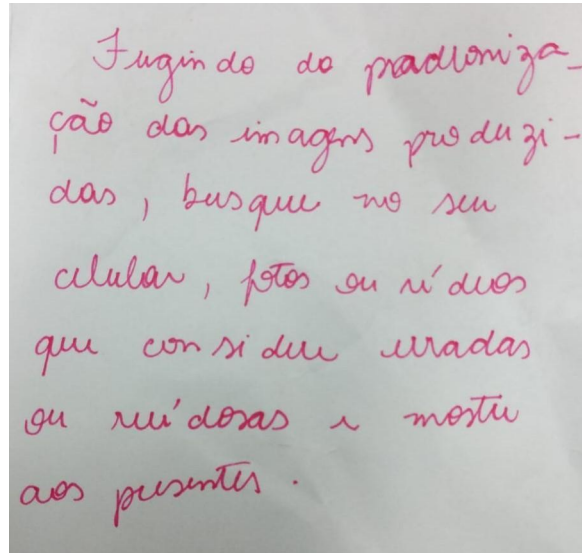


Fig. 3. Image of one of the exercises produced by the MA candidate Camila Florentino Soares in the workshop attended by Ivani Santana's supervisees at the UFRJ. The student investigated relations between image and error. Photograph: Roberta Ramos Marques' personal archive.

This experience called our attention to the book's potential to open for its continuity of proposals created by its own "readers", "performers" or "players". Moreover, it is possible to resume its initial exercise of construction to trigger new perceptions related to dance research, as it was revealed by the participants in the workshop's final conversation, when they were asked if these activities disclosed new ideas or findings for their investigations.

At the UFRJ there has been other experiences with *Livro de Dançar* used in the graduate courses *Dramaturgias do Corpo e Dança e Teatro* (lit. transl.: Dramaturgies of the Body and Dance) and *Fundamentos da Expressão e Comunicação Cênica I e II* (lit. transl.: Fundamentals of Expression and Drama Communication I and II) for the Theatre Direction course taught by Lígia Tourinho. The card game was often linked to the course programmes with the purpose of triggering scene productions. She also experimented *Livro de Dançar* to the Laban/Bartenieff system in her classes for the postgraduate programme at Faculdade Angel Vianna (FAV).

Livro de Dançar was also launched in June 2023 at the *Congresso da Associação Brasileira de Pesquisa e Pós-graduação em Artes Cênicas* (Abrace – lit. transl.: XXII Congress of the Brazilian Association of Research and Postgraduate Studies in Performing Arts) in Belem, the state capital of Pará, at the Universidade

Federal do Pará (UFPA). There, the last print books were sold. In September 2023 we printed the books again with the support of the Postgraduate Programme in Dance (PPGDan/UFRJ) which was launched at the *VII Congresso Anda*, at the Instituto Federal de Brasília (IFB)

Because of its potential for playing in a more continuous development, *Livro de Dançar* was one of the references of dance games for the community project *Jogos, Performance e Diversidade* (lit. transl.: Games, Performance and Diversity) offered by UFPE and coordinated by the M.I. member Roberta Ramos. The book cards were used as themes to create games, based on the connection with game design methodologies. This project involves bodily references –dances, games, performances—that promote game-play based on a counter-colonial and anti-capacity perspective in order to affirm and strengthen diversity. On a two-day study group experimentation of performance and dance references, the students picked specific cards from *Livro de Dançar* to think about game mechanics such as *space, objects, attributes, states, actions, and rules* (Schell, 2011). Based on the card they picked, they firstly had to take up collective spaces at the study centre where the project took place, and, in a second moment, in the practice room where the weekly meetings were held. The group interacted with the chosen material, gradually making its use more complex by adding more rules, objectives, among other game-related components (Schell, 2011).

Another branch of this project, which aimed at individuals from and outside the university community, proposed a *Game jam* at the UFPE's Colégio de Aplicação¹¹. The school students had to explore different possibilities for *Livro de Dançar* to compose a game. By that, it was possible to observe the complex game mechanics of its use related to these students' specific repertoire.

Finally, *Livro de Dançar* has been experimented with in the UFPE Dance Course, such as in *Dramaturgia e Apreciação Crítica em Dança* (lit. transl.: Dramaturgy and Critical Appreciation

¹¹ T.N.: A federal primary and secondary-level school within the campus of a Brazilian federal university.

in Dance), which in 2023 was used as one of the devices to build evaluative improvisation activities and composition in real time. The purpose is that students activate and experience the notion of expanded dramaturgy in practice, as we discuss in the following topic.

From book to action: final regards in expanded and connective dramaturgies

The introduction of the book for different groups of people, whether among individuals that belong to the dance field as improvisers or among drama or art students in general, triggers unpredictability about how the dynamics happen. It is clear that it depends on the reverberation that the cards generate among those around them. The cards can become a set of compositional ignitions that suggest experimental behaviours when carrying out the actions proposed by them. In other words, reading a suggestion generates numerous possibilities of performing it, and the action itself generates a specific behaviour.

The card proposals, at first glance, also seem to induce euphoria in the users' prior imagination before carrying out the actions. That is, the simple fact of reading the cards is already interactive in the imaginary of how the group is going to accomplish the proposal. If, for example, one of the propositions needs to be performed elsewhere and they have to imagine a certain type of behaviour, we can see reactions such as "what if I did it that way in that place, what would happen?". Therefore, we can see a set of ideas that allows the cards to be read, even when their actions are not carried out.

The suggestion of actions, which came from the writers' experience in acts of improvisation and writing the cards, is unfolded and carried out within another context that materializes with different reactions and layers. The feeling of "playing and having fun" is triggered among the individuals who experience such actions in a way that they allow themselves to be in different states during the process. This extroverted state can result in just a different performance or even to the construction of unfolding scenes of the process.

If there is an organization of ideas and actions for the book interactivity, we can think of possible dramaturgical developments and even a way of thinking about this displacement of a written proposition towards a composition of actions that take place in its performance. In turn, such actions can be organized into distinct scenes or performances. This helps us observe that there are several other possibilities that the book can trigger in dramaturgy.

The launches in different formats and the application of the book in classroom in different parts of Brazil state that the cards—due to their colours and sentence formats—spell out proposals for actions which also suggest a possible choreographic arrangement based on improvisation. The seven colours of the cards also mark sets of propositions from each of the 7 women. Together, they compose, as a *book*, a dramaturgical set (still as writing) that goes back to the connective memory (De Laet, 2018) of the repertoire of practices that we shared and experienced in our connection of research based on improvisation. Furthermore, the book promotes this encounter between the memory of this connection of practices and the performative memory of readers/users/players.

An intriguing example took place in September 2023, in the course of *Dramaturgia e Apreciação Crítica em Dança* (lit. transl.: Dramaturgy and Critical Appreciation in Dance) at the UFPE Dance Course. In the evaluative activity, students were supposed to prepare their actions by using improvisation devices or games in a city square close to the university campus. One of the groups chose some cards of *Livro de Dançar* related to archive and social media. From them, the students triggered repertoire from their childhood memories related to games and plays. As a theme for the activity, they presented something that seemed to be a common interest of the group: the overlapping relationship between the virtual world and social media to the analogue world of street games. The space of this action next to a playground where many children were playing was also related to the activity. In this space, their connective memories with the *book* proposition lead to an expanded dramaturgy as it was opened to the interaction of those who were occupying that space. This way, they connected the memories of the practices—which generated the cards in their written forms—with

the performers' memory who used these cards and the reality and repertoire of the individuals who were also there.

Another example we can mention is with the class of *Técnicas de Improvisação* (lit. transl.: Improvisation Techniques) in 2022 in the Dance Teaching Undergraduate Course at UFPB. The students received the cards and remained in a state of improvisation saying the words on the cards out loud: they created a scene which mixed action and ways of enunciating the cards. To present it, they created some sort of script open to improvisation, using both the actions that the cards suggest as well as their own written structure as an utterance. The way these written sentences are used in the presentation is a different way of playing, with players facing intonations, or possible reverberations of these commands during the presentation. They created a dramaturgy of the scene based on the script, which takes place on another layer, other than just the card game itself.

If there is a variety of ways to respond to the card propositions, each experience will be unique and singular since responding with actions means choosing the "tone" of the action. Each individual can find ways of possible relationships to generate connectivity (Morais, 2010) between what they read and what they act. There is an ongoing creation process in the act of playing that depends on how each person understands and apprehends actions.

In its performative variety of crossing cities and occasions, *Livro de Dançar* presents differences in the performativity of its reading/action. It connects new and diverse interest of study, archives, corporeality, and technical and aesthetic repertoires, from which the text becomes experience and dramaturgy expands the space-time of its event (Araújo; Didonet, 2021, p. 37), in a way that expanded and connective dramaturgies are woven, triggering the very action of improvising, in a playful game, atmosphere among readers/players.

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