

revista
brasileira
de estudos
em dança

Geolocating the Artist

***Cardinal Points of a Dance Research Guided
by Autobiographical Artistic Practice in
Performing Arts***

Davidson José Martins Xavier

XAVIER, Davidson José Martins. Geolocating the Artist: Cardinal Points of a Dance Research Guided by Autobiographical Artistic Practice in Performing Arts. **Revista Brasileira de Estudos em Dança**, 03(05), p. 155-182, 2024.1.

RESUMO

Apresento, por meio deste artigo, o processo criativo de uma cena, expressa por experimentações práticas realizadas durante a disciplina “Corpo, práticas feministas e dramaturgias de testemunhos”. A partir de elementos testemunhais e documentais, concentro-me na criação cênica em dança para narrar experiências autoficcionalis. Nessa pesquisa guiada pela prática artística, temas norteadores são explorados para criar dramaturgias, coreografias e ações performáticas. Destaca-se, para isso, a importância dos elementos do espaço biográfico: documentos obtidos no processo, históricos pessoais, memoriais, imagens e sons, sendo valiosos pontos de partida para a criação cênica geolocalizada em dança.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Autoficção; Processo criativo; Espaço biográfico; Escrita de Si

ABSTRACT

In this article, I present the creative process of a scene, expressed through practical experiments carried out during the discipline "Body, feminist practices and testimonial dramaturgies". Using testimonial and documentary elements, focusing on scenic creation in dance to narrate autofictional experiences. In this research guided by artistic practice, guiding themes are explored to create dramaturgies, choreographies and performance actions. For this reason, the importance of the elements of the biographical space stands out: documents obtained in the process, personal histories, memoriais, images and children, being important starting points for the geolocated scenic creation in dance.

KEYWORDS Autofiction; Creative process; Biographical space; Self Writing

Geolocating the Artist: Cardinal Points of a Dance Research Guided by Autobiographical Artistic Practice in Performing Arts

Davidson José Martins Xavier (UERJ)¹

¹ He is a Dance and Theater artist, artist-educator, and movement instructor. DRT: 28.220. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Arts/Theater from the State University of Montes Claros (UNIMONTES) in 2004, holds a postgraduate degree in Psychopedagogy (2013), and an MBA in Art History (2018). He earned his Master's in Performing Arts from PPGAC/UFG. He is a member of the research group *Mito, Rito e Cartografias Feministas nas Artes* (MOTIM/PPGARTES/UERJ/CNPq) and the *Laboratório de Pesquisa Interdisciplinar em Artes da Cena* (LAPIAC/FEFD/UFG/CNPq)

Introduction

This text presents the ongoing investigative process of my PhD research titled *I'm in Love with My Belly Button: Dance Practices Guided by Autobiographical Devices*². I will reflect on the experiences that took place in 2023 during the discipline *Body, Feminist Practices, and Testimonial Dramaturgies*, led by Professors PhD. Lígia Losada Tourinho and PhD. Vanessa Macedo, from the Graduate Program in Dance at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (PPGDan/UFRJ).

In considering this process, I am guided by the framework of practice-as-research (Fernandes, 2013; Haseman, 2006; Scialom, 2016), as the discipline led us to think of testimony and document as scene creators, where the understanding of the self and the other becomes a place for dialogue with the world.

Gradually, the autobiographical became an essential domain that evoked a plurivocal space, contributing to the ongoing research that views these narrative elements as possibilities for giving voice to insurgent bodies. This practice, here named autobiographical artistic practice in the Performing Arts, proved to be fertile ground for exposing fragilities³ - but not just that. Collectively, it was observed that these vulnerabilities find communal places⁴, intertwining with the social and political.

² Supervised by Professor Dr. Luciana Lyra, integrated into the research line *Art, Thought, and Performativity* of the Graduate Program in Arts (PPGARTES) at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Also supported by the research group *MOTIM – Mito, Rito e Cartografias Feministas nas Artes*, where I investigate, through research guided by artistic practice, how autobiography contributes to dance practice, analyzing its impact on the autofictional scene and the representation of racialized bodies.

³ In this text, fragility highlights the intrinsic condition of something or someone being easily breakable, while vulnerability encompasses susceptibility to external damage, regardless of intrinsic fragility. Therefore, I opt for the term fragility, which directs attention to the lack of resistance, solidity, or robustness of the artist, focusing on it as an inherent and necessary quality in the face of autobiographical processes. Unlike vulnerability, which can involve choices, understanding oneself as fragile emphasizes the importance of collaboration in collective spaces, where the experience depends on the involvement of all artists.

⁴ According to Federici (2019), the notion of communal relates to common lands where there is no capitalist division of resources. I use this term thinking that autobiographical artistic practice, when done collectively, opens up spaces for the production of "common subjects." Federici adds that, "In fact, if the idea of 'commoning' has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject. This is how we should understand the slogan 'there are no commons without community'; but not a community understood as a closed reality, a group of people brought together by exclusive interests that separate them from others, like a community formed based on a religion or ethnicity; we are talking about a community as a quality of relationships, a principle of cooperation and responsibility: to each other, to the land, the forests, the seas, the animals" (Federici, 2019, p. 317-318).

The guiding devices (objects, stories, diaries, photos, exhibitions, and testimonies) were sources of inspiration and stimulation throughout the discipline, through which the participants began various performative productions that became expressions of autobiographical spaces, both testimonial and self-representational. This occurred through the intersection of artistic practice, driven by debates, scenic feedback, and artistic experiences.

These performative works, rooted on the sense of otherness of their creators, go beyond ethnographic studies, bringing the research closer and more intimate. In this way, testimonial narratives provided ways to perceive and rewrite life stories, establishing other modes of existence and resulting in new forms of self-representation. Simultaneously, we realized that the exposure of situations of embarrassment and narratives of pain by the involved participants are re-signified in a moment of reterritorialization, where the participating artist understands themselves as a complete subject (Kilomba, 2008).

This geolocation became apparent to me during the presentations and dialogues, making evident the emergence of other boundaries beyond the personal/political. Thus, upon reexamining the material I have carried since my master's degree, territorialized in northern State of Minas Gerais, I encountered the figure of the *geraizeiro*⁵, which provided me with a better understanding of the region's historical documents. By confronting them with personal texts, it allowed me a critical geolocation. This identification arises not only from my origin but also from the characteristic traits of the *sertão* culture, which I carry with me and which enable a attuned listening situated in the northern *sertão* of Minas Gerais, regardless of the practical path that the artistic research leads me on.

Another layer of meaning then emerges—a subtle boundary that manifests in this type of practice and reveals itself

⁵ The Geraizeiros are a traditional people from the north of Minas Gerais, considered a sociocultural subgroup within the context of the *sertanejos*. This designation categorizes a community that, throughout history, has settled near the São Francisco River, in the north of Minas Gerais. This term encompasses various subgroups of traditional peoples, whose connection to the land represents a way of existing and subsisting.

in the scene *Umbigo de Sonho*. *Geolocating oneself* here is shown by the contours between the therapeutic and dramaturgical aspects of autobiographical work. In this context, the testimonial scene assumes the function of purging elements that the artist has not verbalized, which, by territorializing, configures itself as a space to consolidate a (another) truth, present or not in historical documents.

The process of avenging the past makes autobiographical scenic research a place *to avenge* other futures, where the scene can be interpreted as a robust space in development. That is, the duality of the word does not only seek a kind of past justice or reparation but, by confronting and working through these past experiences in the artistic scene, the potential arises to create a science fiction that develops new paths, other alternative futures.

These experiences are lived up to this point, where lives can narrate and circulate freely. However, I emphasize here the echoes present during these experiences, where group and individual questioning, proposals for ruptures and unrest, testimonial and autobiographical practices materialized in the performing arts. In this way, the power of autobiographical research in the Performing Arts became evident, making the act of self-narration an exercise in otherness, emphasizing the ethical responsibility we have towards the other.



Figure 1: Work materials for the testimonial scene *Umbigo de Sonho*.
Source: personal archive.

The Memory's Hidden Side: Autobiographical Practice as Scenic Research

I have tried, on other occasions, to put into words what was experienced, felt, and relived (remembered) after taking the course. However, organizing what was experienced is like trying to capture dust particles in a whirlwind. There were so many crossings and moments of surrender that reorganizing the self and understanding the other(s) in this process of documentary and testimonial construction that still reverberates within me. Therefore, I already state that this text does not aim to catalog and organize what was lived because what was lived is still living within me.

The established understanding of the autobiographical tradition is seen as a process in which the first person assumes the enunciation in the search for their inner truth. Even while seeking this truth, this practice aims to avoid canonical autobiographies, which Arfuch calls "ego-histories" (Arfuch, 2010, p. 51). This type of narrative tends to be self-referential and may emphasize the uniqueness of the individual at the expense of reciprocal interactions and influences with the collective and the

social context. Autobiographies, therefore, often demarcate an individualized space or tell self-referential stories, detached from the political context.

The act of narrating one's own story through documents found during the process, such as personal stories told collectively, memorials, writings on paper, or the recollection of images and sounds, takes on political nuances when the insurgent subjectivities of this process take the stage. The insurgent figures challenge the figure of the universal man and any attempt to impose a universalizing subject, associated with the rights of the family, the church, and the consumer industry. These figures present in the participants' research, to varying degrees, exposed feelings, desires, physical and psychic functions that subvert the hegemonic order of the world.

This aspect was provocatively emphasized during the course meetings when the reflection turned to creation processes grounded in autobiographical elements.

During the classes, a space of diverse perspectives was created that enriched the production. Open communication was established through feedback that brought forth different understandings of the scenes and subsequent reflections on memories, reorganizing what was kept and how it was put into practice. From time to time, these questions surrounded the process: What are we holding onto so dearly? Why do we believe that these facts, which expose the artist's fragility, should not be revealed? How can we reveal them without this action being a *re-experiencing* of pain? What is the importance of what I keep for myself and for others?

I emphasize here the authenticity of the autobiographical artistic practices in the Performing Arts by openly confronting the struggles and fragilities of a Black and gay body acting against social/racial erasure. I understand that, from the moment the artist faces the vulnerability of the biographical space, it is possible, in part, to answer the questions mentioned earlier, creating a scene in which the enunciation reflects the (re)encounter of the subject with an ancestral space.

For this feedback loop to occur in this type of practice, the instructors presented, in the classroom, a process composed of three stages: **1. Collection**; **2. Organization**; and, **3. Selection**. In this proposition, it is necessary, first, to **collect** accounts from the biographical space (Arfuch, 2010); that is, the artist must observe biographies, memories, testimonies, life stories, intimate diaries, correspondence, notebooks, drafts, childhood memories, autofictions, films, conversations, portraits, social media profiles, and confessions, both personal and of others, to formulate this collectible space. After having this vast collection of possibilities laid out, there is the field of **organization**, whether by grouping by canonical autobiographical spaces (biographies, notebooks, or photos) or contemporary autobiographical spaces (conversations, profiles, interviews, and confessions), by themes/traumas, time period (childhood, adolescence, and adulthood), or stories (their own or those of others).

After this organization, the material is selected, as in a process guided by the imagination, one constellated image (Durand, 2004 as cited in Gerencer, 2016) connects to another. I understood that, to avoid the scenic work becoming a tangled mess, it is necessary to choose an element, an action, or an act. This element will be the starting point around which the autobiographical scene can gravitate.

I observed similarities in this process of autobiographical practice, as scenic research, with the Creative Articulations Process (CAP) developed by Midgelow and Bacon (2015). I briefly outline the concept of the methodology here so that the reader can orient themselves through the paths taken by this research of autobiographical practice. CAP contains six phases, or rather, facets – *Open*, *Locate*, *Excavate*, *Elevate*, *Anatomize*, and *Externalize* – and each facet contains instructions to highlight lived experience and embodiment as the place from which a revelation and articulation of creative practice can emerge (Bacon; Midgelow, 2015). This process aims to be a reflective practice and a way to verbalize an artistic practice.

Thus, I note that autobiographical practice as scenic research expands beyond memory. It is guided by material

records, focusing on physical materials that, beyond the act of remembering, seek other clues from history.

In autobiography, one can think of this hidden side as a possibility for transformation or (r)evolution proposed by these testimonial narratives. What initially seemed to be just a simple collection began to take on organizational characteristics as the documents were perceived by me, not as records of a static past but as a past that demands attention in the present, provoking transformations in myself and others.

During this process of revisiting the documents, I found myself immersed in the fabulation of a photograph that was not new to me, as I had already used this image in previous autobiographical processes. However, once again, I found myself contemplating its tear, to which I became attached, focusing on its emblem and what it signified:



Figure 2: Childhood photo of the author. Source: personal archive.

The photo is torn, dividing our bodies in two. Like a magician performing a trick, I might have thought I could fix it later, but no. The tear remained. I tore it in a fit of anger when an uncle asked me if she was my girlfriend. I took the photo in a fury and immediately erased the evidence of a relationship. Today, I wonder if that was my first act of rainbow reclamation. Today, I run my hand over the tear in the photo and say no. (...) Today, I want to believe that this tear was a genuinely childish moment, but it was also the height of childish foolishness, where I

exposed who I really am (Xavier, 2023 as cited in Rodrigues, 2023, p. 65-66).

Using the tear as a constellated image, I cut out my image from the photo and asked my classmates to fill it in, paste, or attach their childhood photos, either with their own images or images related to childhood. I distributed the photo without my figure so that this other void could gravitate among other stories, allowing for more dramaturgical layers in the process.

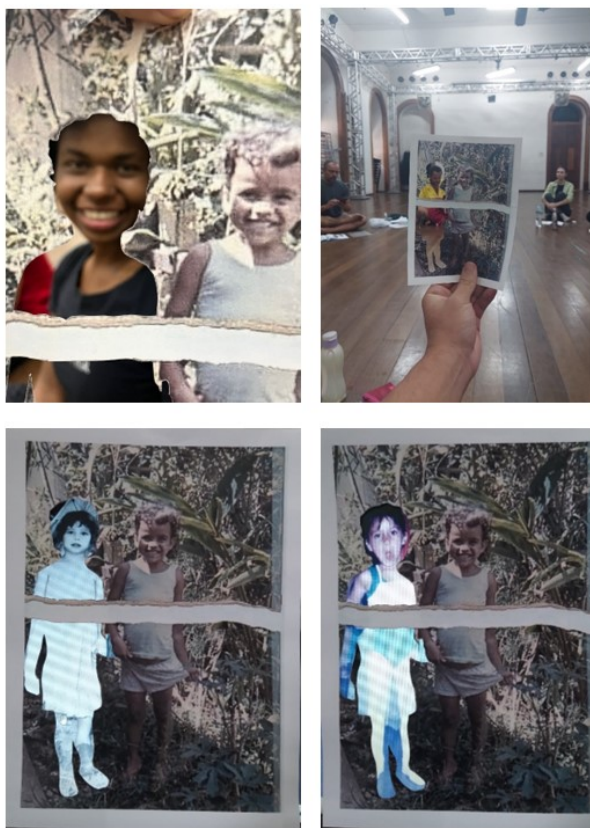


Figure 3: Childhood photos overlapped and cut out, used during the class.
Source: personal archive.

Sérgio Blanco (2023) states that autobiographical practice is a personal experience that always starts from the self, from an idealization of oneself, but always moves toward another. In the ambiguity of the autofictional process, a selection emerged. My hand holding my cousin's hand in the photo connected me to other memories: the death of my grandmother and how this tragic event ended a certain fantasy that her house held; the significant presence

of my aunt Aparecida during my childhood and the power to imagine worlds that I gradually left behind. Holding hands, I could perceive a return to the act of loosely imagining, fictionalizing, blending, recalling the impossible.

In one of our meetings, as a way of selection, I mapped out my paternal grandmother's house in the district of Simão Campos, Minas Gerais. And after the embryonic scene unfolded, there was a suggestion to immerse the scene in sensory experiences: the smell of freshly brewed coffee, the scent of wet earth, what is seen and what is unseen. This inventory of suggestions offered as feedback at the end of each student presentation led me to reflect that scenic self-testimony becomes a space for the unsaid.

In this way, the scene expands into other modes of experience when testimonial dance focuses on small fragments of existence, creating sensory images that, in turn, play with what is present and what is no longer here.

After this selection, the need arose to organize, thus giving rise to an embryo of the dramaturgy of *Umbigo de sonho*

I chose to start this work running with this rustling sound because it reminds me of three things: first, cicadas singing in September; second, hens clucking with the egg in their belly; third, because the sound reminds me of an ox cart. I chose to run because when I heard the ox cart far away, I would run out to see (Xavier, Excerpt from process document, 2023).

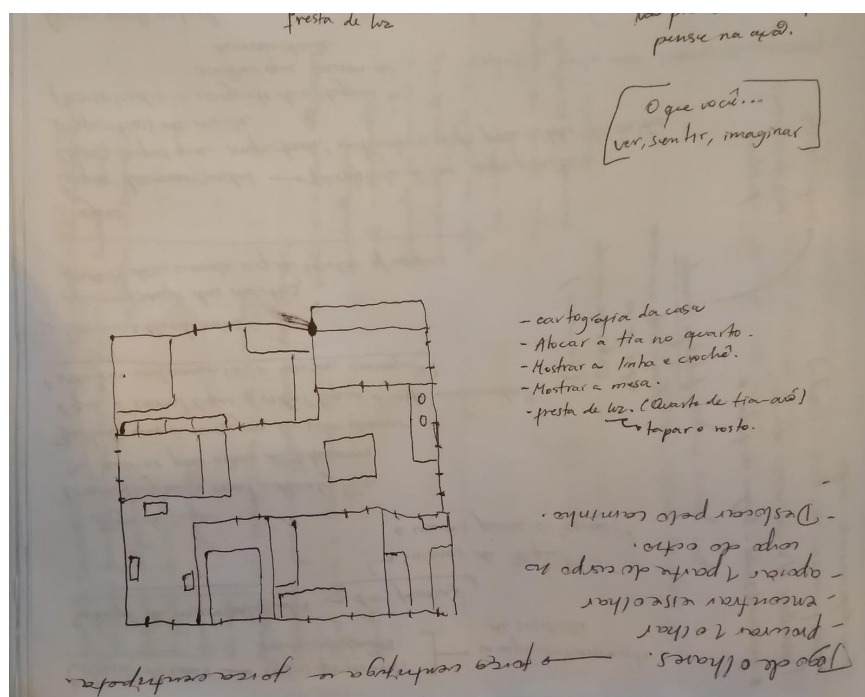


Figure 4: Record from the logbook with indications and a floor plan drawing of the grandmother's house. In the upper right corner, one can read: mapping of the house, placing the aunt in the room, showing the crochet thread, showing the table, sliver of light (covering the face). Source: personal archive.

At this stage of organizing the scene, I referred to the CAP system, presented earlier in these pages, using the facets of *anatomizing* and *externalizing*. However, I noticed that the scenes in progress were already part of my body, already external (in a way) from the elements of the biographical space, and thus I thought of a contraction: first as a uterine contraction, which removes from me and places it on stage, as if the scene needed to be expelled from the body, and later, as a muscular contraction, resulting from the movement of the body, an action present in rehearsal rooms.

As the research progressed, I frequented the rehearsal room of the Research Group, where, equipped with these scripted elements, I sought to materialize a collection of materialities; to materialize them differently, giving them poetic contours in dance gestures.

Here lies another contraction, that of understanding that the scene can be a hidden side of memory, where the scene becomes a reflection on the less known and more subjective and obscure aspects of autobiographical elements. In other words, a scene as the *hidden side of memory*, composing another one that contradicts passionate recollections.

For Laurence Louppe (2012), contemporary dance performs the work of giving existence to the invisible, revealing a subtle network of relationships between bodies. Creating, from the perspective of contemporary dance, is to externalize the forces of the body and not just present the invisible through choreography. The act of revealing movement through the body makes contemporary dance work attune to the forces of the process, capturing them like antennas that mediate movement.

This involves seeking authenticity in bodily expressions, an alterity of the subject, and an openness to the creative process. When it comes to dance piece, research that follows these paths becomes an artist's quest to understand themselves as "subject, object, and tool of their own knowledge" (Louppe, 2012, p. 32).

The Geolocated Artist's Testimony

During the course, I revisited personal documents, as well as those of my family and other *escrevientes*⁶. Noticing the lack of family records, I began to imagine the features of my great-grandparents, along with their erasures, silences, and obscure points. Through these historical blurs, I entered a personal realm, revisiting a collection of texts I produced between 2020 and 2022 that, until then, had not been used as artistic material.

Seeking light, I realized that a sort of affective *aquilombamento* was emerging in this process. *Aquilombamento* presents itself as a symbolic, ancestral, and cultural technology intrinsic to the organization of Black communities. Created amidst social subjugation and based on racial difference, this technology offers alternatives for existence in the face of oppressive conditions. This concept encompasses escape, internal organization, and confrontation through struggle as forms of resistance, survival, and life production.

This political engagement connected me to the erased or torn moments of my history, revealing how omissions or the lack of preserved records turned my family into a place for autofiction. The incorporation of autofiction in this process proved fundamental in giving the documents a collective character, transforming intimate narratives into possibilities for existing and coexisting collectively. At this point, I began a profane approach to the past, engaging in a critical fabulation⁷ of documentary data.

According to Vincent Colonna (2004, as cited in Faedrich, 2016), autofiction has various branches⁸, one of which is fabulatory autofiction. This refers to a specific form of autofiction where the

⁶ The term *escrevivência* was first coined in 1995 by Conceição Evaristo during the Seminar on Women and Literature. According to the author, the term emerges from the combination of writing and living, representing, therefore, a way to "write experiences." By using this expression, Evaristo undertakes a historical reconstruction of the Afro-Brazilian population, highlighting that *escrevivência* is a form of social, cultural, and historical reparation (Evaristo, 2007).

⁷ Concept of Saiydia Hartman, which can also be referred to as "speculative history," "narrow narration," and "documentary poetics" (Hartman, 2020).

⁸ Vincent Colonna distinguishes four branches of autofiction: the fantastic, where the author transforms into a hero in an unreal narrative; the biographical, which blends real data and fiction to create a "truth-lie"; the speculative, which reflects the author or the book within the book itself without focusing on plausibility; and the intrusive, where the author acts as a narrator on the margins of the main plot.

author inserts themselves into the narrative, blending factual elements of their own life with fictional (fantastical, unreal, or highly imaginative) components.

In this context, the autobiographical scene is presented as a place of contradiction, revealing the duality between the false and the true. Thinking of autofiction as an artistic trigger allows one to question the self declared on stage, casting doubt on what is known or unknown about who is on stage.

I then began to fabulate about the existence of my grandmother Josefina and how historical moments might have affected her. From there, seeking to retrace the erased steps of Black history in Brazil, which relied on the myth of racial democratization and the idealization of the mixed-race subject, I found strength in regionality and backyard territoriality, showing that this house, this backyard in northern Minas Gerais, also relates to all erased Brazilian ancestries. At this point, I lean on the propositions of Lélia Gonzalez (2020), a Brazilian anthropologist and political philosopher, who points out in her work that we must detach ourselves from the two socially imposed ways of viewing Black women: as the domestic worker or the sexualized *mulata*.

Her contributions include reflections on the construction of Black identity, the fight against racism, and the need for deeper awareness of Indigenous and African roots in the formation of Brazilian society. According to Gonzalez (2020), this type of violence against Black women and men is legitimized by the Brazilian legal system, which imposes a form of racism on Black bodies that strips them of rights, making Brazilian racism a trauma that always manifests violently.

Examples of this type of violence have emerged since the Imperial period, when the narratives of the people from northern Minas Gerais were deeply influenced by racial violence and political dynamics. From 1850, the Portuguese crown implemented strategies that legitimized the transfer of large tracts of land in the region, favoring the agrarian economic elite. In the 20th century, this process resulted in the expulsion of various families from their lands, mostly Black and Indigenous, as well as small farmers—a practice

that persists to this day, justified in the name of appropriation through possession (Medeiros, 2002).

It is important to note that land demarcation persisted until 1960, when the "absentee lands" (Araújo, 2009, p. 132) were sold to large landowners, displacing the subalterns and making them dependent not only economically but also for survival.

An example of this dependency is illustrated by the figure of the landowner Simão Costa Campos, who, during the drought of 1937, provided food aid to those in need, consolidating his dominance in the region. This *coronelismo* persists to this day, even influencing political elections.

In these erasures, the eyes of my grandmother are reflected.



Figure 5: 3x4 Photos of My Grandmother.
Source: Personal Archive.

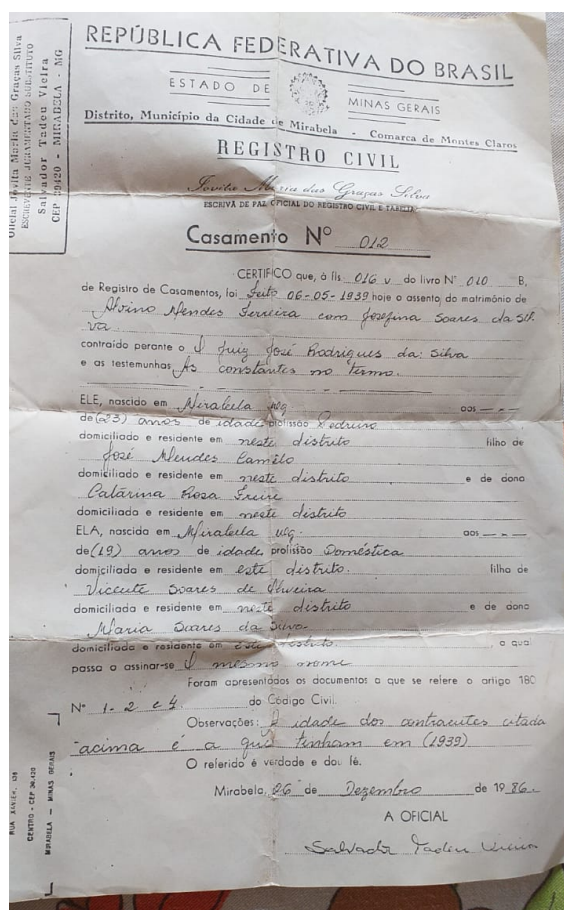


Figure 6: Photo of the Marriage Certificate of Josefina and Alvino, My Paternal Grandparents. Source: Personal Archive.

As I examined the material I have carried with me since my master's studies, I encountered the quadruped figure, and from this, the constellation image of the work emerged. Alongside it, other elements constellated that I wished to bring to the scene, representing the connection between ancestral roots and personal journey. This bodily emblem, used to enter this space, also served to understand how I autofictioned the origin of my name.

Supported by Vincent Colonna's view of fantastic autofiction—as a literary practice where the author inserts themselves into the narrative, using factual elements of their life combined with fictional components that may be fantastical or unreal—I explored these inquiries throughout my master's dissertation, defended in 2023. During this creative process in 2024, I began to envision the figure/persona Deigo: my autofabulation.

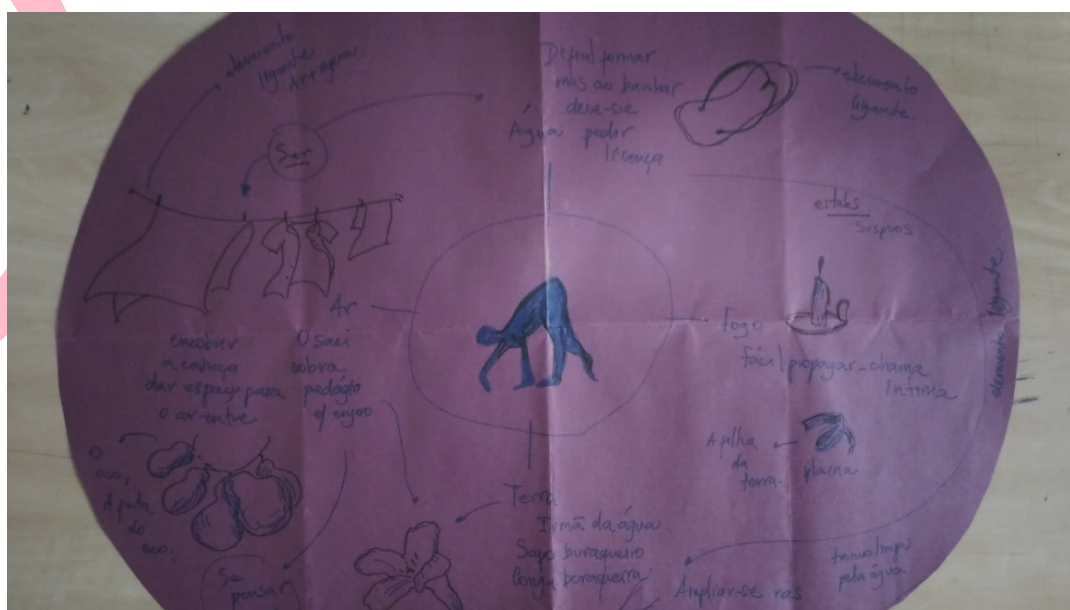


Figure 7: Detail of Semantic Panel. Source: Personal Archive.

This approach allowed for greater creative freedom, transforming the personal experience into a story that transcends traditional verisimilitude. Autofabulation, thus, is not limited to mere autobiography but creates a complex blend of realities, ruptures, and imagination, enabling the exploration and expansion of (another) identity in a fictional and scenic manner.

In this fantastic autofiction, Deigo betrays the truth, stealing parts of the biography, adding moments to the erased parts. Weaving arguments based on a non-truth, Deigo becomes a moment of the artist's desire. To clarify this arrangement, Bakhtin states that

The author is a moment of artistic totality and, as such, cannot coincide, within this totality, with the hero, who is its other moment; the personal coincidence "in life" between the individual being spoken of and the individual speaking does not eliminate the difference between these moments in artistic totality (Bakhtin, 1982, apud Arfuch, 2010, p. 62).

The autofictional scene and the very existence of Deigo is, therefore, the blatant act of shuffling the polarities of history, where the individual being shown is only a moment, the presence of the scenic action. Thus, Deigo, as the "individual being spoken of," steals autobiographical moments and recreates them in stories, where what is told "is based on parts of the truth, either to fictionalize it or to invent a corresponding non-truth" (Xavier, 2023, p. 86).

In this autofictional research, where the gesture (danced or not) is the central composition, there is not just one but several. In them, I find a symbol for a connection between my ancestral roots and my personal journey.

Still understanding this quadruped gesture as something unknown, I dedicated myself to a oneiric, branched, and subterranean search, where I could understand the ancestry present in this gesture. I was interested in the concept of scenic self-testimony (Macedo, 2020), where what matters is not the truth of what is exposed but the presence of the materiality of the body while it speaks. According to the author, the act of making the action present in dance and linking this action to a narration of oneself brings the artist and the audience closer together.

The dance that asks to be seen by me, and in me, constructs meaning when it unapologetically blurs the art-life relationship. When it is the very act of being in the world, in a mix of belonging and inadequacy. It stirs memories, exposes failures, tells about itself, deliberately undressing itself in and for the world. It is possible that others are discovered along the way; for now, the name I find (and that finds me) is "Testimonial Dance" (Macedo, 2022, p. 39).

Macedo (2020), when exposing her testimonial dance, blurs the art-life relationship, while in this research, the notion of erasure, similar to the blur, is also a crossing out of history. Between the act of blurring and erasing, there is the same intention. I can think that in both cases, the action of poking, proposed by the author, aims to reveal the losses of details and the difficulties in identifying or recognizing specific elements. Whether in a blurred image (smudge) or something that was deliberately erased, both generate the sensation of uncertainty or ambiguity present in the act of living.

However, in both cases, there is an alteration in the available information. While the author's act of blurring is intentional to cause discomfort, in my case, the erasure is the discomfort that leads to artistic intention. Both the smudge and the erasure have the capacity to manipulate information; the main distinction lies in the fact that the smudge often happens accidentally, while erasure is generally intentional.

Certainly, both cause the loss of distinction, which the author describes as “a mix of belonging and inadequacy” (Macedo, 2022), for both the smudge and the erasure can lead to the loss of differentiation between objects or elements, either due to the merging of details (smudge) or the total absence of information (erasure). This element interests autofiction. It is in it that the situated speech shows itself and shouts; it is in it that the geolocated artist finds themselves.

To perceive the term geolocated, I reflect on Djamila Ribeiro's work *Lugar de Fala (Place of Speech)*, where the author explains that the place of speech can be understood as a location from which each person understands the world and, therefore, constructs interpretations about it, conducts research, and produces knowledge. The author also emphasizes the intersectional notion of this place, highlighting that our way of understanding the world is permeated by structural elements such as class, race, and gender.

Beyond this term, the notion of the geolocated artist is also guided by the term *body-enunciation*, which “invokes a gaze, and it is from [this renewed gaze] that we construct social and political meanings” (Macedo, 2022, p. 4). Understanding the artist always as a social and political being, aware of their location in the world, it is perceived that they are a specific body in a specific place. Therefore, this body carries actions intrinsic to its biology, social status, race, or gender.

By geolocating my body in Minas Gerais' northern backlands, I understand it as a body that initiates, in a space of myths, of genesis, where imagination uses autofiction to fortify itself. Collecting (whatever it may be) with these assumptions in mind makes the artist territorialize themselves, organizing another vision of self and the other, and consequently, of the space around them, noticing political obstacles, personal contradictions, and conflicts, whether familial or social, configuring other ways of being in/for being in the world.

Geolocating Inward: The Dream Navel Scene

With an understanding of the geolocated body and having amefricanity⁹ as a compass, I return to the process' documents and gather guidance for a reconnection with these spaces. It was then that the research opened up to dreams, for what I sought outside was within me, as the sound of my name led me to the illiterate lips of my paternal grandmother: Deigo.

Predilection for Ruin

On the edge of an unfinished knit, left on the sofa, the needle dangles and shines, *tinlingue* on the floor.

In the boy, the desire to undo the knots. Loosely tied, they illusion patterns.

The act of unraveling made rewind the tape of time.

In a longing for the poorly done, the well-done time returned to its yarn origin.

The pleasure was to see the aunt sing Roberto, while the clouds blew images of birds (Xavier, 2023, p. 141).

The autobiographical scene has a predilection for ruin, for the incomplete. Specifically in the work I have been developing, I intended to blend dreams, memories, and inventions from my paternal grandmother's house, where these nuances, embodied in dance, feed off the symbolic elements of my dreams.

According to Sigmund Freud (2006 apud Trinca, 2015), in dreams there are indecipherable, confusing parts that do not hinder the interpretation and understanding of a dream: "This is the navel of the dream, the place upon which it rests the unknown."

The Freudian metaphor-concept of the Dream Navel not only encapsulates the elusive essence of the autobiographical but also tears apart the fabric of history, bringing to this scene a focal point of memories of all kinds, describing the dark points present in the act of dreaming, emphasizing the complexity of the dream world. Therefore, the term Dream Navel refers to the

(...) point where it [the dream] dives into the unknown. The dream thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, by the

⁹ I use the term to exemplify the *geraizeira* existence, as amefricanity, a concept by Lélia Gonzalez, celebrates the fusion of African and Latin American cultures, highlighting the richness, diversity, and resilience of Afro-descendant identities in Latin America.

nature of things, have a defined end; they are doomed to branch out in all directions within the intricate network of our world of thought. It is from some point where this thread is particularly closed that the desire of the dream springs forth, like a mushroom from its mycelium (Freud, 2006, p. 557 apud Trinca, 2015, p. 118).

I was inspired by the gaps in memory involving my paternal grandmother, making them the crucial point where this autofictional work finds its basis. In facing the absence of certain historical records, I seek them in a fabulatory characteristic, where the work is guided by ambiguity. In this scenario, my grandmother's ignorance makes her the protagonist of the scene, where fragments of existence intertwine in a non-linear and contradictory narrative. It is through this gesture that I seek to convey not only my personal story but also invite the spectator to a journey that transcends the individual, exploring, through a backyard territoriality, the blurred figure of my deceased grandmother.

The act of remembering my grandmother clashes with the doubt of what I really remember. "I only remember my grandmother, the things people say about her. Once I dreamed of an old woman and a rag, I felt it was my grandmother and that the dream was a space to reconnect with my ancestry¹⁰". I tried to seek my grandmother through the invention of dreams, where the remembered is indecisive, leading confusion and contradiction to the scene.

The document-house ceases to be a version of the truth and becomes self-contained, creating another location: the dreamed location of the body and the artist's sensoriality. *Umbigo de sonho* has become an autofictional dance work where I explore ancestral roots through dance and memory.

Umbigo de sonho is a testimonial dance, born from a scenically-dreamy space that updates and involves itself in mysteries that border personal and collective data related to life and dreams, reflecting scenic choices that link self-representation to testimony and art.

¹⁰ Excerpt from the dramaturgical text of *Umbigo de Sonho* in process.

The work invites the spectator on a journey that transcends the boundaries of the body and individual experience when, speaking of personal problems, the forgetting of the house and the grandmother's eyes, it veers into a collective dimension: land ownership and capital accumulation in a few hands. The autobiographical scene insinuates itself with an ambiguous representation, characteristic of autofiction (Alberca, 2007, p. 23) and it is through this unknown that the scene serves, where fragments of the performer's existence blend into a non-linear and contradictory story.

In this context, the autobiographical scene is presented as a revelatory space of the duality between the false and the true. Considering autofiction as an artistic catalyst, the interrogation about the self declared in the scene arises, raising doubts about what is known or unknown about the persona.

Thus, testimonial dance does not rely on representation but on action, allowing the performer to see, feel, and imagine. Personal experiences are constantly reevaluated when stepping onto the stage, differing from a formal testimony. In this context, testimonial dance shows previously mentioned clues, events that the spectator may anticipate, while simultaneously stimulating the unsaid and the spaces between the information.

At this point, reflecting on the research developed so far, I realize that self-testimony would be an autobiographical scenic procedure that stands out for the notion of the geolocated artist. I seek here a dance approach that challenges colonial pathways, reflecting on the complexities of identity and belonging in a culturally diverse context.



Figure 8 and 9: Record of the final scene of *Umbigo de sonho*, dance work performed in December 2023. Source: personal archive.

When the artist geolocates, they are not merely tied to their origin but have a critical perspective that updates the place. A place only becomes critical when, distanced from it, the artist places themselves critically, becoming an uncomfortable thorn between the past and the present.

Autobiographical scenic research seeks the simultaneous recognition of the subject and the artist, while revealing the shadows, voids, and obscurities of the unconscious. The autobiographical scene, as observed in the meetings, results from an aggression: whether when the speaker externalizes their anxieties, in a kind of flagellation, or when the scenes proposed by them become a friction between artist and audience, generating discomfort and tension.

In the ambiguity of the autobiographical scene, the uncertainty of the narratives explores the very place of contradiction, as theater presents itself as a space of falsehood, of make-believe, while simultaneously exposing the pure truth of the artist. Beyond this duality, such a scene is essentially human for bringing the inherent aggressiveness of the human and the purgative nature of aggression. As Bakhtin (1982) exposed, when talking about artistic totality, the game of contradictions in the autobiographical scene confuses the narratives between the artist, the subject on stage, and

the observer, blurring/sticking the lines between who I am and who the other is.

In one of the classroom discussions, teacher Vanessa Macedo unsettled the class by posing a question from her research: is the self declared on stage “what I know about myself” or “what I do not know?” This took me to the twilight of the evening, when huge insects appear, sounds, and a different density. I understood that the autobiographical scene is like a twilight that remains steadfast so that it never reaches midnight. It is always the tension of the unexpected, where the need to withdraw contrasts with the curiosity of what inhabits the dark. It is like making a bonfire to illuminate and realizing that the light intensifies the pressure of the unknown even more. One rushes to extinguish it, but who truly faces their darkness without a single lit flame?



Figure 10: Deigo Xavier. Cut-out and superimposed childhood photo.
Source: personal archive.

Wrapping Up... for Now

The scene *Umbigo de sonho* not only establishes a dialogue that resonates with the principles and objectives outlined in the discipline *Body, Feminist Dramaturgies, and Testimonies*, but it also carries the emblem of a testimonial dance, intersecting the course within the context of body arts. By aligning this understanding with the articulation between personal narratives, feminisms, and dramaturgical processes in body arts, I chose to

attempt to describe the obscure points of a map of a house that no longer exists. Weaving together the emptiness of the grandmother's house and its absence, I seek a reunion by recalling the experiences of my foremothers.

I perceive that the testimonial scene brings forth an artist at the extremes of contemporaneity, as they are the subject, object, and tool of what they wish to show. Thus, they must delve into these autobiographical documents and re-read them through an attuned collection, where the artist's internal and subjective forces are explored, while other forms from the community agency social, political, and emotional forces. Thus emerges the certainty that, in a testimonial performance, every movement, action, or word reveals the maker-performer, turning it into a visual and visceral testimony of their own narrative.

Incorporating real documents, interviews, and accounts to explore personal relationships and experiences uncovers sensations often not visible on the surface. This attuned collection suggests an attentiveness to capture and respond to stimuli, aligning with other documentary approaches in the Performing Arts, where artists act as antennas for the stories and experiences they are documenting and witnessing.

Similarly to the CAP, I find that autobiographical practices as scenic research feed into each other: during the creation of the testimonial scene *Umbigo de sonho*, there was a more detailed understanding of the elements and procedures of aesthetic construction, while I was also evolving as an artist.

Therefore, this text has described, albeit superficially, a process involving the collection and organization of autobiographical materials. I find it challenging to collect these materials without the action becoming accumulative. Thus, before beginning to collect accounts from the biographical space, I noted an immersion in a wide range of sources, such as biographies, memories, films, and dreams. With a keen eye, I collected information in detail, emphasizing that before collection, a thorough exploration and analysis of autobiographical materials is necessary, as a theatrical scene cannot fully encompass a life.

This immersion, which may initially seem as confusing as the artist's own life, allowed me to fully dive into the universe of personal materials, developing a deeper and more intuitive understanding of how these contents could orbit among themselves. Immersion, then, would be the first step for the artist to deeply engage with autobiographical materials, followed by collection, organization, and selection of the materials. I understood, in this process, the importance of the moment of materialization—the composition—transforming the selected elements into a scene or action, expressing the bodily involvement with the research. Therefore, I add a final stage, which should receive attention in a dance research guided by autobiographical artistic practice in the Performing Arts: the moment when we, artists, transform the elements into a coherent scenic narrative with the lived process.

In this way, Deíço's perspective acquired a critical bias, where political issues are recognized in identity affiliation. The awareness of owning the story and understanding that one must profane a unique story granted me the insight that the people most apt to narrate the northern Minas Gerais' *sertão* region are the *geraizeiros*.

The process in question stands out for incorporating the notion of a geolocated artist, closely tied to an autobiographical artistic practice in the Performing Arts, reflecting on a Black body in a hinterland space, silenced by a hegemonic and colonizing culture, while we seek a dance process that moves through counter-colonial pathways (Santos, 2015).

References

Alberca, Manuel. *El pacto ambiguo*: de la novela autobiográfica a la autoficción. Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2007.

Araújo, Elisa Cotta. *Nas margens do São Francisco*: sociodinâmicas ambientais, expropriação territorial e afirmação étnica do quilombo da lapinha e dos vazanteiros do Pau de Léguas. Dissertação (Mestrado), Montes Claros: PPGDS/Unimontes: 2009.

Arfuch, Leonor. *O espaço biográfico: dilemas da subjetividade contemporânea*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. EDUERJ, 2010.

Bacon, Jane M.; Midgelow, Vida L. Processo de Articulações Criativas. (Trad.) Eduardo Augusto Rosa Santana. Charles Roberto Silva, et. Al (org.). *Resumos do 5o Andamento PPGAC/USP – São Paulo, PPGACECA/USP*, 2015, v. 3, n. 1, pp. 55- 71.

Blanco, Sergio; Campanela, Esteban; CONCÍLIO, Vicente. A Autoficção: uma engenharia do eu. *Urdimento: Revista de Estudos em Artes Cênicas*, Florianópolis, v. 3, n. 48, p. 1–18, 2023. DOI: 10.5965/1414573103482023e0701. Disponível em: <<https://revistas.udesc.br/index.php/urdimento/article/view/24369>>. Acesso em: 7 jan. 2024.

Evaristo, Conceição. Da grafia-desenho de minha mãe, um dos lugares de nascimento de minha escrita. In: ALEXANDRE, Marcos (Org.) *Representações performáticas brasileiras: teorias, práticas e suas interfaces*. Belo Horizonte: Maza Edições, 2007.

Faedrich, Anna. Autoficção: um percurso teórico. *Criação & Crítica*, n. 17, p.30-46, dez. 2016. Disponível em: . Acesso em: 27 jul. 2024.

Fernandes, Ciane. Em Busca da Escrita com Dança: algumas abordagens metodológicas de pesquisa com prática artística. *Dança: Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Dança*, vol. 2, n. 2. (2013). Salvador: UFBA, 2013. p. 18-36.

Federici, Silvia. *O ponto zero da revolução: trabalho doméstico, reprodução e luta feminista*. Trad: Coletivo Sycorax. São Paulo: Elefante, 2019.

Hartmann, Saidiya. Intimate History, Radical Narrative. *Black Perspectives*, 22, maio, 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.aaihs.org/intimate-history-radical-narrative/>. Acesso em: 07 jan 2024.

Gerencer, Paula Brazão; Rozestraten, Artur Simões. Constelações de imagens: metáforas e ensaios. *Domínios da Imagem*, Londrina, v. 10, n. 19, p. 87-112, jul./dez. 2016.

Gonzalez, Lélia. Por um feminismo afro-latino-americano. In: *Pensamento feminista hoje: perspectivas decoloniais*. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do tempo, 2020.

Haseman, Brad. A Manifesto for Performative Research. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, theme issue "Practice-led Research" (n. 118), 2006, p. 98-106.

Leujeune, Philippe. *O pacto autobiográfico: de Rousseau à Internet*. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2008.

Loupe, Laurence. *Poética da dança contemporânea*. Lisboa: Orfeu Negro, 2012.

Macedo, Vanessa. O autodepoimento na cena como prática feminista. In Souza. Marco & Carvalho Carla (org). *Arte e Estética na Educação: corpos plurais*. Curitiba, CRV, 2022. p. 39-53.

Medeiros, Leonilde Servolo de. *Movimentos Sociais, Disputas Políticas e Reforma Agrária de Mercado no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: CPDA/UFRRJ e UNIRISD, 2002.

Ribeiro, Djamila. *Lugar de fala* (coleção feminismos plurais). São Paulo: Pólen Livros, 2019.

Rodrigues, Manoela dos Anjos Afonso (Org). *Ciclo de Práticas Decoloniais [livro eletrônico]: o fazer decolonial na arte*. Goiânia: Ed. dos Autores, 2023.

Santos, Antônio Bispo dos. *Colonização, Quilombos: modos e significações*. Brasília: Instituto Nacional de Ciência e Tecnologia (INCT) de Inclusão no Ensino Superior e na Pesquisa, 2015.

Scialom, Melina. Dramaturgia na Dança: A Práxis de Rudolf Laban como Base para o Trabalho Dramatúrgico em Dança. *Cadernos GIPE-CIT*, v. 16, p.145-166.2016

Trinca, Ricardo Trapé. Um breve comentário sobre o "umbigo do sonho", de Freud. *J. psicanal*, São Paulo, v. 48, n. 89, p. 117-126, dez 2015. Disponível em
<http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S010358352015000200010&lng=pt&nrm=iso>. Acesso em: 07 jan. 2024.

Xavier, Davidson José Martins. *Coreogeografia Geraizeira: Um Estudo autof(r)iccional*. Dissertação (Mestrado) – Universidade Federal de Goiás, Escola de Música e Artes Cênicas/EMAC, Programa de Pós-graduação em Artes da Cena, Goiânia.

Received on May 23, 2024.

Approved on August 19, 2024.

REALIZAÇÃO



UFRJ

PPGDAN
UFRJ

Anda
associação nacional de
pesquisadores em dança