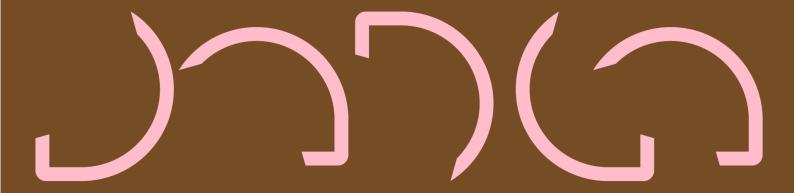


FRANÇA, Mirela Lima de; MISI, Mirella de Medeiros. A dance rehearsal/essay. **Revista Brasileira de Estudos em Dança**, 03(05), p. 458-472, 2024.1.



A dance rehearsal/essay¹

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¹ In Portuguese, there is a word that means simultaneously rehearsal and essay. This word is *ensaio*, and the original text makes this wordplay.

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An essay for a rehearsal/ So it isn't called a performance

This essay is thought of as a conversation circle or, specifically, a samba circle. The diversity and circularity, that brings everyone to the same level, are structuring: it's not enough to chat, or samba, only with Antônio Bispo dos Santos, quilombola⁴ thinker of contracolonialidade⁵ and author of "A terra dá, a terra quer" - main source material for this essay. The samba circle, to be good, reguires more people. Institutionalized science is welcome and from canonical authors, but in an attempt of an academic update and democratization based on counter-colonial principles, the cast and their expressions must be diverse: starting with the ancestral knowledge of the Indigenous Ailton Krenak, going over an artist's diary, by Nuno Ramos, an artistic manifesto by the North American Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and the reflected knowledge from Professor Helena Katz's orality, during the classes in the Master's Program of Professional Dance at the Federal University of Bahia (Programa de Mestrado Profissional em Dança/ Universidade Federal da Bahia - PRODAN/UFBA⁶), up to a publication in press, reverb of Bruno O.'s doctorate thesis.

For the most part, references indirectly enter the discourse, as shared established wisdom from those who came before, therefore, assimilated and embodied by the ongoing research. For the text to follow its course, whilst not losing important contributions, there are no parentheses related to the location of references, but there are parentheses that make paths for other relevant references that, otherwise, would be misplaced. In the end, however, the cataloged bibliography is available, following the Brazilian Association of Technical Norms (Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas - ABNT). Hence, it opens up a discussion about counter-colonial democratization that overcomes the valorization of non-hegemonic

⁴ *Quilombola* is who lives in a *quilombo*. A *quilombo* is a community of people of African descent who resisted slavery and racial oppression in Brazil during the colonial period and after.

⁵ Counter-coloniality, in our translation.

⁶ For the English version, for political reasons, names of Brazilian institutions will appear translated, in English, but also in Portuguese-BR.

wisdom at the university and is also concerned with a formal and methodological update.

In a *samba* circle, we propose to sail among questions from the perspective of dance as a lifestyle, immaterial cultural heritage, work, profession, theoretical and practical field of knowledge, even though, at times, these dimensions can collide between themselves. It's important to highlight: the perceptions exposed here are not conclusive, but movement propulsive.

Short introduction/ Why even write an essay?

First and foremost, for a ballerina, dancer, or dance artist, rehearsal is a familiar term. The work, strictly practical and of an artistic nature, is developed during dance rehearsals: it's where movement research, scene composition, and technical, methodological and artistic refinement of both ongoing and finished pieces take place. In a dancer's career, you rehearse more than you perform. Rehearsing is of utmost need and is part of, alongside dance classes and working out, a simplified routine of this occupation. If performing is the moment that justifies the work, the happiest and most fulfilled are the professionals who appreciate and treasure the potential of each rehearsal.

While reading "O Abolicionismo", by Joaquim Nabuco, a well-published essayist of Brazilian political thinking and, in his most liberal phase, one of the most eloquent abolitionists in the country, I realized that the essay is a meeting between science and art. Speaking of a genre that allows the author to express in a more passionate and opinionated way in a text, aside from presenting references, facts, and arguments from documents of a scientific nature. In an essay, the researcher labors like a writer, working on her/his style to shape ideas and authorial formats.

If it's safe to assume that the reality, to each person, is based on what they perceive, inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and one of his interpreters - the prestigious Brazilian dance critic and theorist, Helena Katz⁷ -, it's plausible to face art as a reflection of space-time individualized elaboration, in an intrinsic dialogue with the artist's context and, overall, with contemporary collectivity. Thus, art embraces multiple forms of expression and experimentation and, according to the cognitive behavior defended by the Phenomenology of Perception by Merleau-Ponty, its starting point is the body. In a state of rehearsal, the body is laid in an exercise of connection: whether for creating a dance or a text. Henceforth, I exercise, in an intentionally challenging way, with Antônio Bispo dos Santos - the Nêgo Bispo - and guests.

Samba with Nêgo Bispo⁸

In his latest published book, "A terra dá, a terra quer", Nêgo Bispo claims that the art we make is worthless because it has a price. To me, it is like a slap right in the face. Needed. Inspiring. Still, a slap. He speaks of theater, for instance, as a place where city adults play doing things, without actually doing them, so that other adults watch upon payment. On the other hand, he says that the people from *quilombo* play doing things until, without noticing, they're actually doing them. That's how they learn how to hunt, cook, tend to the crop...

He speaks of festivities, which involve music and dance, where people know how to sing all tunes, play the drum, and dance *Congado*⁹. In the *quilombo*, art is for everyone. Nêgo Bispo, who passed away from health complications in December 2023, is a radical of the African diaspora concepts - and I adore the impact of his ideas on mine, tamed by the hegemonic culture. The term culture itself, according to him, is colonial and presumes standardized and commercialized things.

Professional dance in Brazil, amid other arts, has little space and audience. Dance here, for good or bad, belongs to the

⁷ Content orally shared by Professor Helena Katz, in the course "Tópicos especiais em dança: Análise de configurações coreográficas" (PRODAN-UFBA), in which I participated as a special student in the second semester of 2021.

⁸ The name Nêgo Bispo will be used as a priority to refer to the author, as a political choice to mention a Master of orality.

⁹ Cultural and religious Afro-Brazilian manifestation.

people - so they say. Nêgo Bispo's explanation, regarding the spread of knowledge through practice in the *quilombo*, made me problematize the maxim "every Brazilian knows how to *samba*". Generalizations represent a simplistic and reductionist way of thinking and, following an ecologic line of thought, as you see in a forest, diversity is the secret of life. I want, however, to insist: shouldn't every Brazilian, after all, dabble in *samba*? I go against the point of view that puts *samba* as an innate knowledge, as I approach experience and practice as rich forms of socialization and learning, supported by counter-colonial thought and common in the field of dance.

Another maxim comes to mind, that "one does not learn how to *samba* at school". There's no formula, as there's for classical ballet, for instance. To learn how to *samba*, first, it's necessary to see people dancing *samba*, get carried away by the sound, by the mood of the *samba* circle, and try those multiple times, in every way, singing, and maybe even playing the tambourine. Nêgo Bispo considers that those who don't know how to dance and sing at a *samba* party do not live pleasantly. In contrast with the society of productivity and burnout, the permission and, more than that, the stimulus for all bodies to freely experience dance, represented in this text - not by chance, but for its symbolic value in Brazilian territory - by the *samba*, seems to me as a desirable utopia, only possible through cherishing different ways of life, others than what's on the hegemonic playbook.

One of the most beautiful things I notice in African diaspora dance is the quality to allow bodies to find their own way of moving, without attaching a technical fault or aesthetic insufficiency to their specificities. Under these terms, dance is accessible and democratic. Contrasting, for example, to classical ballet, dance from palatial and European origins that have forms, positions, and steps meant to be followed rigorously, in an everlasting search for what's considered pretty and ideal - with very few aesthetic and methodological differences from one school to another.

If Brazilian people know how to dance *samba* and don't learn at school, who are they? Maybe the project of the elite class is to remove themselves from this big national group, in a colonial

approach that moves them, whilst heirs of European colonizers, out of the country or leads them to a sense of ownership. Before the group that dictates the rules and owns the institutionalized intellectual capital, the body, emptied and harshened, is left for the people. Those with menial or manual jobs, engaged in repetitive and choreographed activities such as cleaning, loading... And, in leisure time, they dance. Could the body be an embedded treasure that, due to being detached from the mind and marginalized by separatist and binary logic, still belongs to the people?

(BETWEEN PARENTHESES

The well-known thought by Descartes, which endorses the idea of modernity, is rooted in a binary logic, where things exist in opposition and elements are placed in a hierarchical order: culture and nature, man and woman, white and black, cis and trans, good and evil... Hence, men feel entitled to dominate nature, as they deceitfully see themselves apart and don't feel ashamed to impose themselves as superior beings. The cartesian *cogito*, exclusivity of humans, has special importance to justify this supposed superiority, and the world of ideas overlaps the world experimented by the flesh: reason is attached to the soul and gets elevated, above the physical body.

In the early 20th century, the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty establishes criticism of the cartesian thought and turns to the body. For him, the body is something with oneself, a conscience, or before, an experience, a participant in the cognitive process. In addition, he talks about a bond between body and soul that is sealed by the movement of human existence. Merleau-Ponty addresses an integrated body and points out that modern science standardizes man through a universal reason, making it inadequate to cover human diversity. From the detailed description of events, the Phenomenology of Perception, by Merleau-Ponty, seeks to uncover "essences" through experience. Aside from being a term related to monotheist cultures, when the philosopher speaks of essences¹⁰, but also declares that things are always open-ended and

that nothing is definite, a paradox is created. Would it be possible to reach the essence something that is always changing? Would the term "essence" be used by Merleau-Ponty to refer to the experience reduced to its simplest perception? Before this word choice, wouldn't we be witnessing the impossibility of exactly translating from one thing to another? In this case, from lived experience to theoretical understanding?)

For those who work professionally with dance, the underappreciation of the body in favor of the mind, promoted by the colonial and binary cartesian thought, represents a discredit to the development of body arts and the domain of dance as a theoretical and academic field of knowledge, especially when dealing with practice-oriented research.

In Brazil, dance has no strength to leave the popular experience and earn the taste of those who pay for art. Maybe, very few people really pay for art, in a country where the maintenance of ignorance and misery of many is a project of the desensitized elite. Even considering the specific niche of art and culture research, it operates under the logic of Descartes, splitting body and mind and putting performances with body protagonism and vastly practical as less treasured than productions with clear intellectual and theoretical traits.

The Christian, patriarchal, and hierarchical culture of binarism persists, despite its immense stupidity: body and mind cannot be useful when considered separately. While thwarting the establishment of a valued dance market, the deeply ingrained cartesian thought seems to allow the generalization of the said Brazilian people, from the lower domain of the body, to be born with the moves, and dissociate dancing *samba* from a learning process, for having different values than the traditional school. All the while, it creates a generic mass that detaches people from their subjectivity. In the end, it seems to me like a construction based on an unflattering folkloric logic, created by those willing to sell a standardized look of Brazil and don't see themselves as people from this country.

Ideologically, I think it's nice that *samba*, as it has its origins related to the black and criminalized population of Bahia and, later,

Rio de Janeiro, is considered a national treasure¹¹. It's known, however, that this recognition is part of a political project for the creation of a Brazilian identity, proposed by President Getúlio Vargas, stained by cultural appropriation and desecration, denial of social inequality, smothering class struggle, and loaded with populism and belligerent nationalism. It would be truly nice if it wasn't an appropriation thirsty for social control and a whitening agenda; if making samba, which includes dancing, was assimilated as a formative experience into the core curriculum of Brazilian schools; if it was observed the proper recognition and preservation of traditions, offering true prominence to Black culture and its heirs; if it followed the idea of bodily freedom as power, pleasure as politics and practice as a way of living and learning. If Getúlio was alive, I'd ask him if he had ever truly tried samba. I'd ask him if he knew that trying samba is, beyond the act of making or listening to music, the verb that comes from its name: sambar12 (to samba).

It's worth mentioning that Nêgo Bispo places politics, left or right wind, as a hegemonic society's instrument and, thus, serves it. Points out that a person won't govern well for those she doesn't know. Ailton Krenak tells us that one of colonialism's biggest atrocities, reiterated by Getúlio's unifying agenda, is that we are all equal in this country. The myth of racial democracy, established over the ideas of writers such as Gilberto Freyre, serves to maintain an established order and disregards the black people fight, historically exploited, dehumanized and subjugated, and the indigenous people, who are victims of genocide and ethnocide since the European invasion.

A professional rehearsal

Despite dance being seen as something spontaneous that grows in this homeland and belongs to the people, the specialized practice of the contemporary job market reaches the bodies that dance professionally, just like athlete's bodies. In "Arcimboldos",

¹¹ Samba is considered a national treasure especially when referring to the musical genre.

¹² In Portuguese, the verb *sambar* comes from the word *samba* and means to dance *samba*.

short text in "Fooquedeu (um diário)", by the artist Nuno Ramos, he says that Olympic (Artistic) Gymnastics athletes are a close match to "Velázquez's midgets with Miss Venezuela faces¹³". I consider this a derogatory passage, but I find the idea intriguing that contemporary society's specialization extends to athletes' bodies. Given that a dancer embodies traits of both athletes and artists, it seems that this specialization, which can shape bodies, might also influence the field of dance. Nuno brings up the idea of a specialized body, with parts clearly more developed that, chiseled by repetition, bring out specific abilities. For example: swimmers have broad backs due to the repetitive strokes. Even though, traditionally, dance exercises the body in a complete and integrated way, I defend that dance practice, as a daily professional routine, can chisel the dancer as a specialized matter. This agent profile, as observed by Giltanei Branco de Amorim Paes in the publication "Dança e estado: dispositivos de centralização do poder e pulverização do dissenso", establishes a dialogue with the disciplinary society by Foucault, which produces docile bodies: exercised and subdued. Discipline, according to Foucault, tends to enhance the body's work strength while lowering its political expressiveness.

(BETWEEN PARENTHESES

The occupation of dancers is particularly unstable. Along-side the precariousness of the labor market, which impacts Western society in general, it lacks regulatory policies. There are fewer and fewer formal job openings available and, parallelly, there isn't, for instance, a national standardization (Classificação Nacional das Atividades Econômicas - CNAE) that directly links dance to registration on the Individual Microentrepreneur (Microempreendedor Individual - MEI) status.

Once there are no public policies for those who don't exist, a brilliant remark that came to me through Vanda Machado's speech¹⁴, the lack of a regulatory policy for the occupation leaves

¹³ Our translation. Originally: "anãs de Velázquez com rostos de Miss Venezuela".

¹⁴ The statement is in my notebook and refers to a class ministered by Vanda Machado, on 09/15/2022, as a guest professor in the subject "Tópicos Interdisciplinares em Dança e Contemporaneidade" - that I attended in the second semester of 2022, as a regular student at PRODAN-UFBA.

dancers relatively unsupported by the law; making it difficult to understand dance as a job; and raises another barrier in the fight for better working conditions, including tracing a career path and the approval of special retirement, considering the specificities of the job - strongly linked to an athletic approach of the body.)

The theorist André Lepecki proposes modernism as a system characterized by colonialism, that lingers in modern times as coloniality, and has movement as an emblem. He mentions a dance ontology that presumes the isomorphism between dance and movement. Comparing these pieces of information, it is possible to assume that dance, while a field of theoretical-practical knowledge, as reviews its foundation, has a large possibility and responsibility in raising questions against colonial standards. This may start by breaking the expectancy of equivalence between dance and movement, continuous and observable, but shall have other ripples, such as questioning age prejudice and other aesthetic standards or dominant ideas of efficiency. In Brazil, dance has a history of offering resistance and threats to established power: capoeira is, in its origin, a danced fight.

It's worth mentioning that, historically, classical ballet technique has been excessively valued for acceptance in the vast majority of Brazilian contemporary dance companies, both public and private. With advances in racial and ethnic issues in the country, this reality has been slowly changing and evolving. As examples of historic achievements: in 2019, the audition for Castro Alves Theater Ballet (Balé Teatro Castro Alves - BTCA), a public dance company from Bahia, had for the first time an Afro-Brazilian dance class and adopted previous tentative steps, allowing all participants to display their potential in different dance techniques - classical ballet, modern/contemporary dance and Afro-Brazilian dance. Usually, ballet is the first technique to be assessed in auditions, and candidates who do not meet the expectations, technically and/or physically, are eliminated either after or during the class. In 2023, the Arts Palace Dance Company (Cia de Dança Palácio das Artes - CDPA), a public dance company from Minas Gerais, established, for the first time, the lowest assessment grade for the technique of classical ballet, put into practice after the contemporary dance class qualification.

Beyond these small policies, that update and democratize access, currently in growing numbers in Brazil, Nêgo Bispo raises a problem, radically, concerning the monetization of artistic activities. He views commodification as destructive to true art, which he characterizes as a talk between souls. As a dance worker, this disturbs me, as I notice it's a fragile and restricted field, with few professional opportunities, without specific regulations and popularly treated as a hobby. In practice, the few public Brazilian dance companies are slowly being replaced by public-private partnerships, while private companies are increasingly staffed by very young professionals with precarious hiring conditions or paid by projects. Confronted with these contrasting scenarios, I feel thunderstruck: perhaps professional dance in Brazil is especially undervalued due to a troubling mix of issues influenced by both colonial and counter-colonial logics.

As I see my friends, dancers and independent artists, undertaking herculean efforts to survive in the field of dance and, very often, working extra jobs in other areas, I notice that, for those who aspire to approve creation projects and chase sustainability of independent artistry, it becomes necessary to show intellectualism and writing prowess, following a standard settled by the system. From the standpoint of Giltanei, in the aforementioned "Dança e estado: dispositivos de centralização do poder e pulverização do dissenso", the present moment establishes a dialogue with the controlling society, who follows the disciplinary one. These days, the ideal worker works multiple jobs, is flexible and intellectualized. The intellectuality overlaps the knowledge that lies in the body, and it is deterministic in drawing resources that make it viable to develop artistic work and continued actions.

Using radical counter-colonial thought as a reference, where art is seen as a talk among souls and can be used by every person who owns it, the artist might be seen as unnecessary, or so needed that it gets diluted in society. Would the artist - an occupation both created and criminalized by Western society - who is less commercially driven, have lower chances of achieving professional recognition? What's the threshold to make art within the current system but under divergent logic? If counter-coloniality affirms itself

through practice, maybe the question demands more practice than theory.

Practical examples

While writing this essay, I was introduced, through a publication in press, connected to the doctorate thesis in Visual Arts of Bruno O., to the work of Art Club Miriam Garden (Jardim Miriam Arte Clube - JAMAC). JAMAC is a cultural space in São Paulo's southern region, created by the plastic artist Mônica Nador, although under collective maintenance since 2004. It exists on the edge of belonging to neoliberal Western society and maintaining an ethical and aesthetic approach that diverges from it. The institution's practices are grounded in social and critical perspectives, with the participation of the local community and, in denial of life subordination for theory, escapes art's hegemonic standard, excessively virtuous, exclusive and spectacular. The collective stencil development, that makes reproduction viable through democratized matrices, and the adoption of shared authorship notions are examples of how JAMAC operates. Not by chance, JAMAC's printing company, that'll publish the searched material, is called "autoria compartilhada" - in free translation, "shared authorship". It's comforting to realize that the project's maintenance, and of the people who work in it, such as Bruno O., in constant movement, updating the quality of presence, is what guarantees validity and continuity. I'd like to highlight: to establish and maintain formats that are out of the ordinary, it's necessary to be alert, porous, and open to differences and relations.

(BETWEEN PARENTHESES - the spirit of time

Contemporary to Mônica Nador is the dance artist Lia Rodrigues, founder and director of Lia Rodrigues Dance Company (Cia de Danças Lia Rodrigues). Lia is recognized for her social work that unites art and education, and for the choreographic work produced with her Company in Maré's Arts Center (Centro de Artes da Maré - CAM), located in the Maré's Complex - an amalgamation of communities in northern Rio de Janeiro. Her spectacles link sociocultural and political issues, are mainly inspired by literature, and are signed in collaboration with the cast of interpret-creators.)

I see the presence quality as an antidote for most hurdles and lack of involvement that characterize modern and contemporary thought. I use the term "presence quality" to make it clear what it deals with. It's possible to simplify, getting rid of a possible pleonasm, and have the idea fully expressed by the simple noun presence. In presence, we are in the present and sensibly aware of what and who surrounds us. Reviewing Lepecki's publication, I wish to present performance art as a means to bring dance into contemporary times, in a way that does not necessarily align with dance-movement isomorphism. However, the individual/body is required to be fully present, without separation between physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual dimensions, for instance.

I bring up the example of American and feminist artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who brings underappreciated maintenance jobs - domestic labor, for example - to the museum with art status. Ukeles, in her "Manifesto for Maintenance Art", of 1969, presents a Balinese saying that suggests that Balinese people don't make art, but they try to do everything well. Almost in contradiction, the artist uses this saying to reinforce the idea that art is nothing more than what we say it is - and that well-done domestic labor or, I interfere, done in presence, may be called art. In the mentioned manifesto, she proposes, amongst other actions, occupying a museum with her daily chores as a woman, mother, and wife. Ukeles doesn't identify herself as a dance artist, but I would argue that in mundane tasks - like sweeping the floor - there's dance, and the performance art must be considered like a non-identical twin, close friend, or inseparable partner for dance in contemporary times.

(In)conclusion

Finally, I recognize being inserted in the hegemonic Western society, while a dance worker, and that the university, the territory where I develop this research, is an institution of colonial origins. So, besides pointing out practical possibilities of artistic and pedagogical actions that challenge hegemonic concepts, under the inspiration of Nêgo Bispo, I speak up my eeriness to produce a text that balances the pretension to be taken seriously by the academy and the wish

to simplify complex concepts, making it possible to connect to many people, academics or not.

I identify dance, while embodied wisdom through practice, as a field of knowledge capable of establishing a straight dialogue with the counter-colonial thought of Nêgo Bispo. Thus, I highlight the responsibility of doers and thinkers of dance to question motility, a fundamental value in colonialist modernity. I also reflect upon the need to make a collective effort to regulate the occupation of dancers - the base of the dance working pyramid - to affirm the existence of this working class and claim for public policies, including for dance research.

Concerning the academic environment, there are some clues for the tough mission of working at the university under counter-colonial inspiration: value practice, as a research method and object of study; organize theories and methodologies to make it largely accessible; question and reposition the classics; diversify references; observe and take note of collective processes of creation and research, even if it doesn't fit the traditional bibliography.

(BETWEEN PARENTHESES - the last one for now

I tap into the opportunity to thank João Paes for generously sharing references and for the text's orthographic review - Portuguese version.)

It's necessary to conclude the essay, even though the research is not over - furthermore, it avoids making conclusive statements. This is our fate and blessing: eternal movement. Nêgo Bispo says: "We come from circularity: beginning, middle and beginning¹⁵".

Received: 31/05/2024

Approved: 15/08/2024

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¹⁵ Our translation. Originally: "Somos da circularidade: começo, meio e começo".

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