


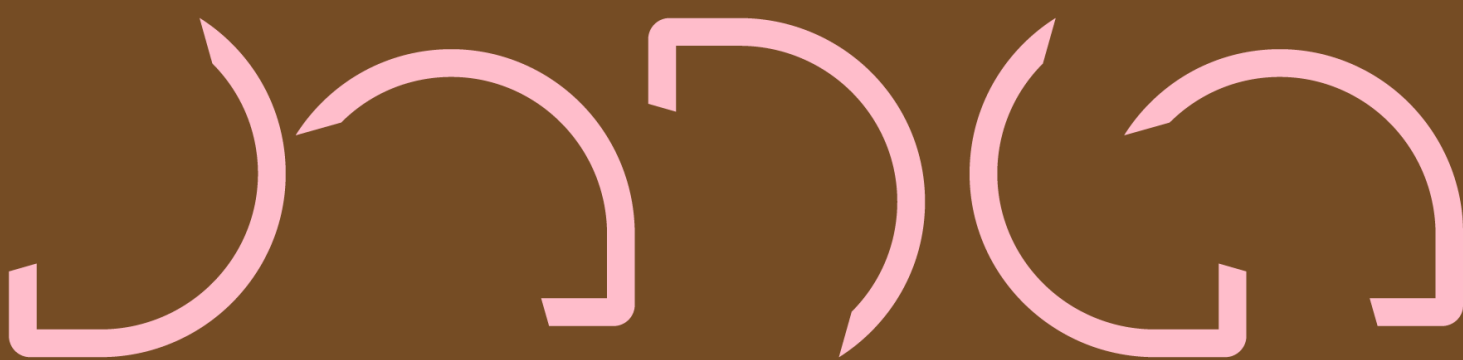
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Regimes of the now: monstrosities, dance and politics

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to reflect on the intersection of monsters and dance through the lens of politics. It begins by contextualizing monsters within culture to understand the territories and policies in which they operate. Then, it discusses the relationship between dance and politics, understanding both as coinciding actions. Finally, it describes the creative process of a performance that touched upon, through the practice of creation, the theoretical and conceptual aspects discussed in this text.

KEYWORDS Monstrosities; body; creation; dance; politics.

Regimes of the now: monstrosities, dance and politics

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Monsters in the territories of culture

This article is part of a doctoral research project ongoing since 2020², which focuses on the intersection of dance with theories of monstrosity in culture. Assuming different forms in different historical periods, monsters represent, metaphorize, and embody risk, danger, horror, and fear, but also, paradoxically, the marvelous, the fascinating, the exotic, and the singular.

Based on this unavoidable ambiguity, the philosopher José Gil (2006) presents us with a first classic division for categorizing monsters, separating them into the *fantastic* and the *teratological*. Broadly speaking, the fantastic are all monsters created by the imagination, fable, and human imagination, while the teratological are all those that present a tangible material reality, a present, living body, that is, a person, a being, but with some type of physical and anatomical variability that, according to different norms in different eras, deviates from the standard. In this case, this body is also read as monstrous. According to José Gil (2006, p. 15), the term teratological designates "bodily deformations of the body itself, differentiating from the imaginary fantasies of fabulous races - some of which, however, are 'teratological.'"

In contemporary times, however, the limits between the fantastic and the teratological have become much closer, confused, since, with the advancement of techniques, technologies, and science, what was imaginary now has much more real potential to exist in daily life:

By becoming fantastic, teratology changed its aspect. The artificial monster was imposed with Frankenstein and has continued to develop since then; genetic manipulation continued the task, promising us a beautiful future of imaginary human-monsters. From now on, we 'experimentally' test the limits of our humanity: to what degree of deformation will we still remain human? (Gil, 2006, p. 12).

The deformation of the human, whether in relation to the bodily interventions available through the advancement of techniques and technologies (especially medical ones), or through

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the multiple behavioral and moral conventions institutionalized by culture and society, or yet, the deformation of the human in terms of medicalizations, anesthetics, and numbing of subjectivity (for example, with the increase in prescription and indiscriminate use of medicines and pharmaceuticals) is, therefore, the central point that monsters provoke, destabilize, and tension. In short, the deformations, pathologies, and deviations of the human are no longer solely within the domains of the teratological but are now mainly a matter of daily medicalization and a pharmacological production of self (Le Breton, 2013). The monster, thus, will always represent

a problem for the culture of its time. In this sense, the monster is a timeless and prosthetic topos. It can be a physical aberration, a code, a deviation from the norm, a presence, or an absence. The monster is that which invariably disturbs what was constructed to be measured as natural, true, intrinsic, genuine, in short, human (Markendorf; Sá, 2019, p. 8).

Seeking to consider this rich and multiple presence of monsters in culture and their specific manifestations in the present, it seems appropriate to use an organizational approach to these beings that is less rigid and more dialogical, which can allude to cultural territories to which monsters are associated, to respond to the complexities and contradictions of our time more forcefully. In this sense, the thematic groups presented by professor and researcher Márcio Markendorf³ seem intriguing for postulating dialogues with cultural fields that are, I believe, urgent for contemporary debate, reflection, criticism, and politics.

Thus, more than a catalog of monsters concerning their morphology, Professor Markendorf proposes themes and territories that can, therefore, encompass different “types” or morphologies of monsters. In this format of analysis, the focus is on how they *function, operate* within these territorial fields, that is, in the ways in which monsters activate deviations, instabilities, and tensions in certain cultural fields. Some of these themes organized by him

³ At the beginning of 2021, through remote learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I attended as an auditor two courses taught by Professor Dr. Márcio Markendorf at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. The first, "Marks of the Body – Notes on the Corporeal in Spaces of Coexistence," in the Graduate Program in Literature, and the second, "Horror Cinema and Theories of Monstrosity," in the Undergraduate Cinema Program.

(Markendorf, 2020) are: transgression, disciplinary normalization, grotesque in the aesthetic domain, artistic horror, difference, gender, race, ethnicity, lack, disabilities, social classes, colonialism, post-colonialism, feminine, queer, abjection, diseases, and post-human. These cultural territories constantly challenge politics of existence and ways of life.

In the grammar of the monstrous, aesthetic issues might be the most attention-grabbing at first. Theorists agree that, in the field of monstrosity, appearance takes on a dramatic aspect and, in general, houses the semiotic decoding of personality - ugly appearance/evil being. Everything that deviates from the typical human form (plants, robots, insects), deformities, and structural variations are elements in conflict with the prevailing culture, drawing dividing lines and labeling as monstrous what is on the other side of the institutional boundary imposed. Whether by excess, exception, or lack, by differentiation or hybridism, the monster is something that disturbs the categories of normality and beauty, characterizing a divergence from the established rule. However, thinking beyond aesthetics, the fundamental issue in constructing the monstrous relates to the *political functions and meanings assumed by such forms in specific contexts*, as the monster meets various needs in the temporal, geographical, corporeal, sexual, technological, and other realms (Markendorf; Sá, 2019, p. 7-8, my emphasis).

Starting from these general territories, we will see that the monsters transit, therefore, through these fields, themes, and functions, acting as cultural *operators* that shuffle conventions, norms, and normative regimes, generally based on experiences of social control of bodies.

Following these approaches, it seems important to me, for a more complex reflection on monstrosity in the present, to think of monsters considering more the territories and policies in which they operate, and less their morphologies, catalogings, and classic monster inventories. This reinforces the objectives of the thesis currently in progress, when it is noted that monsters have become familiar, as they have ceased to be only beings that opposed explicitly the human to also confuse with us, sliding from a teratological or fantastic monster inventory to a moral, behavioral, and subjective one.

What we call monster or monstrous is a kind of borderline case, an extreme phenomenon, a marginalized form, a case of abjection, an epistemological challenge, being the concept of boundary necessary for the construction of identity, whether that which is defined as natural or that which points out the deviation of formation (Markendorf; Sá, 2019, p. 7).

On another occasion (Buiati, 2023), I discussed more broadly how monsters can destabilize creative thinking, subjectivity, and the body to rethink creation policies for a specific territory of dance practices and how this reverberates in the experience and overflow of emotions lived in the present. In the mentioned text, I pointed out some notions that are now being developed in the present research from a field of compositional practices in dance such as the idea of *monster~function*⁴ and the *uncanny activation operators*.

For this article, I will deepen the discussion of the encounter of monsters with dance through the lens of politics, seeking to think about the transit between specific and situated creation practices with the macropolitical apparatus in which we have been immersed in recent years. To achieve this goal, I start by contextualizing the relationship between dance and politics from which I begin to later discuss the creative process of a choreography carried out within the scope of the ongoing research that touched, through creation practice, the theoretical-conceptual aspects discussed in this text.

In general, considering the focus of this dossier, the questions that guide the reflections placed here revolve around the following questions: where is dance in politics and politics in dance? How to think about aesthetic propositions considering their political dimensions?

Dance and Politics

In the article “Choreopolitics and Choreopolicing”, the researcher, curator, and playwright Andre Lepecki (2011) outlines a discussion that has become a reference for dance studies concerning the relationship with politics. In the text, he starts especially from the considerations of philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière, who unite the art-politics binary in a single definition, with the body, its capabilities, and its potentials as the

⁴ The use of the tilde instead of the hyphen is a strategy employed by researcher Alice Stefânia Curi, the advisor for this research, which I also adopt in combining different terms and expressions. According to her, this substitution refers to the image of the Möbius Strip and aims to emphasize the fluidity between the articulated perspectives, sounding less sectarian than the hyphen or slash, giving more emphasis to the ambivalence and reciprocity between the parts (Curi, 2023).

central knot of this link. In this track, instead of representing a point of analysis segmented into two fronts, the goal was to think of the two terms, art and politics, “as a continuum whose function is to disturb the blind formatting of gestures, habits, and perceptions”, seeming obvious to him at the time that Agamben and Rancière's positions had “direct consequences for thinking about current dance and its politics, as well as some performances that prioritize movement and choreography” (Lepecki, 2011, p. 44).

Following these clues, I bring up some other questions that I think are useful for our reflection: what would it mean to think about “current dance and its politics”? Or, distancing myself from 2011, the year the text was written, and returning to 2024, what do current dance production and its politics have to reveal about the present and the monsters of the present? Or, better yet, what does dance have to reveal about the now? What does it have to create in, with, and about the now, and how do the monsters of the now participate in this process?

Risking, on one hand, falling into a generalization, as if “current dance” were a single, linear, and homogeneous thing, which we know it is not, and perhaps, on the other hand, trying to understand that “dance”, with all its expressive, aesthetic, and cultural multiplicity, responds in some similar way to a certain political regime of the present, since it is anchored in the body, I try to understand it here, following Lepecki, as “a social theory *of* action, and as social theory *in* action, [which] would simultaneously constitute its distinctive trait among the arts and its most specific and relevant political strength” (Lepecki, 2011, p. 45, author's emphasis), since dancing incorporates, embodies, and consequently theorizes the social context.

In this sense, a whole variety of choreographic regimes would politically respond in some way to the present: either by questioning it or passively reproducing its conditioning mechanisms. I believe it is important to emphasize that this process of “response” of dancing, this choreographic response to the present time~space, does not occur, even with Lepecki, in a way that translates,

interprets, represents, manifests, expresses, reflects, or even metaphorizes reality, since we share the understanding that “choreography should not be understood as an image, allegory, or metaphor of politics and the social. It is, above all, the primary material, the concept, that names the expressive matrix of the political function” (Lepecki, 2011, p. 46).

Choreography and politics thus share a series of common constitutive elements, such as ephemerality, precariousness, identification between the product of work and action itself, redistribution of habits and gestures, and enhancement of potentials (Lepecki, 2011, p. 45–46), elements that would elide possible boundaries between them, from which it follows that thinking, producing, and creating choreography, or, in other words, making dance coincides with making politics, since “choreography activates a plurality of diverse virtual domains – social, political, economic, linguistic, somatic, racial, aesthetic, gender – and intertwines them all in its very particular plane of composition, always on the verge of disappearance and always creating a future” (Lepecki, 2011, p. 46).

It is around these propositions that Andre Lepecki encloses his concept of *choreopolitics*, establishing a relationship between body and territory, between dance and the context where practices, modes, and pedagogies of creation are forged, or, as he defined it, “a particular and immanent activity of action” intrinsically linked to a “choreographic politics of the ground”, where a “co-constitutive resonance between dance and its places; and between places and their dances” is established (Lepecki, 2011, p. 47).

A “current dance” (at least a certain dance called Western) is, therefore, embedded in a common choreopolitical context that, although it has territorial, geographical, and cultural particularities, is immersed in the same broad process of global operationalization of modes of life production linked especially to the latest metamorphosis of contemporary post-industrial capitalism, that is, its financialized neoliberal phase:

With successive transmutations, this regime has been persisting and becoming more sophisticated since the late 15th century, when it was founded. Its contemporary version — financialized, neoliberal, and globalized — began to form at the turn of the 19th century into the 20th and intensified after World War I, when capital became internationalized; but it was from the mid-1970s that it reached its full power, asserting itself forcefully — and not coincidentally — after the micropolitical movements that shook the planet in the 1960s and 1970s (Rolnik, 2018, p. 29).

If, on one hand, there are territorial and contextual particularities that imply specific choreographic productions, on the other, there is a body~subjectivity conditioned in globally shared modes of production that tend precisely towards homogenization, control, flattening, and anesthesia of affects and sensitivity, the blind formatting of gestures, habits, and perceptions, as Lepecki (2011, p. 43–44) already foreshadowed about the previous decade. Analyzing an article by Suely Rolnik⁵ that discusses the political and power dimension, discipline, and control around art and creative processes, the actress, teacher, and researcher Alice Stefânia Curi also states that

this subtle domination, which neutralizes without obvious violence, through permanent co-optation of new impulses, shifts our inventive potential to actions that are of interest to maintaining a status quo, masked as fluid, rhythmic, and mutant. The media, for example, acts subliminally on bodies in a process of vectorization of desires that triggers a confusion of values and priorities that often radically distances us from other mobilizations, often more genuine. Thus, the resistance bias to all this co-optation needs to seek support in equally subtle but potent actions. Large demonstrations, inflamed speeches, direct clashes have not, in isolation, resolved this type of issue. In some cases, they even feed the continuation of this state of affairs (Curi, 2013, p. 27).

We thus recognize a direct relationship between the production of body~subjectivity and the economic modes of production associated with specific conjunctures of each phase of the capitalist system⁶, being crucial for the reflection on the body in the 21st century “to understand the technical, political, and subjective injunctions” (Patzdorf, 2021, p. 11) that conform it. In this sense, dance, once again, plays a leading role, as it “and

⁵ The article “Geopolitics of Pimping,” available at [this link](#) (accessed in June 2024).

⁶ Looking to think about the body and dance in tension with contemporary modes of subjectivation, artist and researcher Danilo Patzdorf (2021, p. 11) identifies three major phases of the capitalist system: agricultural capitalism (colonization), industrial capitalism (industrialization), and neoliberal capitalism (financialization). Lepecki (Lepecki, 2016, p. 4), on the other hand, starts from five major divisions of the same system: “mercantilist capitalism, industrial capitalism, fordist capitalism, liberal capitalism, neoliberal capitalism”.

choreography, as knowledge formations on the conditions of mobility, self-mobility, and generalizes mobilization, become critical to address and counter the kinetic impetus in neoliberalism” (Lepecki, 2016, p. 5).

It is also in this field that psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik (2018) delves to problematize the implications of a precarious way of life in the micro and macro-politics of contemporaneity, especially concerning its effects and impacts on subjectivity and the psychic processes around what she defines as the *colonial-capitalistic unconscious*: a specific mode of conditioning of the body~subjectivity in the capitalist system, a “dominant unconscious politics in this regime” that metamorphosed and adapted to its different phases throughout history, “varying only its modalities along with its transmutations and its forms of abuse of the vital force of creation and cooperation” (Rolnik, 2018, p. 36–37).

Therefore, to approach the modes of production of a “current dance”, the ways of thinking and writing theory about dance today, and also the ways of the monster’s participation in this political perspective of subjectivation, I am interested in deepening the reflection on neoliberal subjectivation processes, their modes of producing affects, ordering desire, and anesthetizing resistances and objections, since it is this phenomenon that most strongly mediates our corporeality in the present. In other words, I am interested in thinking about how neoliberal subjectivation processes produce, manage, and conform monsters, understood here, especially from their subjective~moral facets, rather than teratological, as was predominant until the 19th century. According to Lepecki:

In permeating our actions, neoliberal conditioning shows how it has already captured subjectivity. Having captured subjectivity, it permeates the making of art and the making of discourses about art. The conditioning becomes our shared nervous system. Including art’s and theory’s nervous systems (Lepecki, 2016, p. 3).

Thus, in its ebbs and flows, “current dance”, or a “Western dance”, would respond to a certain body also subjectified in and by the West, a “Western body”, risking once again falling into the traps

of generalization that always conceal complex processes, usually of violence and extermination, of the different ways and modes of being in life in the world. Thus, “Western body” and “Western dance,” on one hand, do not precisely respond to the complex entanglement of choreographic production today, even though, on the other hand, these terms encompass certain common elements of conformation and subjective violence, since we are inserted in the same globalized economic system based on neoliberalism.

A possible analogy can be made between a Western choreopolitics of dance and the very notion of the *Western body*, as defined by art educator and researcher Danilo Patzdorf, where:

Western body (...) is the deliberately imprecise term we use here to try to designate this immensely diverse set of bodies subjected to the globalized phase of capitalism, whose behaviors, gestures, and desires, despite the specificities (regional, cultural, or phenotypic) of each people, are more or less similar because they face similar processes of disenchantment, discipline, and exhaustion (Patzdorf, 2021, p. 18).

Disenchantment that was already present in 2011, at the time of the writing of “Choreopolitics and Choreopolicing” by Lepecki, and that has intensified greatly in recent years, especially in the Brazilian context. Although most of the current regimes of control and conditioning of the body and subjectivity, as we have seen, were already in action for some decades at that point, I think there has been an intensification of some relevant clashes for reflection between body, dance, politics, and creation, especially in the case of Brazil, which has gone through a period of great political and social turmoil, with quite pressing intensity and continuity in recent years.

Since the infamous popular protests of June 2013⁷, passing through an institutionalized parliamentary coup in 2016, the election of a far-right representative for the presidency of the republic in 2018, and the execution of an extensive necropolitics during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, we finally reached the peak

⁷ Started in São Paulo after a fare increase in public transportation, the protests spread throughout the country in turmoil during June 2013 and gathered other grievances, such as against police violence, lack of investment in public services, excessive spending on major sporting events, large media conglomerates, political parties, corruption, and failures of the democratic system itself.

of an ethical~aesthetic~political crisis unleashed in 2022. At this point, we have a new electoral process marked by a very high level of social agitation and tension, by blatant institutionalized and naturalized violence, by the harmful action of an ostensive digital militia, and by the rupture, emptying, and expropriation of public and private coexistence ties⁸.

All these milestones are still accompanied, in recent years Brazilian context, by the exponential increase of social degradation, poverty, hunger, the persistence of entrenched racism throughout the social fabric, the maintenance of the extermination of indigenous peoples and their territories, and the instrumentalization of mainstream media and traditional press by ideological tendencies. We also have the rise of certain religious and military strands to power, the massive armament of the civilian population, as well as the exponential increase in deforestation and the destruction of national biomes, to name just a few points.

Although Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, a representative of a supposedly progressive broad democratic front, was elected president at the end of that tense electoral process of 2022, what we saw, right at the beginning of 2023, was the attempt of a new coup, with invasion, depredation, and destruction of the headquarters of the republic's powers. With an entire plan devised by the top hierarchies of the previous president's government, Jair Bolsonaro, who refused to relinquish power, allied with the participation of the armed forces and the connivance of various sectors of the legal world and civil society, what we witnessed with this unfortunate episode was the confirmation that a deep erosion of institutions and a sharp weakening of democracy in our country were underway.

⁸ Recently, two documentary journalistic series in podcast format have been published, examining the last decade in Brazil — from 2012 to 2023 — in political, social, and cultural terms. These series are quite illuminating regarding the perception of the major structural changes we are experiencing. They are: “Passado a quente” by journalist Rodrigo Vizeu (access at [this link](#)) and “Uma crise chamada Brasil” by journalist Conrado Corsalette (access at [this link](#)).

Faced with this devastating scenario and as a dance creator who lives, researches, and works in this context, I constantly return to the question: what does dance have to create in~with~about the now? What monsters were mobilized in these de-vitalizing processes experienced in our territory in recent years? Or, seeking Lepecki again: “given the conditions of the situation, how to dance and make dances and attend to dances in the age of neoliberal performance and rationality? How to write about, how to theorize dance’s theories and practices of resistance in and against the age of neoliberal performance?” (Lepecki, 2016, p. 5).

If, in 2011, in the face of the turbulent events occurring in the world⁹, Lepecki stated that it was “fundamental to understand how dance and performance have addressed this fundamental figure [policing] in understanding and directing our active life and, consequently, our political function” (Lepecki, 2011, p. 51), I ask myself the same today, after years of intensification of what was already announced there, and that has produced complete exhaustion and fatigue of the body and subjectivity (Patzdorf, 2021). How to address, through dance, the various new political forms of policing and violence?

Beyond an obvious answer, or a direct and literal choreographic or scenic response about the mentioned episodes (again, there is no metaphor between dance and politics), I assume that, in one way or another, more or less consciously, dance, or the body in dance creation, like monsters, always respond to a field, a territory of culture.

In fact, the immanent capacity of dance and monsters to theorize the social context in which they emerge, to challenge it, and to reveal the force lines that distribute the possibilities (energetic, political) of mobilization, participation, activation, as well as passivity, would bring to this artistic language, in contact with

⁹ Lepecki refers to the popular protests that occurred around the world in 2011, with notable examples including the Arab Spring (Middle East/North Africa), Occupy Wall Street (United States), and The Indignados (Spain), which were directly or indirectly a consequence of the global capitalist financial crisis in 2008.

monstrosities, a particular critical force. “Thus, it can be said that, in addition to those traits it would share with politics (ephemerality, precariousness, identification between the product of work and action itself, redistribution of habits and gestures, increase of potentials), dance would also operate as an *active epistemology of politics in context*” (Lepecki, 2011, p. 45–46, author's emphasis).

In parallel, if monsters, or monstrosity, also function as a method to read cultures (Cohen, 2000), that is, if they also act as active vectors of cultural territories, exposing their contradictions, limits, and becomings, they also stress the boundaries of politics. Here, the encounter between monsters and dance is intensified, as a connection that has especial critical force, capable of mobilizing content embedded in the present, within and through the body, and potentially functioning as an *active epistemology of politics in context*, as Lepecki stated, although it is necessary for us to be open to listening, to perceive the subjective forces that move or set movement in motion.

This is because I believe not every “current dance” is necessarily open to this listening or interested in creation processes that objectively seek to handle, mediate, manipulate, and displace the affects that cause us conditioning, repulsion, estrangement, discomfort, unfamiliarity, restlessness, discomfort, pain, anesthesia, and paralysis. Or, to put it another way, not every creation in dance would objectively aim to question the present, to dance with its monsters and resist it critically and questioningly. After all,

while the monsters born of political convenience and self-justifying nationalism function as living invitations to action, generally military (invasions, usurpations, colonizations), the monster of prohibition polices the boundaries of the possible, prohibiting, through its grotesque body, certain behaviors and actions while valuing others (Cohen, 2000, p. 42).

Therefore, it would be appropriate here, in the direction of inhabiting and investigating the invisible affects that condition our production of movement, to have the ability to discern the monstrous becoming that provokes invasions, usurpations, colonizations, disenchantment, and destruction, that is, the monster of policing, from the monster as an active power of creation and enchantment.

Thus, we need to use the monstrous expressions of the multitude to challenge and subvert the metamorphoses of artificial life turned into commodities, the capitalist power that sells the mutations of nature, and the new eugenics that supports this power. For, if as Negri and Hardt state, “the concept of the multitude forces us to enter a new world in which we can only understand ourselves as monsters” (Negri and Hardt, 2005, p. 253), it is precisely in this world of monsters that humanity must seize its future (Peixoto Junior, 2010, p. 187).

Therefore, aiming for a possible future that will only exist if we engage the monsters who are the others, but who are also essentially ourselves, we must seek dance creation strategies that challenge this framework of disenchantment, in the sense of producing action gaps in the breaches of neoliberal control and conditioning. Thus, no matter how alienated we are in our creative spaces from the urgent themes imposed on our social, cultural, and political reality, I also believe it is already elucidated that all art responds to a territory, to a *choreopolitics*, even though in certain dance circuits, choreography assumes the role of control, conditioning, repetition, and maintenance of the *status quo*, or, to evoke the opposing pair worked by Lepecki, the role of *choreopolicing*, where

what matters is a particular fusion of choreography and policing—choreopolicing. The aim of choreopolicing is to *demobilize political action by implementing a certain movement* that, when moving, blinds and consensually is incapable of mobilizing discord; a movement incapable of breaking with the reproduction of imposed circulation (Lepecki, 2011, p. 54, author's emphasis).

Thus, by using movement as a form of political demobilization, not every “current dance” would aim to question the present, as it would be more aligned with a kinetic production whose intention is not to mobilize dissent in imposed modes of circulation but to act in a production of sterile movement or, again with Lepecki (2017), aligned with an unspoken consensus of body-subjectivity that corresponds to the model developed and polished by modernity concerning the privilege of action, productivity, and efficiency. A kinetic movement imposed at a certain historical and contextual time, as a constitutive attribute of a whole worldview, of a whole way of life: white, bourgeois, hetero-cis-normative, patriarchal. Therefore, according to modern mentality, there is no room for non-movement, for pause. Analogously, this scenario was the same observed in relation to monsters enclosed in freak-show spectacles,

where this worldview needed monsters as its opposite (Buiati, 2023), just as it forged an oppressive need for movement in opposition to pause, to non-movement.

For modern subjectivity, the ethical, affective, and political challenge is to find sustainable ways of relationality. How can a supposed independent being establish a relationship with things, with the world, with the other, and still remain a good avatar of the “emblem” of modernity: movement? Including the kinetic in the ethical-political question of modern subjectivity brings us back to the problem of how to dance against the hegemonic fantasies of modernity since these fantasies are linked to the imperative of constantly exhibiting mobility (Lepecki, 2017, p. 38).

The aim is to dance against the hegemonic fantasies of modernity, being attentive, however, to the fetish of constant mobility, creating with the monsters other fictions, other keys to motricity that play and dismantle preconceived and codified kinetic paths. Therefore, the “current dance” that intrigues and interests me is the one that is actively in contact with the paradoxical forces of the now, that intends to challenge these forces, perceive them, open gaps for the emergence of strangeness, in an attempt to denaturalize barbarism or, as Professor Jardel Sander would say, to desevidence the body, the present. A dance that seeks to “affirm the present, not as an assumption of what is offered to us, but as a search for possibilities” (Sander, 2009, p. 388), in an attempt not to take it as given, certain, not to accept passively the brutality and bestiality as the operative mode of existence. And so, in these temporary zones of coexistence and creation, in contact with the affects of the present, to make micropolitics, to create vitality and enchantment.

The show Manada

In ethology, zoology, and animal husbandry, the term herd refers to a group of animals of the same species that are together or that live, feed, and move together. Normally, the term refers to mammals in the wild and domesticated cattle, such as cows or buffalo, but, with the appropriate poetic license, it can also refer to the human species. The conceptual play around the title of

the show *Manada*¹⁰, expanding the original definition of the term to also include a “human” group, was intentional, as it aimed to allude to the expression *cattle*, commonly used in the heated, violent, and polarized debate of Brazilian politics over the last four years to refer to groups of far-right people who supported former president Jair Bolsonaro.

The studies carried out with the *des~*¹¹ during the second half of 2022 greatly circled around and deepened the ethical~aesthetic~political~poetic tangents of the issues investigated in the thesis, which confirmed a conceptual framework that imposed itself definitively, understanding monsters also as destabilizers of politics and a territory of creation. The performance~show *Manada* was presented in January 2023¹², and the preceding six months of heightened political debate surrounding the presidential elections permeated and influenced the poetic production of the group meetings, so it made no sense not to think and reflect on this entire context in the rehearsal room.

This need also seemed to align with the transformations and destabilizations that my creative journey had already been undergoing, since the beginning of the thesis studies. If choreography, training, methodology, scene, staging, and dramaturgy had already entered a process of blurring, and the political implications of the tensioning of monstrosities in creation in the production of the stage body seemed increasingly urgent, the scenic destabilizations would now reach another degree. Not radical or extraordinary in themselves, but in relation, once again, to my creative journey.

¹⁰ Link to the [full performance](#). Link to the complete [technical sheet](#).

¹¹ Research and creation dance group, which I have led at the Federal Institute of Brasília since 2017, composed of students from the Bachelor's Degree in Dance and independent artists from the city of Brasília. The studies and creative processes of the ongoing thesis are carried out with the group. The group's name alludes to the prefix *de-* as a particle that "has been described in linguistic literature as a polysemous prefix – [and that] presents both a meaning of negation and reversal in the lexical items to which it is attached" (Bona; Ribeiro, 2018, p. 612).

¹² The performance, with a very open and experimental character, took place in the public space of the street and at the Federal Institute of Brasília, which hosts the group.

Manada was, in fact, a grand experiment, in which I allowed myself, in a much freer way, to make mistakes and rehearse stage organizations I had never tried before. After several years of creating shows for Italian stages, I used *Manada* to investigate and further test the limits of the notion of choreography, spectacle and scene that had been referencing me up to that point. Three theoretical references, shared and collectively discussed in the group, were fundamental and substantiated the production of *Manada* in this direction: the text already mentioned by André Lepecki (2011), “Coreopolítica e Coreopólicia” (“Choreopolitics and Choreopolicing”); a text by Professor Alexandre Nodari (2022), “Limitar o limite: modos de subsistência” (“Limiting the Limit: Modes of Subsistence”); and finally, an article by the artist Eleonora Fabião (2013), “Programa performativo: o corpo em experiência” (“Performative Program: The Body in Experience”).

In his text, Lepecki discusses and analyzes the performance *Tompkins Square Crawl* by the American artist William Pope.L, whose artistic production is examined, precisely, in Fabião's text, to support her propositions about her *performative program*. This same performance was also addressed and studied in a course taken during the doctoral program¹³. Meanwhile, Nodari's propositions about composition and creation as bricolage and mode of subsistence, for him the only possible strategy against the limits imposed by violence and barbarism, were linked to the need of an inherent political intentionality in choreography, as proposed by Lepecki, while also seeming to align with the ethical~aesthetic~political questioning that Fabião's *performative program* makes of the body and public space.

These theoretical-conceptual references joined our choreographic thinking, which was already underway, to support both the transformations in the staging proposal, here much more hybrid, flirting with performance and intervention, and the needs for release and outpouring of the affects and impulses of anger, fear,

¹³ The course “Special Topics in Compositional Processes for the Stage 2” taught by Professor Dr. Elisabeth Lopes.

resentment, and hatred stemming from the violent and aggressive political moment we were going through, right after the election results and the inauguration of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, along with a broad democratic front.



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Three days before the group's return for the realization of *Manada*, on January 8, 2023, the invasion of the Three Powers Plaza in Brasília occurred by far-right terrorist groups questioning the election results. The destruction of material, historical, artistic, memorial, and moral heritage deeply shook us, and again, it simply wouldn't have made sense to think of a staging proposal without tensioning these affects that had just imploded in our own bodies. The pendulum between ecstasy and disenchantment, which permeated this entire research, remained very present.

It is from this that I decided to make political-poetic citations and critiques within *Manada* more explicitly than usual. Or, in other words, it is in this staging that I intended, in a more deliberate way, to give vent to

the affects (Pais, 2021) that we collectively experienced at that moment. Thus, I united, simultaneously in a single staging, the

thesis studies, based on the *uncanny activation operators* that were being tested with the group, and the need of pain fabulation (Greiner, 2021) and the affects of violence experienced in the heat of the moment throughout the months of work, since the *des~* meetings returned to the face-to-face mode.

Thus *Manada* is born: an experimental attempt of body agency in an intensive state, through a program of actions that aims to question the very status of the body in performance, the institutional limits of public and private space, to criticize mass manipulations around human groups subjected as “cattle” and, along with all this, to further test the limit of understanding of the idea of choreography, scene, and spectacle.

Openly inspired by the performance “Tompkins Square Crawl” (1991) by the artist William Pope.L, *Manada* also specifically relies on two of the *uncanny activation operators* that were being experimented with — *the quadruped and the dizzy one* — with the intention of exploring an inversion of the metaphysics of the body's utility and a demetricizing occupation of space (Nodari, 2022, p. 357), in order to generate a bodily experience of risk and vulnerability in openness to the intensive. With the incorporation and tensioning of the limits of public space, the show seeks to tension the boundaries between the individual and the social, the



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private and the public, politics and bestiality, and finally, the boundaries of humanity and monstrosity.

Regarding the staging exercise, *Manada* also represents a change in understanding and a reinterpretation concerning the concept of *limit*, which I would like to explore a little more. This point is of utmost importance since the creation of limits and constraints, symbolized mainly by the use of a square on the floor, was a necessary scenic and subjective strategy in the process of *O Inquietante*¹⁴ (*The Uncanny*), but this limit, fundamental in that context, gradually seemed unable to sustain the scenic body that emerged in the continuation of the research.

Nodari's text (2022, p. 359), following the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, helped me to conceptually understand the difference between an *extensive limit* and an *intensive limit*. While the first limits and informs bodies, through a metric and external action, of the law, marking an extension, the second, internal, dynamic, immanent, and non-metric "is expressed not by a contour, but by a way of being, by a mode (of life), a habit: not a determined place, but a way of inhabiting the world, a relational position" (Nodari, 2022, p. 360).

The limit represented, for example, by the pandemic, the quarantines, the square rooms and spaces at the time of producing *The Uncanny*, or by the body itself more broadly, which insists on creating in the face of an overwhelming present and insists on remaining in a state of enchantment, is experienced through two modalities of interdiction: one extensive and the other intensive. The extensive limit prohibits, censors, imposes the stalling of impulses. In contrast, the intensive limit seeks to "deal with limits differently; make them an inclination – subvert them, turn them downwards, *in-tend-them*, tend them inwards: incorporate and

¹⁴ In this solo spectacle (link to the [full performance](#)), which is also part of the thesis, all the dance is performed within a square marked on the floor, defining the boundaries within which the stage actions were to take place. The square's delimitation thus served as a safe zone that allowed the monster to emerge or, in other words, allowed me to *disfigure* myself. Immersing in experiments within a marked square symbolically gave me greater security to enter and exit the *bodily states* I needed to explore on the solo.

transform them into an intense way of life” (Nodari, 2022, p. 368, author’s emphasis).

This *intensive* definition of limit seemed to allude to the scenic body experienced in *The Uncanny*, more than the *extensive*, as might be suggested by the presence of the square, since on stage, the body activated a relational position that constantly needed to manage the inside and outside, that is, relate at the same time to the dilation of the bodily state, in semi-trance, in *blurring* and *disfigurement*, and to the predefined *program* of actions to be executed on the scene, as proposed and jointly produced with the dramaturg.

In this sense, the square, as a representation of an *extensive limit*, of a containment barrier, merely alluded to this overflow blockade, since, as a symbolic and subjectivation strategy, it served to contain contents that emerged and overflowed in the body. However, what actually stabilized the scenic body was mastering this limit in an *intensive state*, in the body in scenic action, in play, and not in cutting off the flow that the square would represent as extensiveness. In other words, ultimately, this body could be produced “outside of a square” literally drawn on the ground, as long as it sought “an operation of *limiting* [not delimiting] the *limit*, incorporating it, making from form, body, converting the boundary-limit into an intense limit” (Nodari, 2022, p. 360, author’s emphasis).

This transition from one notion of limit to another, that aimed to activate a body outside the limit and within the limit *at the same time*, was somehow sought, more intentionally, in *Manada*. This movement also provokes an implosion of the categorical and rigid dichotomy between the two states of limit, internal and external, as “it is about a relationship *between* perspective and things, that is, of meaning. What exists are force lines, metrification and demetrification processes that overlap, reverse, anticipate and conspire with each other” (Nodari, 2022, p. 360, author’s emphasis). It is then up to the scenic body to manage this boundary, to negotiate with these force lines.

Here, I recall once again some of the primary monsters characteristics, as informed by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2000) and Julio Jeha (2009): the monster's body inhabits and destabilizes boundaries, always presenting an ambiguity, an in-between place, a threshold of becoming something else. Therefore, the monster inhabits the limit, whether it is extensive or intensive. If the monster is or inhabits/points to the limit, what type of boundary are we talking about? Following the idea developed here, the limit would not be the focus in itself, as objectivity/subjectivity, inside/outside, form/non-form, but the *experience of the boundary* should be the axis of investigation.

The idea of experimenting with the *function* exercised by the monster as a boundary agent begins to present itself here, rather than the production of a monster-body as the ultimate goal of constructing the scenic body. A function of the monstrous, more than a monstrous body, even to avoid falling into formal, imagistic, and gestural stereotypes crystallized around violent historical processes of body abjection linked to its teratological aspect (deformities, deficiencies, etc.). The *monster~function* would thus be an operator of the *border~sense* experience, of the transitional relationship between objectivity~subjectivity, of the state *between* the extensive and the intensive, as the monster inhabits, destabilizes, and blurs the limit.

By provoking this state in the body, the *monster~function*, finally, as an agent of subjectivities present in a territory where one dances, would help negotiate affects and impulses, as *Manada* also elucidated by bringing to the scene explicit aspects of political critique, in the sense of introjecting and subverting eventual restrictions, violence, and cuts imposed by a devitalizing environment – political, social, cultural. The intention is to introject the rule, restriction, and pain, to play with it, ruminate on it, experiment and subsist within the metric world, seeking “an experimentation of measures that reaches the non-metric through the introversion of a *metric* and its conversion into a *mode*, an inclination: it is by limiting extensiveness that poetic intensification

occurs” (Nodari, 2022, p. 363, author’s emphasis). Or, still, it is by limiting the violent strata of politics that dance politics in context occur, it is by limiting (intensely) the (extensive) limit that micropolitics is made.

It is understood that actions at the micropolitical level (Guattari and Rolnik, 1996), even because they are less evident or explicit, can present a great vocation for gradual and effective dissemination and strengthening of singularities. To operate in the molecular architecture (order of flows and intensities); to bring the idea of politics closer to notions of ethics, aesthetics, energy, and desire; to displace or add to the nervous and often sterile rhetoric of podiums and plenaries an effective action of the body, in the body, and between bodies. These can be more effective and consistent political avenues. (...) It is time to lend to macropolitics (the order of sedimentations, institutions, and state) instruments of aesthetics and not to make art reproduce the worn-out and not always effective mechanisms of conventional politics – verbose, imposing, generalizing. Poetic action through the aisthesis and experience has the vocation to affect artists and audience bodies intensely, stimulating them, awakening them, and activating them in a more sensitive perception of themselves and others (Curi, 2013, p. 27–28).

Thus, by converting metrics into a way of doing poetics, I also invoke here the professor and choreographer Paulo Caldas (2010), when he states that *modes* are different from *models*:

Frequently, where we would expect the multiplication and coexistence of different poetic modes, we encounter a system that insists on making poetic models inscribed in a market logic succeed one another. It is when the new that emerges in art is captured as a consumer good, occupying increasingly fragile culture sections almost as a fait divers (Caldas, 2010, p. 66, author’s emphasis).

Escaping conditioning models, therefore, presupposes a *change in production modes*, a change in creation politics. Not necessarily inventing the unprecedented, but, on the contrary, changing the way of operating with the commonplace, the known, the *familiar*.

To find, chase, provoke, or guess the *unfamiliar* within the already existing, to estrange the body, the present, the scene, the training, the subjectivity, and play with these materials, to manipulate them differently or, as Nodari (2022) also proposes, to bricolage with the very matter, with one’s own subjectivity, to consume consumption, to subsist, to decompose, to work with the remains, to ruminate, to make humus and create, with this, poetic

intensification or, within a subjectivation perspective that I have been seeking in practices with monsters, singularity:

The limit of bricolage is immanent to its raw material, to the things themselves. Because, when operating with 'residues of previous constructions and destructions,' that is, seemingly worn things (...), the *bricoleur* does not deal with empty forms, on the contrary, the possibilities of composition of the elements are 'limited by the particular history of each piece and by what subsists in it,' namely, the 'set of relations at the same time concrete and virtual,' and such limitation is precisely the condition of the *unpredictability* of composition. By intensifying what subsists in things, the *bricoleur* is a radical recycler, who is not limited to simply returning utility to things but composes their meaning" (Nodari, 2022, p. 366, author's emphasis).

In dance practices with monsters, the body, which is a limit in itself, receives other limitations by the *uncanny activation operators* to create poetics, as they have specific movement commands and actions that need to be met and executed by the subject in creation while giving vent to the impulses and affects that are being managed in the present of the creative act. In having to attend to these commands and actions, complex and objectively directed, the body fails, and, upon failing, the *blurring* and *disfiguration* of movement, gesture, and, hopefully, subjectivity emerge.

Evidently, this process did not occur successfully, fluidly, and without difficulties throughout the investigation and creation of *Manada*. On the contrary, during the process, there was tension, doubt, anger, and the impulse to organize something almost improvised, even precarious. In the heat of emotions, many compositional decisions were made in an immediate manner because what was imposed was the need to respond, with dance, to that social upheaval we were living so closely.

To some extent, therefore, part of *Manada* process was quite reactive, and only later were many of the theoretical, conceptual, and dramaturgical connections understood. What was already clear, however, was the need for destabilization, for dismantling *creation policies* that shaped practices, rehearsals, performances, and hierarchies of creation, in short, that shaped bodies and subjectivities. It was necessary, therefore, to identify and attempt to

question an ethics of the moving body, both in rehearsal rooms and in everyday life.

Manada was thus a snapshot — a synthesis of a moment, of a present. There were moments of insecurity and doubt about the strength of the proposal and its resonance with other subjects, with other bodies. And since we live in a world that does not prioritize expanded time, the time of listening, the time of experimentation, but rather productive time, the time of delivery, of the product, I continue to question, constantly, how to balance a *slow* creation policy with a *fast* market-oriented time. How to reconcile? How to think of dance as a practice of time, a dance anchored in other creation policies? How not to throw away what dance does best, which is the labor of movement and the body, in time?

From these inescapable doubts, I hope that in the creation processes with monsters, other kinetic organizations of the body will emerge, eventually dismantling psychomotor patterns and provoking deviations in compulsive, sterile, productivist, and homogenizing movement linked to the choreopolitical regime under which we are all subjected. Dance and movement thus become strategies of creation in~with~about the now, touching on the very political condition of the body by not avoiding the confrontation and tension that present's devitalizing affects provoke.

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