Dance in action – resistance policies in Lia Rodrigues’ Encarnado

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ABSTRACT: Art is a way of communication among artists and interlocutors who are connected within a network of people, things, forces and senses, in an experience sharing the sensitive. The purpose of this research was to understand how the political sense is built for a work of art taking as an example a contemporary dance show, Lia Rodrigues’ Encarnado. On the assumption that a dance show acts as a network of materialities and socialities and the political senses are built from a series of events and Actors, which characterize the transforming power of the work. The methodology used in this research was done with the contributions of the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), as an effort for systematization of a way of thinking and dealing with reality that, instead of interpreting the world, aims at describing it, taking into account its hybridization. Some of those actions were analyzed: thematic and aesthetic choices, the performances of the choreographer/ballet dancer regarding his/her own work or the public policies of dance, the choice of spaces and places for rehearsal, research, creation and presentation of works and resonances and repercussions from the public and the critics.  

Key-words: Dance. Policy. Discursive practices. Social Networks.

1 INTRODUCTION

The word action as well as the word dance are full of a multiplicity of senses. The two words together multiply even more the possibilities. This work treats dance as action from a perspective defined inside this complexity that the terms refer to: how dance can, from its performability, propose a thought or an action of resistance in a community.

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Contemporary dance is an act which cannot be done without the intention of producing sense, of communicating. At the same time, the dance performance itself is already a way of producing sense, with the search for gestures, the improvement of the body and the thematic choices to be treated in the work.

In the privileged place that dance has had in the history of human kind, the value of movement and body as expression of thoughts and sensibilities, besides being a competence or an ability, it is a way to occupy the sensitive and give meaning to that occupation. Dance may be political, because its gestures belong to the aesthetic constitution of the community where it is developed.

It is on this assumption that this article is based: *a dance show may be intentionally political and transforming (inside a situated temporal dimension) and from its action, create effects of resistance*. The question that follows this statement is: how is the political sense built in a work of contemporary dance? Or how art and politics work as intertwined issues? And moreover, how can we make art become political in its actions, its discourses, its *performactivities*?

To answer those questions and even think about many others, I chose the show *Encarnado* from the choreographer Lia Rodrigues as an example of contemporary dance work which has political effects (according to the choreographer’s intention and to the critics). New formulations of the mentioned issues appear from this choice: to what extent can this work be considered political? What are the elements that make it as such? How did its creation, production, presentation and repercussion happen? What may this specific work tell us about art and politics in contemporary times?

*Encarnado* comes from the act of incarnation, from making similar, in color or in aspect to the flesh. It also refers to the act of incarnation though painting, images in sculpture, statues, etc., making them, through color, similar to people or animals. And it is
still said of ‘encarnado’ that it is the act through which beings to which the divine is attributed are materialized. In popular parties in inland Brazil there are fierce and traditional competitions between blue and red (encarnado) parties. ‘Encarnado’ is the color of fire, of roses, of the poppy and of ripe fruit. ‘Encarnado’ is the color of blood. It is also the idea of the red color, which in the western imaginary is the color of passion, repeated, in the encarnado, through the etymology connected to the flesh (carne) (Text from the presentation of the show).

The show Encarnado, inspired on Regarding the pain of others, work from the American writer Susan Sontag (2003), is acted by 12 naked ballet dancers who reflect violence in their movements, they show how it is installed in the bodies and how the feeling of pain from the others affects us. It had its premiere in 2005, in the Centre National de la Danse – CND –, in Pantin, France. In 2007, it opened in São Paulo, in a space on the 9th floor of SESC Av. Paulista, after being shown more than 100 times in 11 countries (KATZ, 2007).

From the choreographic work of Lia Rodrigues and the notion that a dance show acts as a network of materialities and socialities (LATOUR, 2000), I will try to demonstrate that the political senses are built from a series of events and actors which characterize the transforming power of the work. The conducted analysis will be like a description (or its version) of a dance show, with the description of its characters, actors, materialities and places. Leaving the role of the researcher as the one who highlights different narratives about the work, from the questions and problems elaborated together with the actors. The work, in itself is always elusive. The confluence of those narratives stresses the polyphony of the work, without intending to get to the core, to the soul or to a sense of truth.
2 THE WAYS OF DOING

The ways of doing are based on the work of Bruno Latour (2000), especially regarding the theory actor-network (TAR), which emphasizes the descriptions of collective ways of construction and ways of existence. The TAR proposes describing what makes you make or what makes you speak about the object of study, for the actors themselves to produce their references, their theories and their contexts. Describing, being alert to concrete states and finding an appropriate way of coping with a determined situation is an activity which demands a lot from the researcher (ARENDT, 2008).

TAR refers to a sociology that aims at objectivity because it understands that sciences treat objects, assuming that objects are somewhat complicated, folded, multiple, complex, entangled. The contributions of ANT as a methodological principle are intertwined in a way of thinking and treating reality that, instead of interpreting the world, has the objective of describing it, considering its hybridization. The idea of hybridization starts already in the first work of Bruno Latour in a partnership with Steve Woolgar (LATOUR B.; WOOLGAR 1997), where the authors criticize the scientific studies which separate their content from the social context. When trying to accomplish a science in action, the purpose is to have symmetry in sciences, i.e., the social, psychological, cultural and political explanations should be treated in the same terms in the construction of a scientific knowledge. Still about the questioning of the “great divisions” existing in the social sciences, Latour (1994) proposes overcoming the modern separation between humans and non-humans, giving the same importance of treatment to the forms of interaction, studying them at the same time.

Law (1992) points out that in our interactions we have the mediation of objects such as telephone, Internet, paper, table. This article, for example, was built from a network of objects – computer, Internet, printer, CNPq scholarship – and
a network of people – in which I, Lia Rodrigues, Mary Jane Spink (my advisor), the editors, partners are part – enabling its construction and its completion. Those are the networks which help the construction of a social reality. To think of science as a network of actors is not taking into account the rationality, the objectivity or the truthfulness of facts. The network refers to the notions not as causes, but as effects reached from the interactions of the network itself. In the words of Latour (2004, p. 397), TAR is a way of “following the things through the networks where they are transported, describing them in their plots”.

In the case of the show *Encarnado*, we can also identify a network of people and another of objects, besides interactions among them which happen in a determined time and place and which were followed in this thesis. The field work, in this perspective, is a collective which articulates humans and non-humans, hybrid, mixed, multiple where what is in question are the connections and the effects that they produce. As a researcher, I tried to listen, learn, become competent to be able to change my point of view on things and to let the show, as a live work, tell its story.

The stories start from the contact with the choreographer Lia Rodrigues, creator of the show *Encarnado*. Through Lia’s speech on her work, the network started being built, giving voice to ballet dancers, partners, institutions, public policies in dance, violence, slums and many other actions, materialities and people. The meeting with Lia Rodrigues, the contact with the coreographic work and the conversation with actors involved enabled the understanding of the “field” as theme-field (SPINK, 2003).

The theme-field, as a complex of networks of senses that are interconnected, is a space created – using Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) notion – inherited or incorporated by the researcher and negotiated as he/she tries to be inserted in the webs of action. However this does not mean that it is a voluntarily created space. Quite the opposite, it is
debated and negotiated, or even better, it is argued inside a process which also has its place and time (SPINK, 2003).

Claiming to be part of a theme-field is demonstrating the ethic and political conviction that, as a researcher, I may contribute and that I am willing to discuss the relevance of my contribution with anyone, horizontally and not vertically. It is similar to the rhizome concept proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri

Differently from the trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point with any other point, and each one of their traces does not refer necessarily to the traces from the same nature, it risks playing with very different signs, including non-sign states. The rhizome cannot be reduced to the Uno or to the multiple... It is not made of units, but of dimensions, or better, of movable directions. It does not have a beginning or an end, but it always has a mean, through which it grows and overflows. It constitutes multiplicities (DELEUZE; GUATARRI, 1996, p. 31).

This concept proposes an image of thought which is opposed to the tree-thought, i.e., that which works to find the roots or ancestors, of situating the key of an existence in childhood, or even in designating the thought to the worship of origin, of birth, of the appearance in general. The tree-thought tends to build a progression from a principle or a consequence, aiming at a foundation in some truth or going from something general to a particular one. In the rhizome thought, the significant improvements happen by forking, unpredictable meetings, unprecedented angle, without an origin point or a primary principle which commands the whole. The rhizome is the method of the anti-method and it is not easy to build a study from that perspective; its principles are prudence rules about every trace or every reintroduction from the tree (DELEUZE; GUATARRI, 1996).

To let oneself be in the theme-field, to adopt the rhizome perspective may seem to be a frivolous way of
producing knowledge in art or in science. But a little groping, cartography is necessary, i.e., an inherent evaluation to make the thought appear from the multiplicity and from the chaos which are around the objects, the themes, the bodies. To move in the world today demands being informed and guided, because the complexity of means and contents is such that (today more than ever) it is nearly chaos and the chaos, according to Deleuze (1992) is much more the impossibility of a relationship between two determinations (because one does not appear without the other having already disappeared) than the speed.

The greatest difficulty in accomplishing this research was not the speed at which things were done and nor was it the brief meetings, but the desire to include the multiplicities and the complexities of this theme-field, because a show such as Encarnado is a network of materialities e sociabilities: choreographer, ballet dancers, institutions, funding, places, aesthetics, policies. A reality made objective by a diversity of practices that is, in itself, multiple (MOL, 1999).

The multiplicity is also presented in the different epistemological positions present in the thesis. The authors researched and mentioned in this work come from different theoretical references, but, in some way, they open perspectives that, when put side by side, become potentially fertile. The research in dance in Brazil (consulted for this research) has mostly, an epistemological position which comes from cognitive sciences, as one of the post-graduate programs which produces most about the theme in the country is based on this referential (Post-Graduate Course in Communication and Semiotics, Centro de Estudos do Corpo – CED – advisory by Helena Katz and Christine Greiner). The dialogue is, therefore, inevitable and necessary. The diversity which is produced from that becomes, from my point of view, interesting and contributes to the area. Those moments of clashes are signaled during the text.
The research conducted and the analysis coming from it, derive from an option made for a version which supports the multiplicity of the object (contemporary dance show) which could be seen in many other ways. The choice made was of following the work as a network, and of unfolding its performactivities, situating the decision from the point of view of Social Psychology. When I assume the notion of options and multiplicities (MOL, 1999), I also assume someone who chooses (researcher) and other voices which also make choices (choreographer, ballet dancers, critics). There it is, therefore, the first political implication of this thesis: the condition of possibilities in which it was built and created, from a political ontology, suggesting that the conditions and possibilities for a real version are not given, but are chosen by situations and people. Thus, the term “policies” refers to this process of molding reality by our practices and interactions with the world, bearing an open character and likely to be argued.

The term “policies” is used in the plural form due to the multiplicity it carries. Law and Mol (2002) ask what complexity is and how to deal with this in our knowledge production practices. Although simplification in social sciences is seen as a way of violence, the proposal of the authors is not to defend complexity or to report simplification, but otherwise to create ways to deal with the complexities, in ways they can be accepted, produced and performed. It is to understand that, instead of an order, there is a diversity of orders that coexists (ways of sorting, stiles, logics, directories, discourses). The purpose of this research is to multiply glimpses, accept and work with the complexity in duality with the actors and the materialities found in the show Encarnado.

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1 Ontological politics has something to do with the way the real is implied in politics and vice-versa.
3 AND IT WAS MADE LIKE THAT

The relationship with the work happened, first, as a spectator. I went to watch the show Encarnado that was playing in a temporary unit of Serviço Social do Comércio in São Paulo (SESC SP)\(^2\), in the Avenida Paulista. The impact of the show took me to the choreographer and, in contact with Lia Rodrigues, I understood that the choreographic work went beyond the stage. I followed, then, some conversations about the show, besides having organized the *workshop* with Lia at the Bienal de Dança de Santos (2007). From then on, I followed other conversations, interviews and the visit to the Lia Rodrigues Cia. de Danças, in Rio de Janeiro. I followed also the presentation of a “show-class” about the Encarnado which happened at SESC Pompéia (SP), in August 2008, inside the project Palco Giratório.\(^3\) Still inside what could be called approach to the theme-field, I visited the headquarters of the Redes, at Favela da Maré, together with one of the ballet dancers from the company in his body awareness class.

The connections with the Encarnado came from the conversations about the theme of politics or the possibility of understanding the show as a possibility for analysis by “other” which is not a choreographer and the ballet dancers. According to Lia Rodrigues, this is interesting,

> I think it is great too, it is not only something good for you. For me it is very good talking to you because it makes me think about things, the things you pose, your questions,

\(^2\) SESC Avenida Paulista Program called “Conversations about dance” where a choreographer is invited to talk about his/her work from the point of view of a researcher. In this meeting, Lia Rodrigues talked to Professor Carmen Soares about the show Encarnado.
\(^3\) The project Palco Giratório (Spinning Stage) is an achievement of SESC Nacional in a partnership with the Regional Departments of SESC. The marathon of shows gathers, for 31 days, the shows selected by the Circuit Palco Giratório, the largest scenic arts project in the country. In the 2008 edition, 29 shows for adults, children, with dance and circus were selected, from 26 companies from eleven states. The project was created aiming at the education of the senses of the audience; the Palco Giratório is a cultural action which enlarges the research of possible multiple relationships between creators of cultural immaterial assets and the plurality of audiences and contexts that form the national diversity.
they help me to think to organize the things...about what I am doing, why I do it, it helps me to go to another place...it is great, I enjoy it a lot! (RODRIGUES, interviewed by GUZZO 2008b)

When proposing that a contemporary dance show can be intentionally political and transforming and, from its performability, it generates effects of resistance, I think about politics that is done with inextricably artistic practice. From a network of humans and objects, texts, images, places, i.e., materialities and sociabilities, these politics make it possible to reinvent compliant discourses and places to resist in the present.

_Encarnado_ makes us think about contemporary art, violence, body, blood, beauty, politics. Being a work of art, it does not represent the real, but it places the plots of a complex network in movement in a permanent process of creation in interaction with the public, with the critics, with the space, with “the forces that encourage, affections of human and inhuman bodies in their linking and germinating” (ROLNIK, 2008, p. 2).

In this research, dance was treated as inter-action, as an act which cannot be done without the intention of producing sense, of communicating. The text tried to show that a dance show may be intentionally political and transforming (inside a temporal situated dimension) and, from its action, it can generate effects of resistance.

When I chose the show Encarnado by Lia Rodrigues, I tried to show what the elements are that constitute political senses for contemporary dance from Bruno Latour’s (2000) notion of network. When I described the network of the show, from my point of view of researcher, in a dialogue with the choreographer Lia Rodrigues, I tried to describe her characters, Actors, objects, places, their stories and narratives which evidenced plots, knots, drawings, temporalities, in an action and in a performance which produces effects in the world. To this end, the research highlighted four plots which
present the characteristics of political resistance and define the show’s potential of transforming action:

1) The thematic and aesthetic choices. The thematic, connecting themes which deal with the collective such as violence and pain, derive from a political proposal of reporting. The choices of aesthetic references, in turn, point to the networks of artists who have (had) a critical stand regarding art such as Lygia Clark and Francis Bacon. Or even, from the influences of authors such as Susan Sontag and Deleuze who are also linked to critical proposals and to those transforming the present.

2) The behavior of the choreographer and the ballet dancers regarding their own work or the public policies of dance (sponsorship, notices, funding and places for presentation). It becomes evident that the way Lia Rodrigues conducts her Company is a way of making clear a political and critical posture concerning the ways of doing dance today. Lia and the ballet dancers act from an ethics which makes dance an action that goes beyond the moment of their presentation and in the way they relate to the people and the objects of the network in which we are placed.

3) The spaces and places for rehearsal, research, creation and presentation of works. In this aspect, we evidenced not only the residence in the favela da Maré, but also the way the work was presented in the Project Palco Giratório, at SESC Pompéia.

4) The resonances and repercussions, in the audience, in the critics, in the funding, broadcasting and media institutions in general. The dance discourse acts as a constructor of facts, contributing for the show to assume the political sense that it is intentionally proposed for. Dance as a discursive practice also acts in the construction of discourses about dance itself and it addresses, through movement, thoughts about political choices.
The networks that each one of those actions unpacks, in turn, do not fit within the limits of this article. The highlights shown here are the ones that I, from my point of view, could perform, because the show can propose many others for which this thesis is not able to cope with: a dance show will never fit into a thesis. What we present here is a version of the show, from a side glimpse. The attempt was to follow the things through the networks where they are transported, to describe them in their plots (LATOUR, 2004).

4 Final Considerations

According to Arendt (2008), good field work produces a quantity of new descriptions. If an explanation is relevant, a new agent is being added to the description and the network is larger than was imagined. The text is equivalent to a laboratory. It is the place of attempts, of experiments, of simulations. There are, anyway, actors and networks being traced. In this approach, the categories appear in a process where people and objects are involved, these are understood from the complex relationships and categories which they are part of. The relationships between humans and non-humans are, from this point of view, so intertwined that it is not possible to separate them: the dance, the content, the inspiring images, the public policies, the discourses, the laws. It is a matter of understanding the links which are established among them. In the Actor-network theory, the “social” is produced in the network, through existing political regimes which give material to a sociology of sciences and of techniques (LATOUR, 2000).

From this glimpse, Latour uses the term “collective social-technical”, and not society, to understand the relationships between humans and non-humans. The notion of the collective suggests the hybrid, mixed, rhizome character of those relations whereas the idea of society points to a way of thinking which separates humans and non-humans. The
epistemological guideline of ANT converges to a constructionist posture, a term that Latour (2000) retakes and defines as a construction of a reality that is neither purely social or purely individual, but a construction which is based on connections. The truth, according to Latour (2000), is a point of arrival and not a point of departure. Built, negociated, agreed and even because of that, it is always partial, historical, temporary. The connections, the mobilizations of allies, the articulations; all this helps build the real.

There is restriction, which can be placed, on the concept of network, which may help in the conclusion of this article, because it is on the limit of the notion of network that we can notice its sense and reach. The cybernetic metaphor made the sense of network popular connected to the internet, which refers to the transport of information over long distances without promoting distortion or changes in data. The Internet network makes information circulate, without any transformation. The notion of network proposed in this thesis, which is based in the theorizations of Latour, refers to flow, to alliances, to circulations where the actors and materialities involved interfere and suffer effects of constant interferences. I.e., a show understood as a network is in constant movement and transformation. The network is based on a logic of connections, which is why depending on where you are in the network, a series of connections are possible and others are not. This does not refer to the external or spatial limits of the network, but its internal agents, yes. We come back to the notion of rhizome (DELEUZE; GUATARRI, 1996) as a model that embraces multiple possibilities: “The network, as a rhizome, is marked by transformation. There is no information, only trans-formation. Then the stress falls on the action, in the work of manufacturing and transformation present in the networks (MORAES, 2003, p. 3).

The action plots of Encarnado highlighted in this text jointly build the political sense of resistance and not because the work is naturally political. The proposal, therefore, was not to get to the core of the work, because this one is always...
elusive; but to understand it in its broader sense, as a network of connections among multiple realities that are creative, political and social. When choosing themes, partners and ways of funding, the show *Encarnado* is configured as a political action of resistance. As in the political metaphor of weaving, the connection of plots in the warp produces a political action with the help of a number of other parallel and preparatory actions. Those plots and the warp are also always in movement, because, to act in a political way, there is no need to follow a *booklet* of actions which result in a ready, stable, unmovable product. It is the art of making daily choices that are linked to present concerns and problems.

Can *Encarnado* be seen as a political work of resistance? The resistance is exactly in proposing that dance can be a political action. It can, for example, be a criticism to the present ways of funding culture in Brazil, suggesting artistic survival strategies without giving in to the requirements of sponsors (which in fact are funding institutions, using the words of Lia Rodrigues herself).

It is also possible to resist by choosing other places for the creation of contemporary art, proposing dislocations from the center of cities or neighborhoods where the cultural offer is larger to the peripheries or even to the slums, where the investment in culture is even smaller or less developed. The dislocation from the center to the periphery goes against the grain of projects or markets which usually bring them from the periphery to the center, making cultural manifestations such as *funk* or *hip hop* become *fashion*.

The resistance of *Encarnado* is in re-existing, in being projected beyond the present, for beyond the already known and coded experiences, beyond a possible domain, “previously decided, in the spheres of moral and politics” (ONETO, 2007, p. 210). *Encarnado* seems to make this in many of the elements that make of it a work of art (choreographic): it is launched as an experience that goes beyond the moral and political sphere, re-existing as a possibility for the future.
May we conclude that every dance show may be political? They may, but not all dance shows are political. Contemporary dance may, intentionally, create possible connections to communicate on stage the production of differences. By contemplating not only problems referring to its own making, connecting a dance with its time and with the problems of the contemporary world. Dance may have a privileged place to propose new ways of experiencing the body and open possibilities for connections with forces and senses that extrapolate the objectivity and the rationality present in the discourses of science or even in politics.

The focus is in the artistic work, you don’t need to have a political message, because everything is political. I don’t believe in messages in my work, I believe that the work of art speaks for itself [...] It is another type of, clear, language: you have to open your ears, your eyes, your body and be prepared to see that connection with the artistic work. This is very revolutionary. That is why art is not important in this world, a world of utilities. [...] art may be very revolutionary in this world.⁴ (RODRIGUES, interviewed by RODRIGUEZ, 2006).

⁴ I think the work of art in itself has no political message. The focus is inside the work of art, I mean, you don’t need to do it as a political message because everything is political. I don’t believe in messages in my work. I guess the work of art speaks for itself, I don’t know if you understand what I mean. Another kind of language of course: you have to open your ears, eyes, body, to be prepared, to see this kind of connection with a work of art. This is very revolutionary, if you want. That is why art is not important for this world, this world of utilities. You know, in the United States there is no support for arts, they don’t give money to arts, it is very important to talk about these things, because art can be revolutionary in this world.
RESUMO: A arte é uma forma de comunicação entre artistas e interlocutores que se relacionam a partir de uma rede de pessoas, coisas, forças e sentidos, numa experiência de partilha do sensível. A proposta desta pesquisa foi entender como é construído o sentido político para uma obra de arte tomando como exemplo um espetáculo de dança contemporânea, o Encarnado de Lia Rodrigues. Partimos do pressuposto de que um espetáculo de dança atua como uma rede de materialidades e socialidades e os sentidos políticos são construídos a partir de uma série de acontecimentos e atores, que caracterizam a potência transformadora da obra. A metodologia empregada nesta pesquisa foi feita com as contribuições da Teoria Ator-Rede (ANT), como um esforço de sistematização de uma forma de pensar e tratar a realidade que, ao invés de interpretar o mundo, visa a descrevê-lo, levando em conta a sua hibridização. Algumas dessas ações foram analisadas: escolhas temáticas e estéticas, as atuações do coreógrafo/bailarino em relação ao seu próprio trabalho ou às políticas públicas de dança, a escolha dos espaços e lugares de ensaio, pesquisa, criação e apresentação das obras e ressonâncias e repercussões junto ao público e à crítica.


Danza en acción – políticas de resistencia no Encarnado de Lia Rodrigues

Resumen: El arte es una forma de comunicación entre artistas e interlocutores que se relacionan a partir de una red de personas, cosas, fuerzas y significados, en una experiencia de compartir lo sensible. El propósito de esta investigación era comprender cómo se construye el sentido político a través de una obra de arte, tomando como ejemplo de un espectáculo de danza contemporánea, Incarnat, de Lia Rodrigues. Tomamos como punta de partida la idea de que un espectáculo de danza funciona como una red de materialidades y socialidades, y que los significados políticos se construyen a partir de una serie de acontecimientos y actores, lo que caracteriza el potencial transformador de la obra. La metodología utilizada en esta investigación se realizó con aportes de la Teoría Actor-Red (ANT) como un esfuerzo por sistematizar una forma de pensar y de actuar con la realidad, que, en lugar de interpretar el mundo, trata de describirlo teniendo en cuenta su hibridación Se analizaron algunas de estas acciones: elecciones temáticas y estéticas, la actuación del coreógrafo/bailarín en relación con su propio trabajo o con las políticas
públicas de danza, la elección de espacios y lugares para ensayos, investigación, creación y presentación de las obras, además de las resonancias y repercusiones con el público y críticos.

**Palabras clave:** Baile. Política. Prácticas discursivas. Networks sociales.

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