



On Relations between Dance and Movement: reflections about different meanings of movement and dance

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ABSTRACT – On Relations between Dance and Movement: reflections about different meanings of movement and dance – This work resumes some ideas proposed by the dance critic and scholar André Lepecki (2008), in order to reflect about the limits of a refusal of movement as a rupture with modernity and with a certain notion of choreography. For this purpose, a critical reading of the way dance history is conceived in this work is made, and then three nuances for the notion of movement are proposed, in order to point out that the conjunction between dance and movement is neither univocal nor have always the same political or conceptual implications.

Keywords: **Dance. Movement. Choreography. Critics. Modernity.**

RÉSUMÉ – A propos des Relations entre la Danse et le Mouvement: réflexions sur différentes notions de mouvement et de danse – Cet article reprend idées proposées par le critique et érudit de danse André Lepecki (2008), afin de réfléchir sur les limites de la compréhension d'un refus du mouvement comme une manière de rompre avec la modernité et avec une certaine notion de chorégraphie. Pour cela, il est proposé une lecture critique de la narrative de la histoire de la danse développé à cette œuvre, pour ensuite, être proposés aucunes distinctions conceptuelles sur la notion de mouvement, afin de défendre que l'articulation entre danse et mouvement n'est pas univoque e n'a pas plus toujours les mêmes implications politiques ou conceptuelles.

Mots-clés: **Danse. Mouvement. Chorégraphie. Critique. Modernité.**

RESUMO – Das Relações entre Dança e Movimento: reflexões sobre diferentes noções de movimento e a dança – O trabalho retoma algumas teses do teórico da dança André Lepecki (2008), com o objetivo de apontar limites de sua aposta na recusa do movimento como caminho de ruptura com a modernidade e com determinada noção de coreografia. Para tanto, efetua-se uma leitura crítica da narrativa da história da dança desenvolvida em uma obra desse autor, para que então sejam propostos três nuançamentos da noção de movimento, a fim de apontar, desse modo, que a articulação entre dança e movimento não é necessariamente unívoca e nem sempre tem as mesmas implicações com relação a dado projeto político ou metafísico característico da modernidade.

Palavras-chave: **Dança. Movimento. Coreografia. Crítica. Modernidade.**

Movement, dance and modernity

The human movement opens the world, does not close it, as it happens with the machine agency – to close the world is to know what is going to arise in it (Tavares, 2013, p. 514).

In this article, a specific work by the dance and performance scholar André Lepecki – which has influenced and grounded an important lot of reflections on dance, mainly in North America and Western Europe, since its publication – will be approached and discussed, as a starting point for a reflection about the complexity of movement as a notion and its relations to dance. The reference to Lepecki's work here, with a critical positioning about some of its main ideas, aims to problematize and question some of Lepecki's theses regarding articulations between movement, choreography and modernity, in order to contribute to a wider discussion about the singularity of dance as an art form (in a context of hybridization and crossing of what once were the borders between art forms among themselves and also between art and other fields of knowledge).

The work that will be henceforth discussed is Lepecki's book *Exhausting dance: performance and the politics of movement* (2006). In this work, the author asks for a direct association between the establishment of the modern notion of choreography and the project of a kinetic subject, under an ontology of movement, which would be a general fundament for modernity, according to Peter Sloterdijk (2000).

In order to develop this central thesis, Lepecki starts his argumentation affirming, based on the work of the dance historian Mark Franko, that the immediate and inextricable common sense association between dance and movement was not necessary or evident in other historical periods, and that, at the beginning of Renaissance, for example, "choreography defined itself only secondarily in relationship to movement" (Lepecki 2006, p. 2). In the words of the dance scholar Rodocanachi, quoted by Franko and Lepecki (2006, p. 3): "as for the movements, it is the dance itself that seems to have been the least of the dancer's concern".

Without specifying what, then, would be the dancers' concerns alternatively to movement, and what would define or singularize dance in other historical periods or contexts different from modernity, Lepecki argues that

the combination between dance and movement present in the common sense of our time would be due to the fact that:

The development of dance as an autonomous art form in the West, from the Renaissance on, increasingly aligns itself with an ideal of ongoing motility. Dance's drive towards a spectacular display of movement becomes its modernity, in the sense Peter Sloterdijk in the epigraph to this chapter defines it: as an epoch and a *mode of being* where the *kinetic* corresponds to 'that which in modernity is *most real*' (2000b, p. 27, emphasis added). As the kinetic project of modernity becomes modernity's ontology (its inescapable reality, its foundational truth), so the project of Western dance becomes more and more aligned with the production and display of a body and a subjectivity fit to perform this unstoppable motility (Lepecki 2006, p. 3).

Based on Sloterdijk theses, Lepecki will develop, throughout his work, a critical analysis of choreography, understanding it as a mechanism to submit both body and desire to disciplinary regimes, associated to modernity, where the subject "experiences his truth as (and within) a ceaseless drive for autonomous, self-motivated, endless, spectacular movement" (Lepecki, 2006, p. 13).

In opposition to the centrality of *movement*, which would characterize choreography and modernity (intrinsically associated), as understood in the aforementioned work, Lepecki resorts to the notion of *still-act* – proposed by the anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis, as a concept which describes "[...] moments when a subject interrupts historical flow and *practices* historical interrogation." (Lepecki, 2006, p. 15) – to focus and analyze, based on that notion, different dance works in which the artists refused to move, remaining, for example, paused or lying down for long periods of time¹, so bringing to life the aforementioned *still-acts*, which also imply, in Lepecki's words:

[...] a sudden crisis of the image of the dancer's presence (on the stage as well as in the world) as being one always serving movement. The *still-act*, dance's exhaustion, opens up the possibility of thinking contemporary experimental dance's self-critique as an ontological critique, moreover as a critique of dance's political ontology. The undoing of the unquestioned alignment of dance with movement initiated by the *still-act* refigures the dancer's participation in mobility – it initiates a performative critique of his or her participation in the general economy of mobility that informs, sup-

ports, and reproduces the ideological formations of late capitalist modernity (Lepecki, 2006, p. 16).

Following his analysis of dance works in which the dancers either refuse to move or propose *immobility* states, as well as pursuing this critical track about the injunction of modernity, choreography and movement, Lepecki will defend, throughout the book, a certain understanding of the historical constitution of choreography, based on the work *Orchesographie*, by Thoinot Arbeau (book originally published in 1588), discussing, from this work, the project of associating dance and writing and the constitution of a choreographic subject that would be characterized by solipsism. After that, Lepecki then considers the works of artists like Xavier LeRoy and Jérôme Bel (among others) as works effecting radical ruptures with the fundamentals of the choreography constitution project and with certain implications of the modern association between dance and movement: in LeRoy's case, by dissolving a certain stable and fixed notion of subject and, in the case of Bel, by questioning and destabilizing the mechanisms of representation.

In short, what Lepecki seeks to develop throughout the cited work is a way of reading and historically situating a few specific contemporary works and artists under the key of how such works would position themselves before the political meaning that the modern conception of choreography would have. In other words, Lepecki seeks to deductively apply his general critical understanding of the injunctions between choreography and modernity to contemporary dance works, analyzing, then, to what extent these works unfold, reproduce or produce ruptures with such foundational project.

Having so far taken the arguments put forth by the author in general terms, I intend to establish what I think may also be *still-acts* that question, to some extent, the accelerated movement of thought and analysis of contemporary dance works produced by Lepecki. In order to do that, I will develop some ways of stepping back to question and reflect upon the path and the positions taken by the author, in order to open some cracks of uncertainty and offer other possibilities for understanding the relationships between dance and movement, as well as other ways to produce discourses on dance works.

The need to step back to critically reflect on Lepecki's ideas seems to me, first of all, justified by the fact that his work, given the very way he builds a certain type of discourse on dance (which we will examine below), can be read as an analysis which is also often prescriptive, that is, which also stipulates the paths that dance *should* take if it does not want to continue reproducing and feeding, for example, a disciplinary (and, in addition, also in his words, heteronormative, sexist and colonial) project for choreography and dance.

The possibility of reading Lepecki's work as a prescriptive work is exemplified in the interrogation brought by the artist and dance researcher Juliana Moraes (2013), in her book based on her doctoral dissertation:

I am in awe of Lepecki's ability to stitch together very intricate theories and reveal complex structures which are on the basis of modern dance. What I find tricky is the result of the author's conclusions: his insistence on *stillness* as the only viable strategy to counter what he called the subject trapped in the representation of himself. My concern is very simple, and I see this every day: imagine a young student who loves to dance, to move freely to any song, whether Madonna or Lady Gaga, it doesn't matter. Feel the wind hitting the sweaty body, the energy that vibrates from every pore, the joy of dance with another person, with many, with hundreds. [...] That boy, who loves to dance, gets into college and the theory of the movement, the one which 'stuck' the most in recent years, is this one which values the *stillness*. Well, he'll learn that to be swayed by movement is to remain trapped in the structure of representation, in the subjection of the 'auto-mobile individual' (who is self-mobilizing). So, to break with all that violence of modernity, the boy learns that he should leave movement aside and research the power of the *still-act*. Now I ask: where is the violence here? For me, it's in taking the dance away from this lad (Moraes, 2013, p. 136).

The quoted passage, by creating a hypothetical situation which is illustrative of a possible conflict between a prescriptive theorization of dance (prescriptive in the sense of indicating what should be done and valued in order to break from the *violence of modernity*) and the desire to dance and move of a student, seems to justify our intention to critically examine Lepecki's theses and especially their invocation as *the theory that 'stuck' the most in recent years*, in the words of the author, and, therefore, can shape educational and curatorial choices of great impact.

Thus, in response to the conflicts that a prescriptive interpretation of some theorization of dance can indeed generate in the real-hypothetical dancer evoked by Moraes and in the field of dance studies and production in general, it is worth asking to what extent the valorization, performed by Lepecki, of the choice certain dancers make to remain paused, supposedly without *movement* in some of their works, as well as their quite literal understanding of this choice as a way to take on the *still-act*, may or may not validate a prescriptive or analytical theorizing, based on certain general inferences about modernity and about dance history applied to specific works, establishing what would then become *the* political meaning of such works and of the aesthetic choices involved in them.

At first, it should be noted that the narrative made by Lepecki of the constitution of dance in modernity takes as its basis a particular publication: *Orchesographie* by Thoinot Arbeau, possibly under the influence of historian Mark Franko's work, cited above, which, in turn, also centered his historical discussion on Renaissance dancing around to the reading of Arbeau's work. However, in a critical review of Mark Franko's work, Angene Feves (1989), also a dance historian, questions Franko's undertaking and especially the choice to centralize the discussion about Renaissance dance around Arbeau's *Orchesographie*.

Among the main arguments Feves makes against Franko's choice of *Orchesographie* as a central source, is the consideration that Arbeau, as an author, according to her, was one of the least professionalized among the authors of manuals and treatises on dance of his time, and that Italian dance masters, especially Caroso and Negri, had greater circulation across Europe, and were authors of treatises which, according to documents consulted by her, were more important than Arbeau's book, and also describe in more detail how the dances to which they were dedicated may have been.

Another challenge Feves offers to Franko's work and to the choice of *Orchesographie* is even more relevant to what we want to point out here:

If it were possible to open a book and have 'Renaissance dancers' appear like a hologram before us, how would they move? What type of steps would they do? From which area of Europe would this vision come? Burgundy? Northern Italy? Is this apparition from the fifteenth or from the sixteenth century? Indeed, when and where is 'Renaissance'? Art historians, musicians,

and dance historians may well come up with differing answers. Even dance historians may not agree among themselves: ‘Renaissance’ may mean mid-fifteenth century to one dance specialist and late sixteenth century to another. [...] Surely ‘specificity’ is essential in surveying this information in this field. One had hoped that the ‘Pre-Classic’ dance concept, in which every type of dance before Bach was lumped together into a single category, has been proved as useless a catch-all as ‘post-classic’ dance would be for describing all the dances since Bach. Generalities become not only misleading, but positively dangerous (Feves, 1989, p. 388).

So, to what extent is it possible and valid to understand and delineate Renaissance dance, as well as the relationships between the constitution of the notion of choreography and the constitution of modernity as a single project, with the homogeneity that Lepecki’s text points to? To what extent there wouldn’t be, precisely, radically different conceptions of corporeality, dance, movement, writing, subject, aesthetics and politics operating in the historical processes of the constitution of dance in the modernity, which do not taper or amalgamate into a single coherent project, but may continue to constitute a diverse field of conflicts, of alliances and discrepancies without the possibility of a clear synthesis?

Finally, the advice and words of caution, remembered by Feves, offered by Jacques Amyot to King Henri III of France about how futile the effort of trying to write gestures and movements in text is, does not necessarily indicate (as Feves’ text makes clear) that gestures and/or movement did not have central importance in the concept of dance of the *pre-Renaissance* period, but rather that there was already a discussion (which is still present and relevant) about the desirability, the possibilities and the limits of any notation/writing of movement, relative to the nuances and complexities (of style, quality, etc.) of movement, especially of human movement, which can be found in the intercorporeal transmission of dance (and that may be lost when transmitted via written text/notation). For this reason, Feves questions the very possibilities of Franko’s goal – “[...] to uncover the specificity of the dancing body as a movement quality or style of movement.” (Franko apud Feves, 1989, p. 386) –, especially by taking only few treaties of the time, and the *Orchesographie* in particular, as his source.

In this sense, what Amyot’s warning turns evident is that the immediate association between writing and movement, which is one of the founda-

tions of Lepecki's critique on choreography as a disciplinary mechanism, although it may indeed be the project manifested in *Orchesographie*, was not a unanimous or hegemonic project in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, nor in subsequent ones. There was, as there still is, a fruitful tension between the efforts to fixate dance in a written and reproducible text (which could supposedly ensure its character of artistic *work* and *product*) and the very holes in this closed object that exactly the breadth and complexity of the notion of *movement* has the potency of pointing to and generating.

So, in short, Feves' review, regardless of how fully valid or correct it is in its assessment of Franko's work, is important as a sign that there is controversy regarding any authoritative narrative about what might have been a general project of dance conception and formation in the Renaissance, as well as regarding the existence of a sole or primary meaning embedded in the relationships between dance and the constitution of modernity. In other words, there are many reasons to support that the dance founded in the Renaissance did not have a simple, single inaugural event (as the book *Orchesographie* or some other event or document could be), but is the result of a complex and heterogeneous set of gestures in some way foundational and of different transformations of dance making procedures and conceptions, previously existent and with their specific history.

It is worth remembering that choosing a starting point for history as a sort of ground zero, whose characteristics enable a clear description of the principles of what this ground zero founds, is a quite modern undertaking of historical endeavor, which, as discussed by Rosalind Krauss (1986), is based on a quite modern notion of originality, which, according to her, possesses the key structural features of myths.

So, not necessarily the *Orchesographie*, on which Lepecki bases his analysis of dance constitution (like any other ground zero he could choose), can encompass the complexity of the projects that were to converge, not necessarily in an unisonous way, into what later would be understood by choreography and theatrical dance, and into the different uses and political implications of the constitution of this field.

Another point, even more crucial, about Lepecki's analysis that should be addressed is the reference to the work of Peter Sloterdijk (2000), and

how this work is a foundation for a certain general critical reading of the association between dance and movement.

Returning to Sloterdijk's text, right at the outset this author proposes that his critique of the "kinetic ontology" of modernity implies in "[...] a theory in which the vital difference between mobility and mobilization is proposed as criteria for an alternative 'ethics'" (Sloterdijk, 2000, p. 14). Therefore, if stating a difference between *mobility* and *mobilization* is central, then, to say the least, the notion of *movement* which would be the foundation of his criticism of the *kinetic subject* and of an *ethics and ontology of mobility* in modernity deserves to be nuanced and read under a basic question: what is, in this case, being addressed with the word *movement*?

Then, back to Sloterdijk's text, we find that his criticism of the *kinetic utopia* of modernity focuses on the injunction between a project for the world and a certain concept of movement as the possibility of the precise execution of this world project. In his words:

The projective character of this new era [modernity] results from the grandiose assumption that it will soon be possible to make the course of the world evolve in such a way that only what we reasonably want to keep in motion will be moved by our own activities. The project of modernity is grounded therefore – what was never clearly stated - in a *kinetic utopia*: the entire movement of the world is to be the performance of our design for it (Sloterdijk, 2000, p. 23)².

The issue is not so much movement itself (or a generic, not interrogated, notion of movement), but a certain conception of movement as the execution of a design, which – and this is the main point criticized by Sloterdijk – does not take into account the *movement surplus*, that is, the fact that every movement set in motion as the execution of a design also sets in motion other movements not initially planned in such design, creating a kind of unforeseen ramifications' snowball, so that nothing happens as it had actually been designed or according to the intentions of the initial design. In his words:

What moves, moves more than just itself. What makes history, always makes more than just history. That extra [...] is the kinetic surplus that exceeds limits and distorts objectives to penetrate into what was not wanted. This fatal surplus integrates with dead masses' momentum who, once put into circulation, no longer know anything about moral ends. The Kinetic

capital makes the ancient worlds explode – it has nothing against them, this is simply a result of its principle of incoercibility. It can't help but to put things to dance under accelerated melodies (Sloterdijk, 2000, p. 29).

This initial critique of the contradictions between what a design predicts and the movements not taken into consideration in this design, but put into action by its implementation, is developed, in Sloterdijk's text, into a critique on movement, insofar as movement starts to be valued in modernity under the notion of progress and as evidence of the execution of the modern subjects' designs and worldviews. Also, going back to the author's words:

Progress is the concept of movement in which the ethic-kinetic self-awareness of modern times expresses itself loudly at the same time that it hides itself the most hermetically. When the issue is progress, what comes to mind is the fundamental kinetic and kinesthetic impulse of modernity, which has the single aim of freeing the auto-mobility of men from its limitations. [...]

It is characteristic of the progressive processes to start with ethical initiatives to then continue in a kinetic automatism. [...]

There are no modern ethical imperatives that are not kinetic impulses at the same time. The categorical impulse of modernity is: in order to keep a constant activity of beings oriented toward progress, we must overcome all situations in which man is a being stuck in its own movement, self-imprisoned, not free, a sadly determined being (Sloterdijk, 2000, p. 33-35).

It is beyond the purpose and scope of this article to analyze or state a position regarding Sloterdijk's theses (which would require a more specific and detailed examination of his work). In any case, what we want to emphasize here is that his concept of mobilization does not necessarily imply a critique of all forms of movement, or any form of injunction between body and movement, but a specific critique of a particular movement conception and approach, linked to the notion of progress and subordinated to a project of recasting history and of humans being the only or the main determinant of the transformations of the landscape and the world, by "making nature" (Sloterdijk, 2000, p. 23).

So, Lepecki's argument, which, based on Sloterdijk, concludes that the association between dance and movement is a direct consequence of the establishment of modernity's *kinetic utopia* – and that therefore the rupture, in dance, with the modern project should imply a rejection to movement

that would concretely happen when dancers refuse somehow to move, remaining in pause or at rest, for example – seems not take into account the specificities of the concept of movement discussed in Sloterdijk's work (more centered in the idea of *mobilization*), nor takes into account the possible existence of other movement conceptions present in the works of different dance artists and not so directly associable to the *kinetic utopia* and the movement resulting of a mobilization project.

Therefore, I propose – as an alternative to this path, which seems linear and somewhat rushed (and, in a sense, precisely characterized by the accelerated motion meant to be criticized by the author) – to establish conceptual distinctions around the notion of *movement*, which possibly would help to reflect upon different projects and concepts (of embodiment, subject, politics) currently active in dance. The main differentiations that I defend would be: 1. Between movement and mobilization; 2. Between movement and action (and also the related distinctions between movement over something and movement itself, and between movement as an action and movement as a state); 3. Between movement and acceleration (or movement and impulse).

Movement and Mobilization

A first distinction relevant to the reflection proposed here is the one between movement and mobilization, which has already been announced, as we have seen, in Sloterdijk's text. Mobility, in this author's work, is a specific approach to movement, in the sense of actively putting things in motion based on a given design/project to create change as well as a previously envisioned outcome. Consequently, not every movement is mobilization.

Fundamentally, mobilization presupposes subordination between the movement and the expectation of a certain path and a known result. However, there are modes of movement that deliberately relate to openness, uncertainty and the unknown, not via excessive unwanted and not previously considered motion, as discussed by Sloterdijk, but via a type of approach and conception of the unknown and of indeterminacy. This can be found, for example, in the field of improvisation in dance, which turns out to be a deliberate attitude of suspension of the desire to determine, in order to spe-

cifically make room for the unknown and the otherness. In the words of two dancers who are dedicated to improvisation, Nancy Stark Smith and Ann Cooper Albright, in this respect:

Where you are when you don't know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation. It is a place from which more directions are possible than anywhere else. I call this place the Gap. The more I improvise, the more I'm convinced that it is through the medium of these gaps – this momentary suspension of reference points – that comes the unexpected and much sought after 'original' material. It's 'original' because its origin is the current moment and because it comes from outside our usual frame of reference (Smith, 1997, p. 113).

I believe the potency of improvisational practices today lies less in the opening up of more movement options (moving across a space, say, on three or four limbs instead of the usual two), but rather in understanding how to encourage a willingness to cross over into uncomfortable territories, to move in the face of fear, of what is unknown. This willingness is made possible by the paradoxically simple and yet quite sophisticated ability to be at once external and internal – both open to the world and intensely grounded in an awareness of one's ongoing experience. 'Dwelling in Possibility' refers to this dual experience of being present 'here' in order to be able to imagine what could happen out 'there'. [...] Dwelling is a heightened experience of inhabiting – fully and consciously – so that a space becomes more than the sum of its parts, so that space *makes things happen*. This conception of dwelling is similar, I believe, to what Simone Forti describes as a 'dancing stat', where sensations juice the body, encouraging imaginative connections that might otherwise be impossible (Albright, 2003, p. 260, emphasis by the author).

Smith and Albright's words subvert both the mechanistic notion of movement – in which movement is understood as the displacement of a body through a space where the references are externally fixed (Abgnano, 2000; Ferrater Mora, 1951) – but also subvert the notion of mobilization discussed by Sloterdijk, in which a movement is submitted to a design.

The poetics (the way of making) and the ethics (the way of being and living) of dance improvisation, as the passages above point to, imply the suspension of pre-determined references, as well as in valuing indeterminacy and the transit between the known and the unknown, in order to keep open the meaning of the experience, so that the unknown continues, over the experience's duration, invited and included.

As Albright puts, improvisation can be conceived as less interested in expanding possibilities of movement (which would be precisely the concept of progress criticized by Sloterdijk), and more interested in a state of dwelling in indeterminacy. So, the conception of movement implied in it is, in a sense, radically different from the mobilization *ethos*, since, instead of putting things in motion with a pre-established design or purpose, the point is to make room for things to happen without being subordinated to a human subject conceived as external to them. What, from the point of view of modern mobilization, is a problem – that more things move than those originally put in motion by the implementation of a certain design, in unpredictable and uncalculated ways – here is precisely expected to happen: to allow the unforeseen to arise. This other *ethos* implies a concept of action and subject distinct from the modern concept of mobilization as the action of a subject over objects-things, as discussed below.

Therefore, this way of approaching improvisation exemplifies the possibility (which of course is not the only one) of not necessarily conceiving or addressing movement as a synonymous of mobilization (in the sense brought by Sloterdijk), but, on the contrary, as the opening of spaces of indeterminacy and the suspension of the desire to control the outcomes of processes.

Movement and Action

Still on the subject of dance improvisation, it is worth to refer to Steve Paxton's investigations in this field, as some of the most relevant in the twentieth century. One of the practices he developed is called the *small dance*. As he explains:

All you have to do is stand up and then relax – you know – and at a certain point you realize that you've relaxed everything that you can relax but you're still standing and in that standing is quite a lot of minute movement... the skeleton holding you upright even though you're mentally relaxing. Now in that very fact of you ordering yourself to relax and yet continuing to stand – finding that limit to which you could no further relax without falling down, you're put in touch with a basic sustaining effort that goes on constantly in the body, that you don't have to be aware of. [...] We're trying to get in touch with these kinds of primal forces in the body and make them readily apparent. Call it the 'small dance'... It was a name cho-

sen largely because it's quite descriptive of the situation and because while you're doing the stand and feeling the 'small dance' you're aware that you're not 'doing' it, so, in a way, you're watching yourself perform; watching your body perform its function. And your mind is not figuring anything out and not searching for any answers or being used as an active instrument but is being used as a lens to focus on certain perceptions (Paxton, 1997, p. 23).

What Paxton's *small dance* clearly reveals is that movement exists independently from an (active) action and can be more *witnessed* rather than *acted*.

In a certain way, the existence of movement independent from action is a clear reality, however, its valorization is not anodyne, considering that the direct association between movement and mobilization, and the valorization of movement as the result of a subject's deliberation – associated to a conception of subject as one who acts over objects, being the body a passive object of knowledge and action – obliterate other possible meanings for movement beyond the action of a subject conceived as separated from the body and from things. In the small dance experience, the active *ethos* gets suspended. The only action taken is interrupting the mobilization – the action *over* something – and then emerges a subject who witnesses not an action, but something happening. However, the movement does not stop, on the contrary, it is part of what happens.

In other words, Paxton's small dance have an important philosophical implication. What Paxton tells us is, in a way, what has already been said by Heraclit: nothing exists out of movement, there is no such a thing as immobility. From the physical point of view, what could seem to be immobility actually reveals less obvious movements, but not a total absence of movement. Not a non-movement, but different modes or conceptions of movement. Intentional muscle contraction is one of the most clear and common modes, but it is not the only one, just the most obvious one, which, for being the most evident and common one, tends to subsume the notion of movement and obliterate movements that exist out of an active and evident mobility.

Other fields of experimentation in dance and bodywork, like several of the practices in what is called *Somatics*, explore similar principles by proposing forms of contacting and connecting with movements on an even more microlevel: the movement of tissues and cells, a living body kind of move-

ment, that happens beyond or before the deliberation and the action of a subject³.

Besides that, and going back to the issue of improvisation, the dancer and dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster points out that the experience of improvising can subvert the very hegemonic notion of agency, i.e., of the relationships between subject and action, as a unidirectional vector. In her words:

In the form of its function, improvisation most closely resembles a grammatical category found in the verb forms of many languages (including classical Greek) known as the middle voice. With this particular kind of verb [...] events occur neither in the active nor passive voice. The subject does not act nor is the subject acted upon [...]. The concept of an operation that is neither active nor passive such as the middle voice profoundly challenges hegemonic cultural values that persistently force a choice between the two. Most theories about the significance of human action depend upon the conception of an individuated and isolated self, located within a body that controls and manipulates in order to achieve self-expression and fulfill individual needs. The self within the body tells the body what to do, and the body executes those orders, sometimes reluctantly or inadequately or deviantly, but never autonomously. [...] The experience of improvising, however, establishes the possibility of an alternative theory of bodily agency, one that refutes the body mere instrumentality and suggests alternative formulations of individual and collective agency. Improvisation provides an experience of body in which it initiates, creates and probes playfully its own physical and semantic potential. The thinking and creating body engages in action. [...] This body, instigatory as well as responsive, grounds the development of consciousness as a hyperawareness of relationalities. [...] During this playful labor, consciousness shifts from self in relation to group, to body in relation to body, to movement in relation to space and time, to past in relation to present, and to fragment in relation to developing whole. Shared by all improvisers in a given performance, this embodied consciousness enables the making of the dance and the dance's making of itself (Foster, 2003, p. 7-8).

In short, what the 'small dance' and improvisation⁴ allow us to find is a movement reality, not necessarily as the result of an action or an action in itself, but as a state or an occurrence. The well-known Heraclit's phrase, "in the same rivers we enter and do not enter, we are and we are not" (Souza, 1996, p. 101), as well as his image of fire (uncatchable, beyond dichotomies and fixations, beyond the notions of entity and ipseity) as the principle of

all things, are not images or discourses that arose in modernity, nor they imply an ethical or political conception based on a notion of progress or on mobilization, and, still, they propose certain ontology of the world as movement – in this case, beyond the action of a subject who is conceived based on solipsism, anthropocentrism, abstraction, quantification and several other quite well known operations in the development of modernity. In other words, there is more complexity in the meaning of the word *movement* than only modernity subject, mobilization or disciplinary regime.

Movement and Acceleration

Finally, another important aspect of this reflection and nuancing on the notion of movement and its relations with dance that is being proposed here – which is especially relevant now that the city hall of Brazil's largest city is occupied by someone elected under the slogan *accelerate!* – is an examination of the relations between movement, speed and acceleration.

In the first chapter of her book *Corpos de passagem (Passing bodies)* (2001), Denise Bernuzzi de Sant'Anna reflects on the transformations in perception and subjectivity caused by the increase of the speed in the body displacements since the invention of steam trains, and later, airplanes, cars and rockets. One of the effects this kind of high speed mobility allowed by such machines, according to the author, is an erasure of the singularity of the space and the bodies since the speed makes them more and more neutral and abstract, things through we go by rather than things or places with which relations of dialogue and exchange can happen.

As Roland Barthes reminds, “[...] at 2,000 [km] per hour, in constant altitude, no sensation of speed” (Barthes apud Sant'Anna, 2001, p. 16). The very high speed paradoxically creates an immobility sensation, the body and space get abstracted, places where it goes by are only points in a geometrized and homogeneous space.

Of course, the valuing of high speeds and acceleration – i.e., the constant increase of speed driven by a given force – is directly related to what Sloterdijk points out as progress and as a kinetic utopia of modernity: the greater the possibilities of speed, the greater the possibilities of mobilization and of approaching things as objects abstracted from their uniqueness and indeterminacy.

Concerning that, Sant'Anna writes (2001, p. 19):

The adjective *slow* results from comparisons and measures, always culturally determined, historically subject to unexpected changes. When the historic conquest of speed creates new slowness as if they were only each other's opposites, all material weight tends to be perceived as a mere obstacle to be overcome, annihilated. The weight of the body is one of them. Socrates had previously been a spokesman of an ancient dream: escaping the resistance of matter, since 'the body brings about a thousand difficulties'⁵.

In other words, the valorization of high-speed is also linked to a project of overcoming the limitations and the characteristics of the body: its precariousness, its relative slowness and weakness in comparison to machines and, specially, its mortality and fallibility.

Therefore, we want to highlight that the ethics of high-speed and acceleration is not or is not necessarily an ethics that values movement *per se*. Acceleration, as we have known since Newton, is characteristic of a particular type of movement: uniformly varied movement, i.e., the movement which happens in a space with no obstacles or unpredictabilities, a space as close as possible to the abstract space of a Cartesian plane, in which the body is displaced by a force in a vector that points to a precise direction. The irregularly varied movement, from the point of view of both speed and direction, is radically different from uniformly varied movement (and, in this case, accelerated).

Thus, the ethics of acceleration is precisely an ethics resultant of the desire that the body is free from movement as becoming and as unpredictability, that is, to be free both of the micromovement of life and inside things (the movement of life processes towards death, that makes things be in constant transformation, albeit imperceptible to an usual perception), as well as of movement as open transformation of trajectories, points of view, and directions. At high-speed, we walk as close as possible to the straight line, and then the space becomes increasingly a *non-place* (in the sense of that expression discussed by Marc Augé, 2004), so that an utilitarian and abstract relationship with things is increasingly the only possible form of relationship (given that things that can be obstacles to the rectilinear and accelerated movement tend to be eliminated, and what remains tends to be

only fleeting milestones that reduce the diversity of meanings for movement).

However, the space of the human body in motion – and even more when the human body is experiencing a non-utilitarian movement, as discussed by Paul Valéry (2003) – is a space that is distinct from the abstract space where the accelerated rectilinear movement may occur. As Doris Humphrey's and Jose Limón's dance reminds us, acceleration and deceleration can establish a dialogue and their vertical alternation makes evident the radical importance of weight as a principle of movement (also widely discussed by Laurence Louppe, 2012).

Therefore, different forms of dance that emerged in the twentieth century, in different aspects, can point out movement conceptions different from a project to overcome the weight of a materiality from which we would be trying to escape.

Also, as Gonçalo Tavares (2013) reminds us, the complex variation of paths and of speeds (different from the regular and uniform variations of acceleration itself) in an irregular movement implies an ethical relationship of intimacy with the unexpected:

Let's look again to that particular dance, the dance with the Devil [image present on a folktale retold by the author]. The devil is always the symbol of the *unexpected* and not only, say, of the unexpected evil. Everything that you don't expect, everything that is not usual, scares. [...] We are, therefore, in this dance with the devil, in a dance that is no more than a deal, an *agreement of the movements with the unexpected*. To dance with the devil is to try to understand the movements of the unpredictable, is to pair with what is unknown, with what is not understood. [...] The speed of the unpredictable (symbolized by the devil) is speed without rhythm, un-rhythmic speed, hence the difficulty to follow it (Tavares, 2013, p. 269)⁶.

The devil evoked by Tavares, the one who dances in the folktale, is quite different from Mephistopheles, who ensures the expected results of Faust's endeavors. This folktale devil does not propose a uniform acceleration movement (the movement that will inevitably run over the old worlds, as it runs over the house of Philemon and Baucis), but a radically irregular rhythm, therefore, a kind of movement that is also a problem for a modern project of mobilization/acceleration.

Conclusion

Based on the differentiations and nuancing of the notion of movement defended here (namely, between movement and mobilization, movement and action, and movement and acceleration), I consider valid to claim that an alleged refusal of mobility in a dance performance – both under the most evident forms, as the ones cited by Lepecki in the examples of artists who hold long pauses, in relatively slowness, or remain in the same position, as well as other choices that Lepecki also would consider forms of that refusal, as those analyzed in Xavier Le Roy and Jérôme Bel's works – although can be seen as an attitude of questioning and tensioning the boundaries of what is considered dance and the expectations that constitute a certain *status quo* in this regard, they do not necessarily, because of that, effectively break off with modernity, since modernity is always this rupture with the *status quo* (as discussed Krauss, in the work cited above). Moreover, when this *refusal of movement* is still read in a prescriptive way (i.e., understood as the path that should be taken), thus creating a new *status quo* (a new form of hegemony and territory of power for those who first reached the alleged genius of understanding that dance as movement has exhausted itself and now, once again, as so many times throughout modernity, a *new dance* must be conceived), it can obliterate other aspects of experience dancing and watching dance which would also have the power to subvert, question, create dialectic relationships or to complicate the modern project.

Different experiences with dance that I lived, be it from the point of view of the artist, the researcher or the audience, demand me to claim that dance, when understood as fundamentally linked with movement – when the space for questioning and nuancing what we conceive as movement is kept – has the power to make evident the impossibility of stabilizing form and objectifying the body. Consequently, even when the modern project of choreography tries to submit the body to a kind of docile discipline that closes it as an object with supposedly finalized meaning, dancing can always be the failure of this project, to some degree. The experience of watching or practicing dance forms conceived as movement forms (movement, however, non-utilitarian and not necessarily reproducible or understood as execution of a project/design or a choreographic text) can be, often, one of witnessing

the simultaneous arise and disappearance of form, i.e. their incompleteness, which is also the impossibility to capture or objectify.

In this evanescent and precarious type of construction of forms, the categories of traditional dichotomy between form and content, subject and object are subverted. Although elements of this kind can be identified into what would be a language of dance, its very matter is lived as a passage. Heraclitean experience.

It might be argued that the ability to video record would subvert this evanescent character of dance, by fixing the event in images that can be reproduced and watched again. However, the experience of watching a dance work in video (such as seeing a photograph) is not enough to close the work into a fixable and objectifiable entity, given the mobility of the gaze itself which the video calls for, and its equally fragmentary and contingent character⁷.

In any case, not by chance, the history and theory (and philosophy) of art often relegate to dance a very minor role (compared to the role of visual arts, addressed as synonymous of art *per se*, but also in comparison to theater, literature, music and film), possibly because its poetic material in some way contradicts and reveals the limits of the theory and the conceptual work about art grounded on certain ontology of the work of art and the artist as entities (fixable, identifiable, stable things). A dance work, when articulated to certain notions of movement, only in part is fixable in a text or record, but in (large) part depends on the life of bodies as well as the body to body communication, therefore, it depends on relationships not achieved by acceleration or objectification. At the same time, this is also why a latent tension and contradiction cross the whole notion and constitution of choreography and of dance spectacle, since these are notions that precisely imply a certain conception of artwork (object, entity, text, fixable and stable enough thing) that contradicts the Heraclitean character of movement (or certain conceptions and approaches of movement) as something lying under every experience, dissolving identities in an continuous becoming. Therefore, disagreeing with Lepecki, I find reasons to affirm that the trait of modernity in the institution of choreography lies not in the assertion of the being-in-motion, but on the contrary, in trying to entify and fix movement

in text, conceived as something with delimited form, with definable boundaries and linearity.

In response to this endeavor, I think that many choreographers in the twentieth century (but also throughout the history of classical dance), more or less consciously, have played with this paradox, sometimes stating its impossibility even while trying to achieve this project. And, consequently, the experience of watching a dance performance tends to be always the experience of watching an intransitive becoming, of a form that never completes itself or in the way intended when it is conceived as text or object.

Post scriptum

The initial motivation for writing this article is derived from an experience of failure in writing another work. In that other text, my intention was to critically discuss the work of Jérôme Bel, understanding him as an example of an artist who bets on a certain concept, discussed by Jacques Rancière (2012, p. 45), of the “global social process as a process of auto-dissimulation” – a concept that involves the premise of the impossibility of any distinction between “image and reality”. After that, my goal was to revisit and defend Rancière’s proposition of art as a production of dissent, pointing Bel’s work limitations and problems in this regard (derived precisely from his ironic adherence to this premise of the impossibility of a distinction between image and reality).

My taking the side of a critical (and quite discordant) view in relation to Bel’s work started with my experience watching his work *Pichet Klunchun and myself*, 2004, At the *SESC Santana* (São Paulo, SP) in 2014, which, at that time, seemed to me a clear example of the limitations and problems of an ironic and parodic position by the author. I understood the irony in this work as a strategy of staying in an apparently safe (or well defended) position of self-indulgency (or guilt) in relation to an obvious Eurocentrism in the type of encounter with the other established by the mechanisms of this show and, then, I intended to develop a critique of this position.

I still maintain my critical opinion about this aspect of Bel’s work (although I will not develop it now). However, I will return to what I intended to report from the outset: during the research for this text, I came

into contact with a video of *Le dernier spectacle*, a work from 1998 (on which Bel gave a lecture in 2004, available on the Internet⁸) and I was totally conquered by the moment of the work in which Bel dances an excerpt of the solo *Wandlung* (Transformation), by Susanne Linke. I have found in it, precisely, issues that affect and interest me in very important layers: the life of other bodies in our body, the irreproducible which can only be accessed by playback/repetition, the work of mourning, the tension between the masculine and the feminine in dance...

Incorporating/quoting Linke's solo, Bel slid out of the parody and irony position, which I attributed to him, to a place of dissent that could crack the understanding and the almost closed narrative that I had already built about him.

Having been *defeated* in my starting position, for having been affected by a scene of the work of an artist from whom I at first expected to only find an ironic detachment, seems to me to be a very significant experience, as an example that points out the shortcomings or precariousness of the critical discourse (I mean art criticism and much of what we, researchers and theorists of the arts, strive to do). Even more so because, before the contact with this scene, I had read the chapters by André Lepecki (2006) in defense of Bel's work (including his descriptions and analyzes of the same show) and had already formulated my own critical responses to Lepecki's arguments, reinforcing my initial position on Bel. That is, what shifted me was not the argumentative power of the critic – the one who would supposed to be able to *illuminate* the artist's work, making evident its philosophical implications and political meaning in a much broader way than the very experience of the work (opaque, not illuminated by the theoretical translation critic) would allow us to glimpse – but the very encounter with the artist's work.

Therefore, moved by this experience, this article points to disagreements regarding André Lepecki's theses, not so much with the intention of producing a reading that would be better or more accurate than this author's in relation to certain contemporary dance artists or in relation to dance more generally – because in any case I consider that many of Lepecki's ideas, especially his criticism of the disciplinary aspect of a certain notion of choreography and of the colonial character of its approach the

ground (where dance happens), are very striking and relevant. My intention then is mainly to point out problems and limitations of a certain way to theorize dance that precisely fulfills the modern project of founding knowledge starting as an action of a subject who is outside the object to be known – a project based on a certain specific concept of body, space, subject, object, action, as we discussed. This project is what underlies the attitude of a theoretical and critical production such as Lepecki's, who feels comfortable to make quite hard statements about the political and philosophical meaning of dance works, especially from what would be its *contents*.

My intention is therefore, in addition to affirming what has been discussed so far, to also propose, in this sense, a critical and theoretical production about dance less based in a deductive logic, which analyzes dance works according to their fit in a general theory or sovereign worldview previously assumed by the author-analyzer (which is then applied *to* the work).

Alternatively, I think critique can be much keener when it is directed to the experience conceiving it as polysemic, to some extent always open and undetermined. Such polysemy seems most evident from the position of the viewer and the artist, mobilized by an event that always passes through the subjectivity, beyond a single direction vector (such as the one of a subject that knows its object). Theorizing delicately from that position may favor a moving and dialoguing reflection, as a way to unfold the meeting, rather than establishing prescriptive readings and, consequently, territories of belonging and not belonging (determining which artists deserve to be seen, which are good, which truly break with what needs to be broken, etc.), through a theoretical discourse which in the end also acts, effectively, as an instrument of power.

Notes

- ¹ Lepecki cites the choreographic lab SKITE, held in 1992, at the *Cité Universitaire* in Paris, when the choreographers Vera Mantero and Santiago Sempere “stated that the political events in the world were such that they could not dance” (Lepecki, 2006, p. 16), while Meg Stuart choreographed a “still dance for a man lying on the ground” (Lepecki, 2006, p. 16), and Paul Gazzola presented a work in which he remained naked, lying down, by a highway.

- ² Free translation from the French edition.
- ³ A dance artist worth citing here, who describes many ways of addressing body and movement towards this direction is Deborah Hay, in her book *My body the buddhist* (2000).
- ⁴ It is also worth mentioning that in the field of reflections on dance based on choreography, the idea of a subversion of this notion of agency as an action on the body (as an object) by a subject also appears clearly in some works by different authors. For example, the aforementioned Susan Leigh Foster, in another paper (2016), in order to answer a very relevant question (why is dance experienced as a kind of movement that energizes rather than consumes or exhausts?), goes back to the ideas of the artist and dance theorist Randy Martin, to state that even for a dancer dancing a choreography (as Martin himself was), the mobilization is not the result of a power coming from outside over the dancer's body (as happens in the imperative relation between master and disciple described by Lepecki, based on the *Orchesographie*), but is experienced by the dancer as an affirmation of a power of the very subject-body, blurring the dichotomy and separation between body and subject (Foster, 2016, p. 21-22).
- ⁵ Free translation from the original in Portuguese.
- ⁶ Free translation from the original in Portuguese.
- ⁷ In this respect, I make reference to the works by Amelia Jones (2012) and Nick Kaye (2012) about the relationships between a live performance and its records, reproductions, recreations, etc. in photography and video.
- ⁸ Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGpsTArU82Y>>. Accessed on May 16, 2017.

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