



Autoethnographic (D)escriptions: performance in dialogue with anthropological research approaches

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ABSTRACT – Autoethnographic (D)escriptions: performance in dialogue with anthropological research approaches – The goal of this article is to develop the notion of sensory autoethnographic (d)escription to experience possibilities of making the scene present through writing. The article draws on anthropology of art and performance studies to analyze three poetic writings and the mediated senses based on the experience of seeing the shows *Caprichosa voz que vem do pensamento*, by Aderbal Freire Filho, Maria Alice Poppe and Tato Taborda, *Casa de especiarias*, by Terpsí Teatro de Dança, directed by Carlota Albuquerque, and a dance video by the dancer Marcela Reichelt. It is concluded that autoethnographic (d)escription as a writing genre is a means of making the scene present and illustrates new perspectives in which the personal experience is inscribed.

Keywords: **Autoethnography. Anthropology. Performance. Performance Analysis. Dance Writing.**

RÉSUMÉ – Descriptions Autoethnographiques: le performance en dialogue avec les approches de la recherche anthropologique – La proposition de l'article est d'élaborer la notion de (d)escription autoethnographique sensorielle afin d'expérimenter les possibilités d'accéder au présent de la scène dans le support écrit. L'approche de l'anthropologie de l'art et des études de la performance est utilisée dans l'analyse de trois écrits poétiques et des sens agencés à partir de l'expérience dans le public des spectacles *Caprichosa voz que vem do pensamento* d'Aderbal Freire Filho, Maria Alice Poppe et Tato Taborda, *Casa de especiarias* de la Terpsí Teatro de Dança dirigée par Carlota Albuquerque et une vidéo de danse de la danseuse Marcela Reichelt. Il est conclu que la (d)escription autoethnographique sous forme textuelle est un moyen d'identifier la scène et illustre de nouvelles perspectives dans lesquelles s'inscrit l'expérience personnelle.

Mots-clés: **Autoéthnographie. Anthropologie. Performance. Analyse du Spectacle. Écriture de Danse.**

RESUMO – (D)escrições Autoetnográficas: performance em diálogo com abordagens de pesquisa antropológica – A proposta do artigo é elaborar a noção de (d)escrição autoetnográfica sensorial para experimentar possibilidades de acesso ao presente da cena no suporte escrito. Utiliza-se a abordagem da antropologia da arte e dos estudos da performance na análise de três escritas poéticas e dos sentidos agenciados a partir da experiência na audiência dos espetáculos *Caprichosa voz que vem do pensamento*, de Aderbal Freire Filho, Maria Alice Poppe e Tato Taborda, *Casa de especiarias*, da Terpsí Teatro de Dança, dirigido por Carlota Albuquerque e de um vídeo de dança da bailarina Marcela Reichelt. Conclui-se que a (d)escrição autoetnográfica como forma textual é um modo de presentificar a cena e ilustra novas perspectivas na qual a experiência pessoal está inscrita.

Palavras-chave: **Autoetnografia. Antropologia. Performance. Análise de Espetáculo. Escrita da Dança.**

Introduction

This article addresses the subject of sensory writing from the point of view of the audience. I share three autoethnographic (d)escriptions written in 2013 while seeing two shows and a dance video that prompted accounts based on my somatic reactions. The motivation for these sensory writings follows the reasoning of Alfred Gell (1998; 2001), for whom works of art matter for their power to act on us. According to the author, anthropology of art can be better understood as anthropology of the inseparable perception of cognition.

In revisiting the texts seven years after they were written I realized that they were not merely descriptions of the performances aiming to reproduce what was seen. In academia, some artists who research performance start out by reflecting on what cannot be described about the creative process¹ and develop their arguments from that issue (Icle, 2019). That kind of investigation is close to the goal of this article, with one proviso: although the texts contain descriptive aspects to make the memory of the scene present in writing, they are testimonies in the form of dialogue with and feedback to the dancers-creators. The approach used combines analysis of the shows and (d)escription of the senses mediated by them. They are autoethnographic writings, not only for resulting in actual texts, but also because the proposal of dialoguing with the artists provides clues to their interaction and proximity with the writer. My relationship with the artists-creators delimits my gaze as a spectator.

On May 5, 2013, at 5:39 pm, after receiving on Facebook a dance rehearsal video of the dancer Marcela Reichelt, I realized I had shoulder blades, shoulders, backbone, breathing. On May 11, 2013, I wrote *Impressions for Marcela*, pages of a return to the body dimension. On June 15, 2013, I wrote *To an Exquisite Voice Traversed by So Many Thoughts* after seeing the show *Caprichosa voz que vem do pensamento* [Exquisite Voice that Comes from Thought] by Aderbal Freire Filho, Maria Alice Poppe and Tato Taborda. And on September 17, 2013, I wrote *Two Nights at the Spice House* after seeing *Casa de especiarias* [Spice House], a show staged by Terpsí Teatro de Dança, directed by Carlota Albuquerque.

In the context in which the (d)escriptions were written I was experiencing a sense of scarcity associated with the lack of performance and dance, as I was not dancing. I had stopped dancing to focus on my doctorate on the tensions between theory and practice in the field of dance in higher education. Bateson (2004) argues that the situation experienced between acting and audience occurs in a frame capable of informing how the performed event will be signified. At the time I saw the performances, the doctorate's pressures and subject shaped the frame of the audience experience. The performances reverberated in the bodily perception and emerged as content in the writings. I highlight some factors that led me to provide the creators with written feedback. I had an urge to write from the spectator's viewpoint in search of dialogue with the scene. I only realized to what extent I was feeling trapped in my graduate studies and estranged from the body/dance when I had contact with the performances. The impact stirred a poetic manner of reporting the aesthetic experience as a statement. The (d)escriptions combine comments on relevant points of the shows with accounts of how they mobilized the writing.

In analyzing the (d)escriptions – a term chosen to address autoethnographic experimentation – I resort to the concepts of metacommentary and agency to understand how communication and action are interlaced in the autoethnography of the abovementioned texts. The notion of metacommentary (Bateson, 2004) situates the twofold connections under strain in the (d)escriptions, resulting from the mediations produced during the context of the shows. Impressions triggered during the audience experience that later reverberated in the texts. The (d)escriptions were produced in a space between analysis of the performance (other) and sensory description (self) in order to provide feedback to the dancers-creators. The act of (d)escribing is at once alterity, self-perception and subjective encounter.

Traversals and Routes

The dance experience relates to the transmission of knowledge from/in the body. The creative process is able to generate forms of written expression, enabling the circulation of new meanings (Dawsey, 2013). The written records of the artistic performances inspired reflection on how to nar-

rate events in their evanescence and movement (Zumthor, 2014) without losing their poetic aspect (Bauman, 1993; Zumthor, 2014).

Bateson's (2004) notion of frame is a set of instructions that guided the way I identified three levels of (d)escribing the audience experience. Goffman (1985) contributes the concept of footing, akin to frame, something that anchors, provides support for the performed situation and contextualizes the exchange between stage and audience. The impressions (d)escribed by the skin in the texts are metacommentaries that produced three levels of analysis of performance, developed from traversals and routes with the concepts of frame (Bateson, 2004) and footing (Goffman, 1985). The three levels of analysis are: 1) Body perception; 2) Body placement; 3) Analysis.

The chronological factor of the sequence in which the texts were written is relevant, as the three levels of analysis emerged in the first text and were expanded in the following (d)escriptions. Chronology of (d)escriptions: May 11, June 15 and September 17. *Impressions for Marcela*, the first text that marks the stirring of sensory (d)escription. In the second, *To an Exquisite Voice Traversed by So Many Thoughts*, thought was torn between letting the text flow and trying to capture meanings, and analytical aspects provided support organically. In the last text, *Two Nights at the Spice House*, once again the performance provokes impressions (d)escribed by skin, bones and joints, resulting in an analysis of the scenes but with the addition of theoretical questions that guided the analysis of the performance, which in the text appear with no citation and as subtext. An intersubjective encounter occurred between *self* and *other* via the artists' feedback on the texts, which confirmed the alterity of the encounter.

Briefly escaping from the doctoral thesis, on May 11, 2013, I wrote *Impressions for Marcela*, a sensory (d)escription grounded on body perception, body placement and scene analysis. Who is my audience? Marcela Reichelt² was a dancer and stage partner of mine at Muovere Companhia de Dança for 15 years. Writing about her research on movement triggered memories of her corporeality and her way of conceiving gestures and sequences in space. I was a presence in the text and was describing my feelings and the body state changes that the video had mobilized. Living in Berlin, Marcela was asking friends to comment on her movement research video. I

shared with her my impressions of her creation in process. Marcela replied excitedly that they made sense and asked if she could translate the text into German and post it on her blog. The photo provided for the article was chosen to give visibility to a specific use of the dancer's joints during the solo, an aspect of her corporeality that I comment on and emphasize in the scene analysis (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Occo. Marcela Reichelt in *Occo*. Photo: Cintia Bracht.
Source: Marcela Reichelt personal archive.

Impressions for Marcela Reichelt

A brief account of the situation of watching you on May 5 at 5:39 p.m. Here I was reading and writing, focused, studying, I'm working on a doctorate here, I spend thousands of hours reading and studying. And then, during a break, I decided to log into Facebook and see my friends, just a glance, without much communication not to get distracted from my studies, really quick. And then I see your post, I'm interested, I click on the link and I start watching you, and well, I immediately remember that I have a body, I realize that my shoulder blades, which were so tense they were almost jumping over my shoulders, start slowly sliding down, I watch you and feel relieved. Oh good, my shoulders also relent, I can feel their weight, how good they feel, heavy and slipping, I start getting even more comfortable in the chair. I see it once non-stop, from start to end, with the sections

proposed in the fragments that you've been showing the viewer in parts, I considered this an artistic option, and not something like, it's that way because the video only records each fragment for a while, no, for me it made perfect sense, the section and the transition. I'll explain. The feelings are intense, with each section change, a physical reaction: Is it over? A start – Ah! There must be another scene. Hope so! And I also think you've been revealing these small successive events to us in homeopathic doses, *doucement*, careful, looking out for the viewer who may succumb at your next change of state. We breathe together and follow your lead.

I found it beautiful because your work instigated in this first level, perception in the flesh, bones and muscles, affected breathing and posture, a subtle feeling that changes everything. A second level, which I will soon describe. And, on a third level, it excites curiosity. What's going on there in the video and here? I started to wonder what the reason might be, eager to penetrate the creator's mind. I've just seen the video sections, they've all been seen. And?

I get up feeling like I've been sitting in the chair for 18 hours straight, with a desire to go to the body. I take a few steps to a single vacant spot in my micro apartment and place myself, get it, Marcela? The second impression of your work: *I place myself*, feet aligned, feeling the floor, opening the toe joints on the floor, I touch my pelvis, I remember yours, so heavy towards the floor, so supported there, so dignified occupying its space; I return to mine and breathe in the position, that's all (as if it were only that) and relax my head, close my eyes and remember you, trying to relive the inner silence that I experienced with you two seconds ago when watching you. My eyes fill with tears, of admiration and gratitude. Thank you Marcela! Thank you for getting me out of here. I come back different from this experience with you.

Third impression, May 11, 2013, 2:19 p.m., same chair, me and your post, I watch you again with a pad and pen beside me. I now want to write, I now really wanted to write something about it. Two words invade and leap up impatiently: *Traversals* and *Routes*. I consider them a subtitle for what comes next, my jottings scribbled on the pad sheet as I watch you again. I pay more attention now, I have a task, I am committed, I have bonded with your movement research. I find your gaze, your gaze support-

ed in space, alive, present, a beautiful quality of yours as a dancer. Neither more nor less, exactly where it should be, with strength and simplicity. I recalled you at Muovere and Jussara Miranda telling me while we watched you rehearse: *Observe Marcela's volume of movement*. She nailed it in one word, volume. I decide to return to the third impressions.

Traversals/Routes

I note the clear beginning of each movement and its end, it is precisely demarcated, with fluidity and continuously, that is the paradox of your quality of movement in the research, the beginning/end precision and flow as something incessant. At the same time, I perceive a connection of bones and joints that allows me to follow the course of each movement together with you in detail. A precise route leads my spectator's eye along a clean, clear course of where each one begins and ends. A kind of genesis of each route. And so, is something being set up? Taken apart? It's all linked together, but nothing is at all obvious. There's a meaning that for me is your understanding of the bone links and connections, but it didn't seem like an exercise for them, but rather a route leading somewhere. What gave me that idea? Well, while I feel you detaching one joint from the other, sliding from one place to another in the joints, I also feel that when the course/route is happening, it's as if there were a focus, a light/lantern that magnifies and shows us the passage. A path where there is space in the body for the movement to arrive and settle down. Like looking at a movement isolated from other parts by a camera zoom, but entirely connected because it flows, slides, shows, experiments. The breathing at times seems to trigger the movement and at others provides support, merely accompanying and letting the route happen.

When watching you the notion of route sort of emerged inseparable from the idea of traversal, a pair that goes hand in hand in your research. I'll explain. If your body is clearly revealing the traces of a mysterious path it follows of movement beginnings and ends in a continuous and almost unceasing broader route, this course also seems to me to be traversed by lines of force that drive and direct these courses/routes of the movements. I don't know if it's still unclear, I let the writing flow while watching you again, a thought of mine under construction, it's not analysis, it's more ac-

tual impression, a living, spur-of-the-moment thing, so not so clear, hazed by your presence which cannot be put into words in an articulate manner, but let's try, I wrote a little more.

The joints breathe and it's pleasant to watch because if we try to follow you, I refer to the design of movement and route, because for me it's clear now, *your movement is a route*. And a route that can even be felt beyond the gaze, we observe from another point, not just by looking.

A lot is happening there, I perceive clashes between these traversals, forceful entry of a high diagonal moves you differently, destabilizes, and you let it happen, without depriving the movement of its independence and path, of how it reacts and relates being the actual space, living architecture. A sculpture body being made in real time, before us, we are witnesses to this creation. Your presence is greatly alive, impressive, whole, all is present and in a Buddhist-like silence. Impressive, when I grow up I want to be like that, I think about that and resume the task of observing to unravel what is going on there. I return to the traversals and start seeing intersecting lines of force, a battle, body, bones, joints, muscles, connections, skin, flesh, organs. All alive, switching places all the time, repositioning themselves, I find myself once again repositioning myself in the chair, in my shoulders and shoulder blades again with you. This reminds me of a dialogue, never a movement in itself, always a passage because something is actually happening.

I come out of the experience enriched, I have gained body and presence, I have remembered myself. So, beloved Marcela, I have no more words, thanks again and carry on, it's lovely. One last image of your beautiful work in me: *a leaf in the wind*.

From that first experience of sensory (d)escription on June 15, 2013, I went on to write the second text, *To an Exquisite Voice Traversed by So Many Thoughts*, after seeing *Caprichosa voz que vem do pensamento* by Aderbal Freire Filho, Maria Alice Poppe and Tato Taborda. Who is my audience? Maria Alice Poppe³ is a more recent friend and co-worker, we've known each other since 2009 when I started teaching in the graduate programs in dance at UFRJ. I was taking part in the research project *A poética do fluxo* [The Poetics of Flow], coordinated by her, when the show *Caprichosa voz que vem do pensamento* was produced. When I shared what was

written, Maria Alice Poppe, Tato Taborda and Aderbal Freire-Filho gave enthusiastic hints that something in those pages had made sense. Once again, the description provided an encounter between *self* and *other*.

The photo chosen to compose the article alongside the sensorial (d)escription aims to contribute to re-establish the feeling of *being there* seeing the show. The image features the protagonists of the performance, Maria Alice Poppe and Tato Taborda. At the time they were also a couple in real life (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – The couple. Maria Alice Poppe and Tato Taborda in *Caprichosa voz que vem do pensamento*.
Photo: Renato Mangolin.

Source: Maria Alice Poppe personal archive.

To an Exquisite Voice Traversed by So Many Thoughts

Caprichosa voz que vem do pensamento by Aderbal Freire-Filho, Maria Alice Poppe and Tato Taborda. An invitation to the dance room? Anticipation of a concert by a barefoot pianist? Scenic encounter between two artists in love? The director's reverie in search of audible movement? Extraordinary lust with technique? Reminiscences? Smooth state of unknowable impermanence? At first glance I venture a mere interpretation: a man and a woman in a sophisticated love triangle with the piano. But who ultimately dances and who becomes music in this show? Like a snake, the musician and the dancer change their skin and discreetly this sinuous process of

shedding/stripping becomes visible – muscles, shoulder blades, bones, moods, looks. We, vulnerable spectators, are easy prey. We are at a point of no return. The predation of art reveals our size and our real impotence, it's not about trying to understand, that was never really the great issue for viewers. After all, we have already been ensnared by the show's trap. *Distinguished members of the audience* [...].

I once heard someone say about the aesthetic experience that at some moment of the opening scene, at the symbolic raising of the curtain, we can be hooked or seduced by the work of art. Faced with the mysterious scenic spectacle, we witness our capture, our surrender, the transient possibility of *being there* together, everything around us becomes something else, we become the *other*. We feel we are the dancer or the pianist due to a delicate gesture capable of snatching the spectator who struggles to recognize his flows and fluids, as well as the awakening of his own intensity. I speak from within my own experience of seeing *Caprichosa*. After seeing it more than once, today I work my way back to the first image. I close my eyes and try to write now from my carnal notepad, and a stubborn, insisting memory takes me first to the body. I feel my face slightly warming, my breathing suspended, or rather, I breathe together, a palpitation comes and goes with each expectation of a new movement or piano note, eyes and ears overlap and then soon merge, no hearing or seeing comes from the organs related those senses. I feel I'm somewhere else and about to levitate with Alice's soft suspensions, delicate presence, light weight, lightness. I think how good it feels to be light, I feel this lightness in my expression, *mon visage* melts. Tato Taborda also seems light to me, a soft presence, a musician who send shivers up one's spine with his dance in a duet of occupying each other's spaces, a beautiful scene. It is a trio because it includes the piano, I love to perceive the powerful interplay, the knowing how to take risks, how to take hints, how to share the scene, there is a lot of generosity between them, an exchange of *in-between* spaces, an attempt to harmonize *between the other*. Surprise! I discover a musician who is also a dancer. Thought struggles between wanting to understand and letting go, I remember a wait, I'm eager to follow the courses in the routes, the non-obviousness causes me great strangeness, I can't keep up, I think it's hopeless to try to capture the tone of the scene, on the contrary, I'm being engulfed, drawn in by a buffet of

shifting sensations, so fast that the synapses even exhaust me. I'm adrift and, paradoxically, I have never been so close to myself as now. Dance, music and theater are indeed the warm arts, I see myself writing treatises on the difference between literature, poetry, painting and sculpture as opposed to the so-called warm arts. I recall that it might be best *not to give away so much* how captured, how excited, how point-of-no-return I am. That mantra returns more than once during these hours so full of immense, incomprehensible spaces and therefore devoid of a commonplace interpretation. Another mantra: words cannot reach.

I empathize with the couple in the scene and I find myself even more ensnared. I reflect that I should read more and learn more about reception theory, only to soon I realize it's a useless search, so I say to myself: enjoy, enjoy, enjoy! I feel a small space opening between my shoulder blades, which immediately open a space between my eyebrows. Ah, what a relief! Because there's a scene of Alice's that made me think that I'd never seen a living shoulder blade before, the audience has been greatly impacted by Alice's back. I return to my own shoulder blades – my old forgotten omo-plates – I recognize them, a marvelous discovery, they are here, much more relaxed now. Guys! Wake up! Never, at any time, has dance succeeded in being contemplative, it moves, destabilizes, unbalances, loosens, wrings, overwhelms. I go back to what I can and to what I feel. My presence activated and the miracle happening. I think about capturing an image, maybe two, three, I want to pause the moment. In vain, it's cloud, smoke, I should've known by now, I recall José Gil when he says that the dancer's gesture is a cloud, one can't perceive beginning and end, he could only have written this idea inspired by Alice. Gil is right, I recall the cigarette, I recall that there is also something smoky in the pianist's eyes, he doesn't seem real, he looks like a cloud too. Perhaps it was not my blurred vision and hearing, but whole the time, pianist and dancer in the mist, two specters of themselves in a significant presence. On the effectiveness of the scene. I go back to the cigarette-sign, look here! Absolutely everyone has already smoked on stage, all good shows have had scenes with cigarettes, I immediately refute: but not this way, not like this, not at the end. I feel that composing a text about a work of art is also a composition. At the most vertiginous moments of the dancer's ellipses I squirm, I feel I'm falling. I recall

Bachelard and the dream of flying she realized on stage and that reverberates in me.

I notice a slight smile lingering on my lips, one hour? An hour and a half? And the friendly smile on the lips. I forgot to mention this and it's important, a joy both times I saw *Caprichosa*. For years I have studied and tried to understand how to devise an intensity graph of the actors on stage, intellectually this has been my subject in creative processes, I practice ways to achieve it, and here in *Caprichosa* I witness the intensity graph happening. I wonder: how did this trio achieve this perfect *rising and falling on stage*. I get even more excited! I bubble, overflow, hop without leaving the chair, look around, I feel I'm in a fairy tale, I can't remain in myself, or is this how I'm most within myself?

I move from one unfinished suggestion to another, abruptly, a story is told. The evocation invites me to embark on a journey in my grandparents' time when listening to the story of the apprentice and of the piano teacher Celina, I recall my paternal grandmother who was a violin teacher. The woman in the tale incarnated and quartered into a thousand pieces in the play. I return to a time I've never lived, the piano-woman portrays a paradoxically laughable and deadly memory. I'd never pondered before how difficult it is to start out from a literary tale adapted to the stage, because a written text is made and devised in another medium. That thought evoked the challenge of narrating a memory through acting. So far the doubt persists, is it a laughing or crying scene? I am grateful for the benefit of the doubt, not knowing becomes the rule of the game. I then think that the good show relates to something that is not there. And, not being given, it suggests interpretations. I feel my body opening, I shed my skin, I feel that now I breathe more closely, I am also the spin, the pianist-dancer's judo somersault, feet on the ground, the exchanged looks, the sounds of the dancer's body, the dance's music. How silly of me, one can no longer distinguish where the dance ends and the music begins, a sterile discussion, after all *Caprichosa* blurs any attempt at delimitation. I am grateful during and now. Thank you for getting me out of this chair where I'm stuck for hours and hours of all my days without danced music.

As smooth and subtle as it may seem, art is always violent, invasive, extreme, there's no middle way, it must overflow completely. The glass drives

Alice to dance, that low weight of water inside instructs the dance like a subtext: the water must not spill out of the glass during the dancer's numerous loops. A childish excitement may be taking hold of me and a considerable part of the audience, as there is always the risk of the water spilling. I go back once more to my misery of trying to understand, to rationalize, to encapsulate the sensitive experience in a cage. Not desiring to imprison senses, I cast another hermeneutic look: before us a couple is dressing for a gala – the second part of the show – as if everything that happened before belonged to the domain of reverie or memory. Although it was really a preparation for Tato and Alice, in the skin, flesh and bones it was a gradual transition through bodily states that allowed them to arrive at this state of the gala/dance. In the dancer's and musician's flesh, under the keen eye of the stage director, the boundary between dance, music and theater was vertiginously violated. Point of no return.

The final text, *Two Nights at the Spice House*, was written on September 17, 2013, after seeing *Casa de especiarias*, a show staged by the dance company Terpsí Teatro de Dança, directed by Carlota Albuquerque. Who is my audience? I was a member of Terpsí Teatro de Dança and danced under Carlota Albuquerque⁴ direction for 10 years. I have prior knowledge of the logics that circulate in the choreographer's scenic compositions. In addition to a current partnership with the group aimed at writing about the shows. In 2011 I published *Os malditos e a arquitetura de gestos: um olhar para o Terpsí* [The Accursed and the Architecture of Gestures: A look at Terpsí] in the *Dossiê Espetáculo* [Performance Dossier] section of *Sala Preta* magazine, published by the University of São Paulo (Coccaro, 2011). An article commissioned by Carlota Albuquerque on the show *Ditos e Malditos* [Sayings and Curses]. I have been practicing writing about performances since 2011, with the difference that it is performance analysis rather than sensory (d)escription in the sense I give to the texts published in this article. Carlota Albuquerque was touched by the (d)escription and soon posted it on the group's website⁵.

Permission was granted to include the photo, featuring the group's emblematic dancer, Angela Spiazzi, and Edson Ferraz. It was chosen for providing an image of the sensory aspects of spices and food, scenic elements of the performance (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – Casa de especiarias. Angela Spiazzi and Edson Ferraz in Terpsí Teatro de Dança. Photo: Claudio Etges.

Source: Terpsí Cia de Dança personal archive.

Two Nights at the Spice House

I arrive early in downtown Porto Alegre on September 12, in a 35°C heat, to see the Terpsí show entitled *Casa de especiarias*, directed by Carlota Albuquerque and selected for the *Porto Alegre em Cena* festival. I walk on a hot day from the Public Market to the Labor Museum, the venue assigned for the show which Terpsí has successfully occupied. I intuitively go on foot in order to prepare myself, as I am eager to see their new work, a useless preparation as the reader will soon realize. Right at the entrance, in the queue, I notice a buzz outside the venue, a commotion inside me because I know I'm going to see something new, but as this is Carlota I have no idea of the proposal, in principle I should like it, I have enjoyed her prolific work for years. The *distinguished members of the audience* start inadvertently filing into the venue, and I'm in the middle of the crowd. I immediately like the proposal of the first scene staged while the audience is entering. I felt the act of kneading on the muscles of my back and arms. The words *dough turned into mass* dance on Angela Spiazzi's body, the loose letters search for the clock time in the light. A scene that makes me wonder, what time is this, after all?

I peer largely with my sense of smell in the half-light and realize that I really do seem to be in a house, I'm seated on comfortable cushions and everything suggests a dining room and a kitchen. But what is this place? Where am I? My senses lead me to a strangeness, I'm in a place I've never been before. Great! I can't recognize it so well from now on, I now feel I've been swallowed up by the performance, which every work of art should be able to do with its audience, enrapture it, sweep it off its feet and launch it into something new. I was conveyed to an unknown place, unique and nameless. Thank you Terpsí! I publicly thank Carlota for pulling me out of my cage, airing me and dusting off my supposition that I might know something, I don't know anything, I experience something for the first time and with the butterflies in my stomach of every first time. I return to this chance to embark with them on this new trip. I identify it as a trip somewhere outside Porto Alegre because there is sea, sand, waves, coarse salt, and it feels like a distant place where we've never set foot but are setting foot for the first time.

I soon wonder, what now? After all, I have a task here today, I came all the way from Rio to write about the show, my role was clear. Right at the

beginning I realize that I might not be able to go through with it, as I start to feel rather displaced, I feel myself melting with the heat and pulsating scenes, I slide my back and my *derrière* touched by the plasticity of the male and female dancers that confuse me. All six become transfigured together with dishes, dough, cinnamon, clove, chamomile, pepper; this goes on the whole time, like food preparation that undergoes alchemical mutations until the dish is ready. We, the gaping audience, watch a metamorphosis of the bodies that gradually turn into the food we need to live. I think of Kafka, of the short story *A Hunger Artist*, a metaphor for the starving artist in search of food that will never satiate him, as his hunger is for art. Yes Carlota, yes Terpsí, we are all starving and you have offered us a feast.

I recall Malinowski, one of the fathers of anthropology, who would speak of the plasticity of social life and also of the imponderables of researching human beings because perception is unable to understand a human being in interaction at first glance. So it is! Faced with such sensory novelty I gave in to enjoyment, I let myself be carried away, enthralled, transported. On this first day of the show I laughed out loud, smiled, tasted the drink they gave me, I was bubbling, enthused by so much change in climate, music, environment – always diverse and thought-provoking.

It ends with the dance of dishes, bodies and spices. I ask to come again the following day, I get an invitation, I return on September 13, completely sure of myself: I've seen it, I've enjoyed it, I've like it and now to work and observe with the eyes of someone who will analyze and write. I have an idea in mind for a starting point. After taking a course with the dance historian Isabelle Launay on Nijinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, I recall her starting the course by asking who those people that Nijinsky had invented were. After seeing the show, I thought it would be interesting to start writing by asking: Who are these people of the Spice House? What tribe is this? At what time and place do they meet? I attended the show the second time with that subtext.

During the course of the show I observed more closely everyone on stage, trying to penetrate more deeply into the house, the dramas, the interactions, the situations. A first gaze was more technical, I noted the cast's physical preparation and skill. I observed the *choreography* – I stress that it is impossible to see a choreography, what we see are men and women, a diver-

sity dancing, because in dance what is being done is not dissociated from who does it.

Carlota's work of composition and her masterful creation of scenes, ideas and movements necessarily based on the engagement of dancers with elements/objects that acquire a scenic nature. This trait has been a kind of signature of Carlota's creative work. Practically no gesture or composition in *Casa de especiarias* is devoid of a scenic element. The show's notion of *choreography* reinforces Carlota's creative proposal by choosing the object as the driving force of the dancers' action.

After these more analytical considerations of the work I realize that the audience's point of view is perhaps the most intense and closest perspective of a potential enjoyment of the show, since it is charged with the experience lived in the ephemeral and irreducible space-time of the show. Among the emotions stirred within me by *Casa de especiarias* in those two days is the feeling that each day of the show is different, as each day of the audience is also different. At the second time, engaged in the task of trying to find out who those people were, I observed more closely each one of the dancers in their varied performances. The result was also highly emotional, but this time I was hardly ever allowed to laugh, as if I were following the paths in the lives of those unknown subjects. And in the final scene, where the dancers move around among spices scattered on the floor and spin their plates frantically, in a loop that could have lasted for hours; when it is interrupted – describing how would spoil the show for who hasn't seen it – the broken flow made me burst into tears, because it seems that it stopped, but something continued spinning in me and moving around. I thank Carlota and Terpsí once again, because you put me in my place, that is, in the audience, the place to enjoy with the work. And so I repeat what I said personally after the second day of the show: now you've got me.

The proposal of autoethnographic (d)escription under the impact of agency in art raises epistemological and methodological questions that contributed to reflect on the connections between the field of anthropology and performance studies and dance research.

The 1993 Manchester debate, responsible for questioning the role of art in anthropology, also destabilized the relationship between anthropology and art history and aesthetics. Anthropology of art, aesthetics and art histo-

ry focused on classifying, cataloging and judging what could be considered art. The debate cleared the way for the emergence of a new anthropology of art focused on perception and cognition as one. Gell (1998; 2001) and Lagrou (2003; 2007; 2009; 2013) argue that art should be researched in its social context of production, circulation and reception of the creations.

Performance can be both a subject of anthropological analysis and an epistemology that allows us to interpret an event as performance. As Diana Taylor (2013) suggests, there is a wide spectrum of forms of performance running through academic and artistic disciplines. Performance plays a role “[...] in learning, storing and transmitting knowledge” (Taylor, 2013, p. 45). Performance is a means of creating, preserving and transmitting full-bodied knowledge acquired in the body. In dance research, the performance/event plays an important role in preserving collective memory, because choreographies are remembered either by dance notation or via the memories of dance companies, dancers and choreographers. Dance follows an oral tradition and therefore can be researched in the light of performance standards. Many dance shows have become public domain thanks to the way in which the collective memory of artists holds information about many of these works (Chartier, 2009).

In the article, autoethnography aims to reinforce Gell’s (2001) notion of work of art as a trap for thought rather than art as contemplation. The autoethnographic method is characterized by the recognition and inclusion of the subject’s experience in the research process and in the final written product. Autoethnography is akin to autobiography, it exploits memory and self-reporting resources and relates to the technique of life history. In artistic practice research it is used by the researcher as a tool for self-reflection, addressing the somatic reactions of the researcher included through notations in the written work on the lived experience (Fortin, 2009; Fortin; Gosselin, 2014; Dantas, 2016). For me, the selected texts are autoethnographic writings in terms of both the description of my sensory reactions and my relationship with the protagonists of the scenes. Autoethnography enabled an analysis in the materialization of these shows and dance scenes through traversals of my trajectory as a dancer and of my knowledge of and familiarity with the creators of the shows.

According to Sandra Meyer (2018), in including the somatic reactions of the researcher, autoethnography evokes awareness of the actual experience. Dantas (2007) stresses that dance research should not remove the researcher from his experience in dance. I set out to write the analysis of three artistic performances and, in realizing how these events acted on me, included my somatic perceptions in the writing. According to Fortin (2009), the experience of observing the works of other artists resonates in the body of the artist-researcher. These somatic reactions of mine are described together with the analysis of the works.

Autoethnography is at once process and product. Autoethnographers must recognize that their personal experiences influence the research process and must be incorporated into the results (Adams; Bochner; Ellis, 2011). In line with Ellis (2004), my proposal to produce autoethnographic (d)escriptions, texts that are both poetic and evocative, points to new perspectives in which personal experience is inscribed. (D)escription as metacommentary is a choice to invite readers to *be there*, a means to make the scene's memory present in thoughts and emotions through the action of written description.

Conclusions

The proposal of producing three autoethnographic (d)escriptions in the form of metacommentary after having seen the shows and the dance video, under the impact of agency on art, raised methodological questions that contributed to reflecting on the interaction between the fields of anthropology and dance research. The choice of the autoethnographic method focused on creating new ways to experience writing as product and process in the artistic field. The inclusion of somatic reactions in the texts related to knowledge about dance provoked according to the effects it produces.

In (d)escribing and recording my impressions in writing, from the point of view of a spectator and active participant, I produced metacommentary on the shows with emphasis on the somatic reactions they triggered. Autoethnography made it possible to create metacommentary on the relationship between performance analysis (other) and sensory description (self) about audience experiences with a proposal of feedback to and

dialogue with the creative dancers. In the shared texts, (d)escribing is at once alterity, self-perception and subjective encounter.

The chronological route in which the three texts were written was crucial to my own understanding of the notion of sensory (d)escription through the production of metacommentary on the shows to refer to autoethnographic experimentation. I believe the first text triggered the writing method followed and expanded in the others. In *Impressions for Marcela*, the three levels of analysis emerged: 1) Body perception; 2) Body placement; 3) Analysis. I only noticed these levels, and thus classified them, after rereading the texts seven years later and identifying them according to the way they were written. In *To an Exquisite Voice Traversed by so Many Thoughts* I explored these three levels being aware of them. And in *Two Nights at the Spice House* I managed to advance further on level three, analysis of the performance.

The proposal of producing autoethnographic (d)escriptions, both aesthetic and evocative, illustrates new perspectives in which personal experience is inscribed. Autoethnographic (d)escription invites readers to *be there*, an alternative found to make the memory of the scene present in thoughts and emotions. A possibility of recreating the audience experience through writing.

Notes

- ¹ Research subject of the International Network for the Study of Presence, results published in the book *Descrerver o inapreensível: Performance, Pesquisa e Pedagogia* [Describing the Inapprehensible: Performance, Research and Pedagogy] (Icle, 2019).
- ² Marcela Reichelt is a Brazilian dancer and choreographer born in Porto Alegre and residing in Berlin. Marcela is interested in investigating the body as a place of incorporated cultural and personal habits, the relationship of the body in public and private spaces, and how this nurtures and affects her production, expressed in possible bodily forms in her work. Her first solos, *Occo* and *Como Risco em papel*, received awards and were performed in many cities and festivals in Brazil. In Germany she created *Collections* and the *Verlagern* trilogy, with *Verlagern and Adjustments* and *Verlagern-What is left*, the latter in process. As a collaborating dancer she worked on long projects at Muovere, directed by Jus-

sara Miranda in 1998-2003, and with Cena11, directed by Alejandro Ahmed in 2003-2009. She performed for and with Tatiana Rosa, Guto Geremias, João Fernando Cabral, Hooman Sharifi and Mona Hatoum. She currently collaborates on projects by and with the visual artist Marina Camargo, the choreographer Thelma Bonavita and the musician Felix Astor.

- ³ Maria Alice Poppe is a dancer and collaborator in creative processes in contemporary dance. Together with the choreographer Paulo Caldas she founded Staccato Dança Contemporânea (1993) where she performed for 11 years. She has collaborated with the artists João Saldanha, Angel Vianna, Marcia Rubin, Mauricio de Oliveira, Frederico Paredes, Pim Boonprakob, Thereza Rocha, Tato Taborda and Aderbal Freire-Filho. Among the main festivals she has taken part in are Panorama RioArte de Dança (1993; 2016), Dança Brasil (1998), Soles de Dança do Sesc (2006), Fórum Internacional de Dança (2010), Bienal de Dança do Ceará (2001-2011), Festival de Dança do Recife (2006-2010), Japan International Competition (1996), Wettbewerb für Choreographen Hannover (1994), Costante Cambiamento (2001), AmericArtes/KennedyCenter (2002), Biennale de la Danse de Lyon (2002), Danse a Lille (2007) and Move Berlin (2007). Prominent among prizes and distinctions are best performance at the Mostra para Novos Choreographers (1995), best dancer at the RioDança (1998) and Mambembe (1998) awards, best dance performances by *Jornal do Brasil* and *O Globo* newspapers with *Tempo Liquido* (2006), Klauss Vianna Award (2006; 2010; 2015), Edital de Fomento RJ (2009), Edital FADA (2011) and best dance performance by *Globo* with *Qualquer coisa a gente muda* (2011). Highlights among artistic residence programs include *Les Repérages* (Danse a Lille 2007) in Porto and *O Corpo Pensante* with Vera Mantero (Ateliê Dudude - Casa Branca - BH 2013). She took part of the film *Em três atos* directed by Lucia Murat (2015). She has a PhD in Performing Arts from UNIRIO (2018) with a doctoral internship abroad at Coventry University (Scholarship Capes/PDSE - 2017), a master's degree in Visual Arts from the School of Fine Arts of UFRJ (2014) and a teaching degree in Dance from Faculdade Angel Vianna (2004). She is currently an Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro where she develops the LINHA research project.
- ⁴ In 1987 Carlota Albuquerque founds the contemporary dance company Terpsí Teatro de Dança, where she is choreographer and director. In 2010 she was awarded at the 16th Edição da Ordem do Mérito Cultural in a ceremony at the Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro promoted by the Brazilian Ministry

of Culture. She participated as a choreographer in several productions: *A morte impossível – Homenagem a Samuel Becket* and *Amor Febril*, both directed by Luciano Alabarse; *Maria vai com as outras*, with Dulcimarta Lino as musical director; *Expresso 25*, with Pablo Trindade as musical director; *Novena à Nossa Senhora das Graças*, with the Chamber Orchestra of Theatro São Pedro, directed by Décio Antunes; opening of the *Arte no Solar* project; *Antigone*, directed by Luciano Alabarse; *Encontro de Jovens Talentos da CAPES*, in Brasília and Porto Alegre; and the children's musical *Locomoc e Millipili*, directed by Luciana Eboli. She is currently a resident choreographer at Terpsí Teatro de Dança. Since 2006 she has been dedicated to the creation of the Terpsí Center of Coreographic Studies, a space for research, experimentation, dialogue and reflection on dance.

- ⁵ My text is available from: <<https://terpsiteatrodedanca.wordpress.com/o-que-dizem-sobre/casa-das-especiarias/por-luciane-moreau-coccaro/>>. Accessed on: April 15, 2020.

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