Motim: laughter's 'relational thinking' as contagion in a process dramaturgy

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ABSTRACT – *Motim*: **laughter's 'relational thinking' as contagion in a process dramaturgy** – This paper discusses the creative process of the street performance *Motim* (Mutiny) (2015) from the perspective of laughter as a bio-potent performative action. We discuss how the *relational thinking* emerged within the framework of a *process dramaturgy* (Kerkhove, 1997), conceptualizing creative thinking as a network (Salles, 2006). The collaborative creative process of *Motim* started with three ways of approaching the act of laughing: physicality, memory and contagion. By focusing on contagion, we will discuss how *relational thinking* was installed in the creative process of *Motim* and was powered by the investigative aspect of laughter as contagion.
Keywords: *Motim*. **Relational Thinking. Laughter. Contagion. Process Dramaturgy.**

RÉSUMÉ – *Motim*: **la pensée relationnelle du act de rire comme contagion dans une dramaturgie en processus** – C'article a pour but faire un étude du processus créatif de la perfomance *Motim* (*Émeute*) (2015), en discutent l'acte de rire comme un acte bio puissant et performatif. On aborde comme dans une dramaturgie en processus la pensée relationnelle a émergé pour la construction de la dramaturgie, dans une compréhension de la pensée créative comme un réseau (Salles, 2006). Le processus créatif et collaboratif de *Motim* a eu comme base trois parcours pour aborder le rire: la physicalité, la mémoire et la contagion. En portant une attention particulière sur la contagion, on discute comment la pensée relationnelle a été presente dans le processus créatif de *Motim* et a été potentialisé par le sujet du rire comme contagion.
Mots-clés: *Motim*. **Pensée Relationnelle. Rire. Contagion. Dramaturgie en Processus.**

RESUMO – *Motim*: **o 'pensamento relacional' do riso como contágio em uma dramaturgia de processo** – O artigo traz uma reflexão sobre o processo de criação da montagem de rua intitulada *Motim* (2015), a partir do riso como ato biopotente e performativo. Parte-se da reflexão sobre como, em uma *dramaturgia de processo* (Kerkhove, 1997), deu-se o *pensamento relacional* para construção desta dramaturgia, conceitualizando o pensamento criativo como *rede* (Salles, 2006). A construção colaborativa de *Motim* partiu do riso através de três eixos investigativos: fisicalidade, memória e contágio. Com ênfase no contágio, discute-se como o *pensamento relacional* abordado por Salles instaurou-se na montagem de *Motim* e se potencializou pelo eixo investigativo do riso como contágio.
Palavras-chave: *Motim*. **Pensamento Relacional. Riso. Contágio. Dramaturgia de Processo.**

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Introduction

> What art can do is to set free the virus of the poetic. This is no small action in the confrontation of different kinds of forces from which results the ever provisory forms of reality in its endless construction (Rolnik, n.d.).

The *Motim* project consisted of a creative research culminating with a street performance. The project received money from a government fund in 2013, having been developed by the *Coletivo Lugar Comum* throughout 2014 and performed in early 2015 in four different neighborhoods of Recife (Pernambuco state): Santo Antônio, Boa Vista, Várzea and Afogados.

The motivating idea for the research came from one of the researchers and a member of the *Coletivo*, Roberta Ramos and her childhood love for laughing aroused by a magazine article (Tiraboschi, 2009) about the book *A Time to Dance, A Time to Die* by the historian John Waller on dance and laughter epidemics throughout History. The article reports how the historian associates two epidemics - the one in which people danced until death, in France (1518), and the one in which girls and women alternated laughter and cries incessantly, in Tanzania (1963) − to hysterical processes related to religiosity. In both epidemics, the contagion is a component that highlights the cultural aspect of them, related to the way social groups collectively engage themselves with their beliefs, and to the effects of the religious impositions on their behaviors. In the case of laughter, according to Georges Minois (2003), we are able to comprehend the alternation between laughter and crying, in the epidemic discussed by the historian, certainly as a phenomenon influenced by the alternation of valorization and devaluation of laughter along the history, associated to the historical movements of weaker or stronger religious repression. From the contact with this reference, the notion of laughter as contagion became an aspect of interest and started being articulated with the possible potency of that contamination as a political gesture that would value laughter and evidence it as a performative stance towards life in its distinct dimensions (political, personal, social). Once the seriousness and sadness, in different institutional contexts (Family, Church, Politics, for instance), seem to be the only reasonable behavior and feeling, the laughter emerges as a performative body conduct (Butler, 1997) because

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it establishes possibilities of attitudes not necessarily attested by the socially and historically accepted corporal codes.

From these initial ideas, the proposal was accepted by the *Coletivo* – whose members formed most of the cast [1] and who constructed this work during an entire year through readings, workshops related to the main theme and creative labs inside and outside the studio as we will describe further on.

That question unfolded into two other guiding questions in the initial period: what kind of body dramaturgies can emerge from a body taken over by the act of laughing and willing to keep feeding that impulse? Finally, how these dramaturgies can make sure the performance has a political stance, emphasizing laughter and humor as creative movements of rebellion?

The unfolding of these questions has oriented the creation of *Motim*, following three focal points in the research: laugher as physicality, memory and contagion. With an emphasis on this third aspect, we will discuss how the "relational thinking" was installed in the creative process. Having in mind laughter as relation, this process created its own methodological procedures, acting as a network, promoting spaces of exchange among the participating artists – during the creative labs – and also between artists and the passers-by – during the street rehearsals. This environment was fertile for the emergence of an open creative system and made many mutual learning processes possible in its trajectory.

One of the first challenges for the construction of *Motim* was recognizing the polyphony of the group responsible for its creation. This research was made into a performance through the ideas, hard work and artistic contributions of 13 people, the costume designer, the lightning designer and the musician who composed the soundtrack. Our interest of creating a body that was not subjected to the norm, creating a resistance to the biopolitical body, was present in the process of thinking about the dramaturgy.

Laughter as a Bio-Potent and Performative Action

The performance *Motim* preserves the polysemy of the word chosen as its title – which translates as the Portuguese word for mutiny. The term re-

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fers to an act of rebellion and at the same time also describes a loud rumor made not only by voices but by strong laughter revealing the pleasure of the body in laughing sate. The title was chosen not exactly because of what would be created in the resulting dramaturgy, but because it represented a metaphor of the power in the act of laughing as well as the desire to restore the legitimacy of that action, so that this mutiny could use laughter as its main weapon.

Thus, it was a basic premise of this research to politically value the role of laughter, especially because of its ability to establish social bonds based in the exchange of affection, the predisposition to creative acts, the playful dimension of relationships and in pleasurable and joyful experiences that explicit, above all, the legitimacy of the body itself. Bergson (2001) emphasizes the social significance of laughter arguing that, as a social gesture, its function is precisely to divert life's mechanical rigid and objective goals – in situations such as ceremonies. In the field of psychoanalysis, Kupermann (2003), from a Freudian point of view, associates laughter with the production of pleasure through games and jokes. He also emphasizes the ethical dimension of laughter being a rebellious (as opposed to resigned) action in the face of the "cruelty of real circumstances" (Freud apud Kupermann, 2003, p. 56). This ethics of pleasure production seems to be related to what the philosopher Daniel Lins (2008) identifies as the ethics of joy as a revolutionary force. Opposing stagnation and death, "[...] joy, like desire, is an ethics and aesthetics of the ephemeral" (Lins, 2008, p. 53). The association of joy (including laughter) with creative acts is due to the space created by both for the useless, the deviation of immediate functions or utilities, prioritizing the production of pleasure, the sharing of joy, the affirmation of the present and of life itself: "The ethics and aesthetics of joy presupposes a good amount of non-psychiatric madness, poetry and art, that is, the useless" (Lins, 2008, p. 54).

The importance of the act of laughing in many different dimensions of individuals and collectivities – aesthetic, cognitive, political, bodily etc. – motivated this creative research. However, this did not necessarily imply a focus on making someone laugh or even approach the comic aspect of art, but above all, producing an artistic discourse about the act of laughing that acknowledged and reinforced its significance as well as redeemed it of its

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stereotypes of immorality and banality to which it has been associated throughout the history of mankind according to an ideological strategy (Minois, 2003).

An important aspect to point out in this project is the deep involvement and eager interest of the participants towards the motivating theme. Beyond taking pleasure in the action of laughing, there was a common recognition for the creative and political potency of an artistic project in which laughter and humor are not approached only for their ability to cause a "general relaxation". According to Kupermann (2003), that would represent reinforcing an uncritical and gratuitous humor "[…] proportional to the failure of common projects and [to] the disinvestment of the possibilities of social change" (Kupermann, 2003, p. 17).

As opposed to resignation, humor or the laughter that motivated the research was associated to a creative rebellion which presupposes the existence of options "[…] at the subject's disposal in face of his real weight other than a masochistic resignation" (Kupermann, 2003, p. 27). One of these options may as well be the pleasure of sharing underlying arguments and the wit that are expressed through laughing.

This way, there was an agreement on a political (or micropolitical) approach to laughing converging (through a collaborative project) with the desire of sharing a critical view of the negative connotations historically associated to laughing and, as a premise, to the body itself. The repression of laughter is related to a gesture trained by the biopower (Foucault, 2001), the same power that attacks life itself, acting over the body, regulating and normalizing behaviors (Foucault, 2002) and pre-assumptions of the ideological constructs of disciplined societies as defined by Foucault (1987; 2001; 2002).

The political motivations of the project were related to the repression of laughter and all it represented, as well as with Hakim Bey's notion of TAZ (temporary autonomous zone) (2004), a kind of rebellion based on indirect confrontation that dissolves itself only to reassemble in other locations: "[…] temporary rebellion is what presents itself as possibility, peak experiences that show, in quick moments of suspension, how life can be lived differently (Oliveira, 2007, p. 33).

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In order to create moments of suspension, the piece was created to be performed as a stroll, starting in a given point and finishing in another one, like a parade, having the scenes happen in different public spaces. Appearing and disappearing to the passers-by. This format created moments of estrangement and playfulness for the people who were immersed on their day-by-day chores.

The variety of public spaces already envisioned for the performance had also a political connotation. On one hand, it was coherent with *Motim*'s potential of valuing laughter as Temporary Autonomous Zone from "[…] cracks in the power, moments of suspension that, when triggered, must disappear in order to reappear with a new form in a new location" (Oliveira, 2007, p. 33). On the other hand, it pointed to our desire for reaching a wider range with the research results, making it accessible to different audiences, each one with its own geographical and social contexts, as well as directly intervene over the daily routine of the passers-by, having in mind that a work of art performed in the street can "make the surrounding landscape vibrate" or "create a parenthesis of suspended time within the urban turmoil" (Clidière, 2008, p. 13). A spectator commented that the performance was as a laughing stroke around the city (Siqueira, 2015), as something that happens, transforms the space and goes away leaving a trail inscribed in the memory.

This suspension, this parenthesis made possible by laughter wished to be the way of valuing the restitution of the body's discourse, making the body take back its own power (Deleuze, 1988). Thus, "[…] when it seems that everything is dominated, as the rap lyrics go, at the end of the line a turnaround starts to insinuate itself" (Pelbart, 2007, p. 58), and life, that seemed so under control, dominated, subjected to power, "[…] reveals in the very process of its expropriation its indomitable potency" (Pelbart, 2007, p. 58).

Despite the fact that all these questions inevitably constitute a concept of *Motim* previous to its own creative research, it will be discussed further on how it did not make this performance fit into the category of "dramaturgy of concept" that Kerkhove (1997) opposes to a *process dramaturgy*. In addition to reasons that will be explored in subsequent items (related to a collaborative, network oriented creative process), we believe that *Motim* is

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more adequately described as a process dramaturgy because of its performative character.

What we call performative is an expansion of the concept developed by Butler (1997 apud Setenta, 2008) from Austin's speech act theory (1990 apud Setenta, 2008)[2] According to Butler's idea, the speech act is regarded as a "bodily act" comprehending what the body says through its actions, and performativity is understood as the possibility of turning that bodily action into a political action, inaugurating new actions, de-naturalizing normative actions through a "doing-saying that not only communicates an idea but produces the very message it communicates (Setenta, 2008, p. 31).

Starting from Butler's idea, Setenta identifies and discusses the possibilities of a "doing-saying" of the dancing body as a way of understanding that this body has the power of inventing in each new project "its own ways of uttering ideas" (Setenta, 2008, p. 32) and inscribe in these new ways the very idea and its (micro)political implications from/to the body and the subjects. Thus, in life or dance, performativity operates in the dissent between worlds, what is imposed and the ones inscribed as possibilities (Rancière, 2005b):

> The bodily actions organized in performative speech indicate the possibility of rapports and connections among different elements in an action of exchanging and sharing of information. Performative utterances reconstruct the speech act's conditions of existence in order to make possible the emergence of other discourses that can question the present context and act in favor of the inauguration of new contexts (Setenta, 2008, p. 37).

In *Motim* these unique ways of uttering ideas point to the precariousness of every poetic project in a way that makes looking into the body's *doing-saying* precisely the focus of a creative process.

Thus, the concepts that initially guided *Motim*'s research do not assure any result regarding how it was going to present itself in the performer's bodies in a way that the concept itself was changed. Through all activities that the process comprehended – readings, discussions, experiments for the construction of the body dramaturgy, and the involvement of the artists in the interpretation of how they felt their implication in the political gesture that would become the performance – something was understood: that the questions involving the creative process need to be constantly reviewed and

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reformulated, especially when the field of experimentation is the body and its interactions (with the city/culture, performers and the audience). The dialogue between the theoretical perspectives exposed here and the practical activities in the studio and in the streets were constant during all the creative process. Some of the concepts lead to the proposition of body work routines and some of the practical exercises lead to concepts that were incorporated in the process, as we will discuss further on.

Guiding Questions and Points of Reference

Studying the first references in the initial period of the research, the concept of the *good laughter* (Propp, 1992) was identified as a guiding principle in the creative process. The "good laughter" is a predisposition to perceive and create the comic which originates from an inclination to a benevolent and creative movement. However, according to Kupermann (2003), this does not constitute a resigned but rebellious attitude towards the established power and its attempts to control the individual's production of pleasure. Nevertheless, the strategy of this rebel act is the ability to recognize and/or create humorous situations within circumstances about which it is expected to act in a ritualized, serious, ceremonious, grave, extremely reverent fashion. The first question that has been formulated from that reference was: which bodily states can be accessed through the so-called good laughter or the disposition to recognize or create humorous situations? That question unfolded into the other guiding questions mentioned in the beginning of this article and they based the investigation of a dramaturgy that allowed a continuous laughing state articulated to its political bias.

From the references read before the research, the "expectations of occurrence" (Zamboni, 2006, p. 63) were that the effects of laughter could establish a body state in which consciousness would turn into a kind of "body consciousness" favoring the decision-making during improvisation not based on the reflexive consciousness of the body as an exposed object, but on a state of consciousness with wholes, de-centering and openings to the unconscious (Gil apud Silva, 2009, p. 107).

The additional questions would be answered through the investigative process developed with the bodywork, the practical experiments and the process of writing a dramaturgic nexus. These practical labs and games that

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aimed for the construction of a state of laughter should generate scenes that would compose the performance through improvisation, as we will explain further ahead. However, concerning the political aspect of the work, our goal was to value laughter and pleasure, thus proposing an interference in the way people commonly relate to power in their day-by-day lives, stimulating a refusal to the control exerted over the production of pleasure. One expectation of occurrence was previous to the creative process: that a public place would favor the performance's political character. Thus, from the beginning the work should be performed in different public places, to be defined during the creative process as part of our workshops and labs in the streets, in order to identify the possibilities of affecting various audiences in different geographical and social contexts.

Starting with the guiding questions and expectations of occurrence, a work routine has been established, including the bibliographical review as well as experiments in workshops and labs. A lot of references from different perspectives regarding laughter have been reviewed: historical (Minois, 2003); philosophical (Bergson, 2001), cognitive (Verrone, 2009); psychoanalytical (Kupermann, 2003); literary (Bakhtin, 1987); theatrical; performative (Baehr, 2008), among others. Regarding the body and its potency, we have chosen philosophical texts following a contemporary perspective that discusses the interferences of constituted power over the individual's body and how, through History's twists and turns, the body has affirmed its potency by rebelling against the power (Pelbart, 2007; Lins, 2008; Foucault, 2002; Bey, 2004).

Among those references, the article "Joy as revolutionary force: ethic and aesthetics of joy" by Daniel Lins (2008) has turned the focus of interest from the good laughter (Propp, 1992) to the laughter that manifests itself as a practice of joy, understood as a revolutionary force (Lins, 2008).

Contrary to some ancient philosophical views[3] that regard joy as mania, delusion or madness, the valuing of joy from the 17th century on, with Espinoza, can be identified as an "increase of potency added to the realization of desire" (Lins, 2008, p. 46). Also according to Lins, other positive meanings are attributed to joy by Leibniz, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Clément Rosset. Rosset views joy as "[…] an irrational grace that makes us accept the real in all its cruelty" (Lins, 2008, p. 47). From all these references, joy is

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considered an ethical, aesthetical and social creation that presupposes a care of oneself and the other (Lins, 2008, p. 47), and that, as a practice, is fully realized through art, laughter and the sacred without seeking "any given ontology or absolute" but already according to a Deleuzian perspective, "the sacred was born an orphan, desiring, rhizomatic and not arborescent" (Lins, 2008, p. 48).

In all the philosophical perspectives cited by Lins (2008), as well as in the previously mentioned theoretical views, the positive valuing of joy (including laughter) is a common feature that has been historically challenged in order to exert control over the individual's body (Foucault, 2002), especially the control over the production of pleasure and the access to the knowledge of the body that comes from the ever-changing, and not the abstraction of the platonic dualism that Nietzsche reads as a poor comprehension of the body (Nietzsche, 2009). Thus, to react in the face of that control and affirm joy and laughter represents recognizing in them a *revolutionary force* (Lins, 2008). We also add that the ethics of joy is associated to a nomadic reason for conducting our life affirmation outside any passive behavior in a constant and creative motion that loves what's new (Lins, 2008), we can say that joy "is a revolutionary force" (Lins, 2008, p. 48) which conciliates "the exercise of life and the knowledge of truth" and as such moves towards resisting death (Lins, 2008, p. 53).

This was the conceptual redirection that took place during the research, but that does not contradict our initial interests but better situates the ways through which laughter takes on a political stance and acquires a positive value, therefore offering better reasons to consider it a bio potent and performative action.

Through the bibliographical review and already in close relation to our experiments, three ways of investigation concerning studio work were identified: laughter as physicality, memory and contagion. Investigating the impulses that lead the body into a state of laughter, we have identified three ways to make it happen. Sometimes we would access laughter stimulating movements of breathing and vibration in the body, that is, through physical stimulation. It was also possible to access it by remembering personal experiences, especially childhood memories. And a third way was developed by

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contamination beginning with the laughter of other. Having that in mind, we have developed exercises that enhanced these processes.

The first aspect leads the performers to search, through exercises, for a physiological predisposition to laugh. The cast observed that laughter was composed by the repetition of a vocal sound and a specific breathing pattern that triggered a vibratory state in the body. That repetition leads to a cyclic process of catharsis and exhaustion.

This way, the group has dealt with repetition exercises using gestural and vocal expression and body vibrations that stimulate cycles of catharsis and exhaustion by accumulating laughing patterns. Another aspect of the training was to work with pleasurable sensations caused by touch. We also did touching exercises that opened up the perception of the pores as mouths and improvisation through the imagery of laughing mouths all over the body; laughter yoga exercises[4], accumulation exercises[5], manipulating of a partner having laughing as a stimulus.

Other labs were proposed with the aim of creating specular contaminations such as the mirror neuron's conditioning by witnessing particular actions. According to the neuroscientist Ramachadran, there are some motor command neurons that are stimulated when observing someone doing an action. This system is made possible by the existence of mirror neurons that allow us to mimic gestures through observation, that is, the ability to put ourselves in the place of the other, a process called empathy (Ramachandran, 2014). Having that in mind, we did some exercises such as a circle of memorization and reproduction of laughing patterns, in addition to other practices in which the laugher was induced and maintained by observing some other person laugh.

Beginning with a bodily predisposition to laugh, it was our interest to verify how the body would move in composition-oriented improvisations. This was interesting for the creative process because the bodily state created through laughter needs a certain freedom in order to articulate movement. We also noted that the composition of scenes through improvised movements contributed to the flow of laughter we were after.

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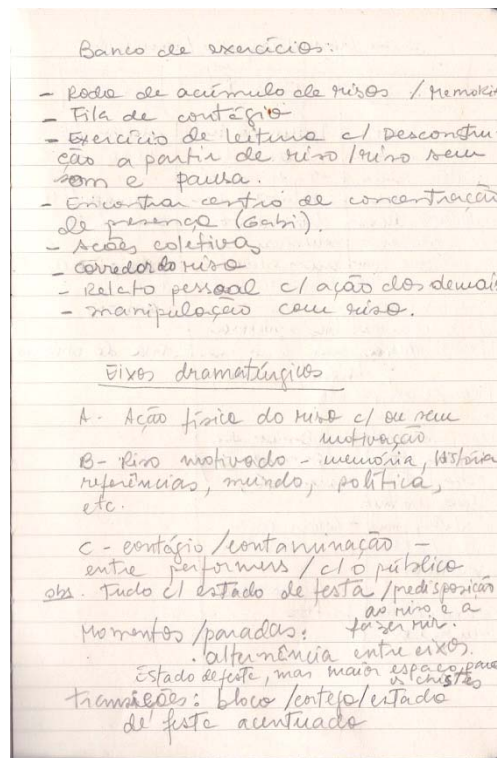Available at: <http://seer.ufrgs.br/presenca>

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Image 1 − Creative process notes by one of the performers.

The aspect of laughter as memory dealt with accessing our references related to the act of laughing: personal, collective, artistic (in performance, dance, theatre or literature). We used different exercises like reading texts out loud trying to modulate the meanings produced by the verbal language through many types of laughter, labs about laughing at oneself through looking at childhood memories (using pictures and telling stories), group action with gesture and songs known to all the performers (Image 1).

The contagion aspect was present in all exercises and labs regarding the three central aspects of laughter. However, working with laughter contagion strategies of contamination were emphasized through eye contact among performers and between performers and audience. Some exercises like a line of contagion and triangulation[6]were repeated many times (Image 2).

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Image 2 − Image of *Motim'*s rehearsal at Várzea Square. Photo by Paloma Granjeiro.

It is important to point out that the three aspects of laughter are merely used as a system of organizing the exercises during the process, since the aspect of contagion is deeply connected to both physicality and memory. They are not understood as separated and the presence of all three aspects in each and every phase of the creative process only reinforces that view. It is not possible to dissociate, for instance, the investigation of laughter as physicality from the relations of contagion which, in that case, can be activated by merely listening to the laughter of another person, a phenomenon related to the mirror neurons (Verrone, 2009); likewise, the aspect of contagion can be affected by the sharing of personal and collective memories.

At the end of the initial phase of research, which resulted in *Motim*'s premiere and first season[7], something was clear: one of the initial questions – related to finding and testing ways of moving in states of laughter – have been only partially answered[8]. These questions were less explored partially because some of the labs proposed to pursue and investigate this laughing state ended up being used in the very structure of the performance (like what we call the "laughing line"); on the other hand, because we have tried to put together a script that was coherent with the concepts we wanted to explore from the beginning and the references (bibliographical and bodily) discovered throughout the process, as we will discuss further on. This script tried to build a dramaturgic nexus in a way that it could make sense both for the audience that was able to follow it from beginning to end and for

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the occasional passer-by that was only able to glimpse a scene. Even though the script was a product of the process and not some previously arranged structure, we understand that it imposed itself over a dramaturgy that could spring from the moving bodies.

Why *Motim*? Understanding and creating a process dramaturgy

Theorization about dramaturgy in dance using the term originally popularized in the field of theater is relatively recent but already contributes to keeping in mind the specificities that must be taken into consideration when the concept migrates to the field of dance (Hércoles, 2005). In theater studies, the term is used in a wider sense, close to the post-Brechtian[9]. In the dance field it is related to the person who, with the choreographer or director, collaborates with the work's sense of coherence and unity in consonance with the meanings that wish to be produced in a poetic project. On the other hand, it is applied to the very making of this sense of coherence and unity as a product or result of the dramaturgic as a craft[10].

Even though the dramaturg is not that easy to find in the Brazilian dance production scene, the activity does exist even when it is carried out by the choreographer or director, or even collaboratively. Another change in this concept, due to the historical transformations of dance in the search of establishing itself as an autonomous field of study, is considering the importance of bodily actions influencing the dramaturgic composition. Seemingly that change has to do with the use of terms such as *body dramaturgy* or *movement dramaturgy* (Tourinho, 2009), that reports back to Setenta's work (2008) and to the importance of the body in the production of the meanings of a work as well as its unique ways of uttering ideas. At the same time, it removes from the text or previous script the responsibility of producing these meanings.

Marianne Van Kerkhove (1997) distinguishes between two types of dramaturgic processes: a first one she calls concept dramaturgy, when the structure is previously defined by a dramaturgist or director; and a second one she calls process dramaturgy, in which the construction is made during the creative process and can count on "[…] a multiplicity of voices, the human material or the artists who participate in the process and a variety of

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materials such as texts, movements, films, ideas, objects etc." (Tourinho, 2009, p. 93).

Thus, without a previous script in the process of constructing the meanings of the work, the process dramaturgy seems to be a reality in which rules and orders are not fixed in the phases of the creative process of a contemporary work:

> The process dramaturgies seem to be the type of dramaturgy that sets itself to create a theatrical work using resources generally attributed to the creative process. Or else, it seems to be the categorization of laws and procedures at the disposal for the execution of a given artistic task or show. The current perspective of contemporary dramaturgies seems to be related to creative protocols. For each process we can adopt different protocols. There is no way to adopt a fixed protocol. There can be multiple forms of establishing the dramaturgies of a performance. And the dramatic text definitely is regarded as a possibility among others (Tourinho, 2009, p. 93-94).

It is important to point out that process dramaturgies seem to have already become a current protocol within the creative practices of artistic collectives. The functional structure of the collectives - less hierarchic - and their interest on collaborative creation that values the uniqueness of each artist justify their choice for the plural, collective processes. Because of that, the process dramaturgy has been a recurrent choice in the works of *Coletivo Lugar Comum*.

As a reflection of this focus on the process, the relationships with the micropolitical potency of laughter and the reasons why the performers should organize a mutiny were questioned and understood along the creative process as well as the definition of the mutiny's actions. *Why mutiny?* was the question of one of the performers, Conrado Falbo, at a given point of the creative process, in the sense of making it clear to all of them against what they were rebelling within the context of their city, country, internal politics, the precariousness of life etc.; against what to fire laughter as an act of rebellion? That would be very important in choosing the places we could perform, the actions, rhythms and political content that would constitute the dramaturgical nexus of the mutiny.

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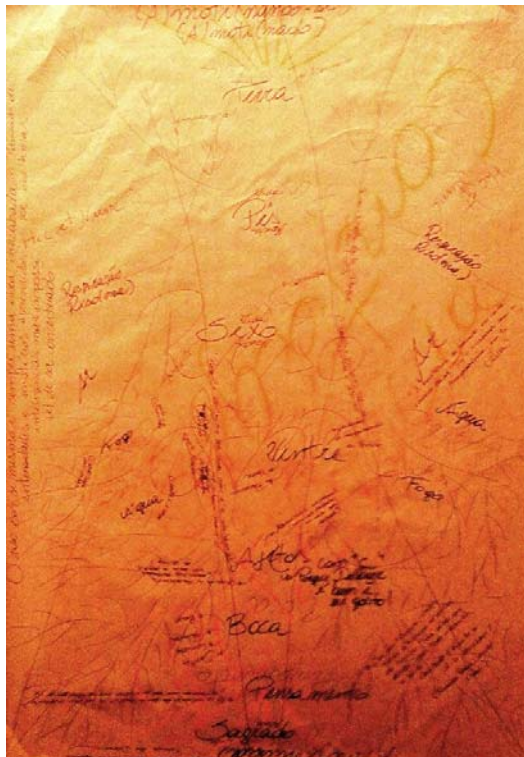Available at: <http://seer.ufrgs.br/presenca>

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Image 3 – Cartography by one of the performers.

In order to try and answer this question, the researcher and teacher Gabriela Santana, one of the performers, suggested that the group could draw personal cartographies (Image 3) of the images, expectations and insights up to that moment in order to render it clear to ourselves, making it possible to share with the rest of the group. These cartographies were highly valuable in the sense of bringing to light and proposing a dialogue among our various views, trajectories, forms and intensities related to the process.

Process Dramaturgy, Networked Creation and Contagion as Methodology

Akin to the idea of a process dramaturgy is Salles' notion of the creative process as a network, including "[…] creativity as a network of connections which density is directly linked to the multiplicity of relations that sustain it" (Salles, 2006, p. 17). According to the author, networked creativity is dynamic, unfinished, not linear, interactive and transformative.

The aspect of contagion in *Motim* feeds its network-oriented creative process, making it especially important as a connection principle responsible for promoting interactivity, as discussed by Kastrup:

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> Kastrup (2004, p. 81), making reference to the principle of connection, writes that these network interactions happen through contact, mutual contagion or alliance, growing in all directions and sides. It is important to think about this range of the creative thinking, in our case, being activated by elements external and internal to the process of the construction system (Salles, 2006, p. 25).

As a guiding principle along the process, all our strategies (network, contagion, exercises and labs) invested in establishing a connection – based on cultural motivations and physical stimuli – among the performers themselves and between them and the audience. A motto from one of the residencies that took place with artist Micheline Torres seems to translate what happened in that networked creative process: to steal, to share, to lend.

The individual references, the exercises, images and also the interaction with the local and national political contexts have fed these connections through the principle of simultaneity (Salles, 2006), making clear the reasons to laugh and share the wits through laughing:

> […] our questions are about how the creative processes interact with culture. How is the work constructed in this context of intense interactions? Interact with whom, how and for what? These are just a few questions we pose when thinking about the time and space of creative work. This leads us to the impossibility of discussing these processes without a context but fully immersed in this atmosphere. More specifically, this leads us to follow closely how the interactions with culture are conducted (Salles, 2006, p. 40).

All texts, discussions, workshops, videos, and opinions of artists who came to the studio for an open rehearsal – all are representative of how this process was based in interaction (Image 4). The performers were interested in creating a porous body, a body that says *yes*, that is receptive to the changing intentions, according to the relationships it establishes with the spectator and with what happens in the city, in an intense and provisory state of presence as we will see further on, in order to promote the multiplicity of this group for the streets, for the city, for culture:

> Therefore, we have to think the work in process as an open system that exchanges information with its environment. In this sense, the interactions involve also the rapport between social and individual space and time. In other words, they imply the rapport of the artist with the culture in which he or she is inserted and with the ones he or she seeks (Salles, 2006, p. 32).

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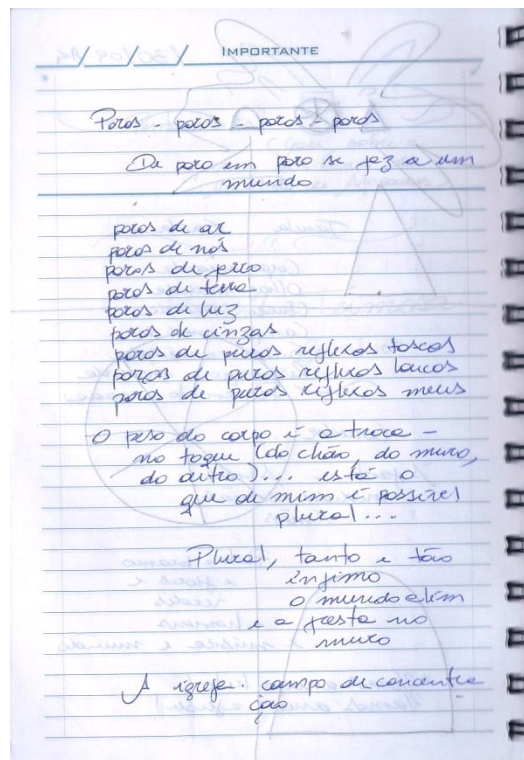Available at: <http://seer.ufrgs.br/presenca>

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Image 4 – Notes by one of the performers.

Contagion, connection and exchange are exacerbated when we go to the streets, the marketplace, the squares and public spaces. This way, we understand that the choice of location for the performance favored the interaction as a guiding principle of the research.

Contagion as Methodology

Following our desire in establishing a collaborative creative process, the methodology created for *Motim* was based on relational and networked procedures, acknowledging the contagion as a guiding principle in our creative strategies. This methodology was created along the process without a previous plan but articulated with a guided process to which Salles calls *tendencialidade*:

> All interactions are guided by trends, directions and vague desires. The artist, willing to face the challenge, goes in search of satisfying his or her needs, seduced by the realization of that desire he or she acts and starts building the work. The trend is undefined but the artist is loyal to that vagueness. The work slowly goes towards a better definition of that which one wants to elaborate (Salles, 2006, p. 33).

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In addition to a close connection with the object of the research (that presupposes laughter as relationship), the consolidation of this network-oriented methodology is also linked to the way *Coletivo Lugar Comum* acts and organizes itself as a group. Since it was founded in 2007, the *Coletivo* was thought as a space of sharing among artists acting independently in Recife. Thus, the day-by-day activities were structured with classes exchanged among the artists, a horizontal space for exchanging knowledge – without a single director, teacher or choreographer – using creative procedures and physical training conducted by different members according to the specific needs of each work.

This modus operandi was replicated during *Motim*'s creative process, counting on the various agents who shared exercises, physical and vocal training and influenced the construction of a laughing body and established an environment of contagion through the dialogue of their personal references. We also perceived that the events taking place at that time in the city directly influenced our thinking about the project and its poetics. Looking closely at the process, we understand the methodology invested in contagion as an exchange that took place in three different ways: among performers, the environment and our references; among the performers themselves; and between performers and audience.

Contagion among Performers and their Personal References, the Environment and Culture

During the creative process, *Motim*'s cast has taken part in workshops and residencies that greatly contributed to the creative procedures used in the composition, as well as brought about diverse references that influenced in its dramaturgical nexus. The workshops offered by Joice Aglae and Arilson Lopes, both experienced actors and clowns, brought to the work the universe of the savage buffoon and the comical clown. The residency conducted by the artist Micheline Torres introduced some exercises by Grotowski and another residency with Michelle Moura brought references from the composition methods of Steve Reich, using repeated individual sounds as matter for composition. Finally, the workshop offered by the dancer Líria Morays was responsible for opening our relationship with the city and the

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urban environment, imagining the body also as architecture and the city as a circulatory system or an anatomical structure such as the body.

Our relationship with Recife and its political and aesthetic movements also influenced the creative process of *Motim*. Between 2013 and 2015 Recife was the stage of a number of spontaneous popular manifestations demanding an ample discussion regarding urban mobility, the revitalization of public and artistic spaces in town and the policies of urban planning in general. During that same period, the *Passe Livre* movement leaded a series of public demonstrations in São Paulo against a raise in the price of the bus fare and for better conditions in the public transportation system. This movement was harshly repressed by the state police.

Another important movement that took place in the same period was the *Ocupe Estelita* movement in Recife. This movement protested against the illegal selling of a public land to private companies that planned on installing a complex of twelve commercial buildings in the location by the side of the river. In time, the movement assumed a wider discussion about the policies of urban planning in the city and came to represent a strong resistance against the privatization of public spaces in Recife, gathering thousands of independent minded architects, lawyers, political activists, teachers, students, intellectuals, artists, politicians and other city dwellers from every strand of social and professional profile. The movement is still active in Recife and has gained international visibility through its actions. Some artists from *Coletivo Lugar Comum* have intensely taken part in the actions of *Ocupe Estelita* Movement, attending the meetings, performing in public demonstrations, helping in the occupations and being in the frontline of the manifestations that were also heavily repressed by the state police.

Another mobilization called *Movimento Ocupe Parque* took place during that period, involving mostly artists trying to pressure the mayor of Recife to reopen a public theatre that has been closed for repairs for many years. In 2014 the theatre would celebrate its 100th birthday and was out of use because of a flagrant lack of interest in the public administration (Image 5).

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Image 5 − *Motim* scene in front of Teatro do Parque. Photo by Juliana Brainer.

In this context of public manifestations and resistance against the oppression of the constituted power, *Motim* was created and performed, bringing to the streets its defiant and rebellious laughter and incorporating the idea of "occupying the city in e new way that allows the creation of different social bonds and the transgression of what is apparently impossible to transgress" (Oliveira, 2007, p. 93).

This context served as a basis for the choice of places where the work was to be performed. It also influenced in the making of the soundtrack that was being composed as a series of soundscapes incorporating sounds and discourses present in the city and using recorded material of a radio newscast and other sounds found on the streets.

Contagion among the Performers

The creative process was also intensely permeated by the contributions the performers themselves brought to the labs. Thus, the methodology also comprehended references from the artistic and physical training each performer had experienced in his or her lifetime and had proposed through exercises during the research. Having in mind the guiding aspect of laughter as physicality, memory and contagion, some performers brought exercises that crossed those aspects and could be used in the composition.

For instance, the teacher and artist Leticia Damasceno introduced the group to her investigation about artist Lygia Clark in some labs, which contributed to the image of the body's pores as laughing mouths. Another ref-

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erence used in the creative process was the group's experience with contact improvisation, practiced by many *Coletivo* members since 2011. Exercises proposed by Conrado Falbo and Liana Gesteira, as well as the group's experience in jams and contact meetings contributed to the inclusion of the practice in one of the performance's scenes.

Another space of contagion identified during the process among the performers was the connection with *Transito coletivo*, a research the group was developing simultaneously to the creative process of *Motim*. It was a practical research concerning states of presence in places of passage such as bus terminals, airports, subway stations etc. Thus, *Transito coletivo* was a strong influence in the making of *Motim*, as a way of thinking about presence in performance and how to occupy with that presence the various public spaces in which we were going to perform.

Contagion between Performers and Audience

The contagion relationship between performers and audience was also an important strategy in creating the methodology used in *Motim*. By organizing our labs in public spaces, the performers started to notice the need of creating a porous body that could open up to interact with the passers-by and compose the actions with them. This state of a porous body was named *corpo sim* [a body that says yes] by the performers. In order to make that state happen, they had to articulate an interdisciplinary body that does not make use of any single technique, but mixes different references of body work (coming from dance, theater, clowning etc.) bringing them all together to construct its "doing-saying".

By bringing to the studio and body work different techniques and practices allowed the cast to build a flexible state, receptive to the changes in tonus and presence. That allowed the cast to be more receptive to what was going on in the street and a heightened awareness to interact with the unpredictable throughout the performance's trajectory.

Another important factor influencing in establishing this dialogue with the audience was the strategy of creating the structure of some composition games in some of the scenes. The rules were very simples and we used gestures easily recognized in the streets and quickly identified by those watching the performance (Image 6). Thus, in many moments the audience

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was incorporated to the cast and many watchers and passers-by joined in the chorus and acted as performers. In this sense, the use of laughter as a body work tool was a great help in inviting the audience to participate for it was a simple and recognizable day-by-day action. "The audience feels, through a rapport based on synaesthesia, a possible communion of movements and they move collectively [...]" (Bardet, 2015, p. 77). In this sense, *Motim* contributes to a non hierarchical knowledge, approaching the audience and the artist's craft as well as enabling a space in which the distribution of the sensible as discussed by Rancière (2005a) can happen.

Image 6 − *Motim*'s scene at Sete de Setembro Street. Photo by Juliana Brainer.

Looking at the three types of contagion that based our methodology, we can identify the discussion of principles that reinforce Salles' ideas on the network within the framework of a creative process: "simultaneity of actions, absence of hierarchy, non linearity, and intense establishment of meanings" (Salles, 2006, p. 10). These principles permeated most of the choices concerning exercises and aesthetic solutions determined by the methodology and they corroborate the effort of creating *Motim* as a network process.

What made the work fit into the category of a process dramaturgy was the effort to understand a creative process from inside out, experimenting procedures and methods to articulate its main nexus. Establishing a network-oriented process based on contagion made possible the opening to the many voices contributing to the research, valuing the idea of a process dramaturgy built upon a variety of human and theoretical material, as well

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as the construction of a bio potent body that resists pre-determined protocols in its creative organization.

Final Remarks

The investigation of laughter as relational thinking granted the articulation of different phases of *Motim*'s creation, from the methodology to the resulting dramaturgy, assuring the coherence of a work heavily invested in a political bias since its conception and throughout the creative process.

The political aspect of *Motim* is due to many factors: the view of art as a way of expressing a political stance about something that seemed relevant to the performers: the act of laughing; the view of political action as empowering the process of art-making through pacific actions that can represent resistance to normative systems; the use of accessibility strategies through the performance in public spaces and without any cost for the audience; and finally the horizontal, non-linear, non-normative and precarious creative process.

Linked to its character of suspension, disappearing in order to reappear under a new form, *Motim*'s dramaturgical choices were based on the language of performance and on a relatively mobile structure counting on scenes that alternated from one place to the other according to the different states developed in the labs.

The effort of writing about the research in dance/art reveals all the absences that were present in the process, making it clear that there are *fluctuant signs* (Gil, 1997) in the creative process that can never be apprehended through that effort. However, the effort of discussing the strategies that had been used leads to an investigative trajectory which is far from finished for that effort necessarily makes to recognize that one of the main questions is still in search of an answer and that is how the doing-saying of laughter can be used to produce meanings.

Thus, the process dramaturgy extends its meanings to a wider sense of time, corresponding to different phases of resuming the research in order to discover, further on, a new phase of this networked process. As opposed to the idea of a completely finished performance, we understand that the future season represents a continuity of our questioning, the network-oriented creative process, valuing the construction of an unique way of expressing

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ideas that can make the performers come closer to each other as performers, closer to our cultural environment and the audience in a way that can makes people reach the goal of valuing the act of laughing as suspension, as a way of reconnecting themselves with their bodies and restitute its potency.

Notes

[1] The 10-performer cast was composed of eight *Coletivo* members - Roberta Ramos, Maria Agrelli, Renata Muniz, Liana Gesteira, Priscilla Figuerôa, Conrado Falbo, Cyro Morais and Silvia Góes, as well as the guest performers, Letícia Damasceno and Gabriela Santana, artists and teachers in the undergraduate department of Dance at the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. Due to personal issues, Renata Muniz and Priscilla Figuerôa had to be temporarily replaced by Drica Ayub and Iara Sales Agra.

[2] According to Setenta (2008), the speech act theory "comes from the idea that speech is a form of action", so performative utterances – as opposed to declarative utterances – would be the ones which not only use the linguistic expression to say something but actually to do something (Austin, 1990 apud Setenta, 2008, p. 21).

[3] According to Lins (2008, p. 45), especially in Plato's Phaedrus.

[4] A practice created by Indian doctor Madan Kataria using yoga breathing exercises to arouse laughter and having in mind the beneficial effects of laughing in the body, regardless of any emotional reason.

[5] Exercise called *MemoRia* by the group of performers.

[6] Proposed by actor Arilson Lopes in one of the workshops offered during the creative process and based on techniques and principles of clowning.

[7] In 2016, *Coletivo Lugar Comum* is going to perform a second season of the work. For the group, the occasion of a new season cannot take place without resuming and continuing the research in order to find new ways of affecting the audience with the performance's (micro)political aspect.

[8] For instance, through the unfolding of some exercises proposed during the residency conducted by artist Michelle Moura emphasizing the repetition of pulse and gesture until the transformation of the initial material, always working with exhaustion and close contact with trance-like states.

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9   Comprehending, in addition to the original text, "the theatrical means employed in the staging" (Pavis, 1999, p. 113).

10 Even though it is not so common to count on a dramaturgist when it comes to the reality of dance productions in Brazil.

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