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Genius and aesthetic grace: an archaeology of discourses on dance education in Portugal (1839-1930)

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ABSTRACT – Genius and aesthetic grace: an archaeology of discourses on dance education in Portugal (1839-1930) – This article identifies the advent of diagnoses and solutions concerning the goals and procedures of dance education in Portugal, which resulted in the continued advocacy for a Conservatory to come. It detects two moments – the 19th century and the First Republic – during which a discourse built on the natural aptitude vs. universal learning polarity came to prevail. The theatrical dance syllabi created in 1911 were an attempt to end this dichotomy. However, these discursive formations continued to reinforce the notions of aesthetic grace and individualism of the genius, bolstered by the perception that was then cultivated of foreign vanguards (Isadora Duncan and the Ballets Russes).
Keywords: **Conservatory. Dance Education. Pantomime dancing. Genius. History and historiography.**

RÉSUMÉ – Génie et grâce esthétique: une archéologie des discours sur l'enseignement de la danse au Portugal (1839-1930) – Cet article repère l'émergence de certains diagnostics et solutions concernant les buts et moyens d'enseignement de la danse au Portugal, qui se traduisent par la défense continue d'un Conservatoire à venir. Il porte sur deux instants – xixe siècle et Première République – au cours desquels s'est imposé un discours fondé sur l'antinomie don naturel vs. apprentissage universel. Les programmes de danse théâtrale créés en 1911 visaient à abolir cette dichotomie. Cependant, ces formations discursives ont continué à relancer les idées de grâce esthétique et individualisme du génie, accrues par l'image qui était alors cultivée des avant-gardes étrangères (Isadora Duncan et Ballets Russes).
Mots-clés: **Conservatoire. Enseignement de la danse. Danse de pantomime. Génie. Histoire et historiographie.**

RESUMO – Génio e graça estética: uma arqueologia dos discursos sobre ensino da dança em Portugal (1839-1930) – O artigo identifica a emergência de diagnósticos e soluções em torno dos fins e dos meios do ensino da dança em Portugal, e que derivaram na defesa continuada de um Conservatório por vir. Concentra-se em dois momentos – o século XIX e a Primeira República – durante os quais se impôs um discurso em torno da antinomia aptidão natural vs. aprendizagem universal. Com os programas de dança teatral estatuídos em 1911, procura-se suspender esta dicotomia. Porém, estas formações discursivas continuaram a reconduzir os princípios da graça estética e do individualismo do génio, exponenciados pela perceção que então se cultivava da vanguarda estrangeira (Isadora Duncan e Ballets Russes).
Palavras-chave: **Conservatório. Ensino da dança. Dança pantomímica. Génio. História e historiografia.**

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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Introduction

This article seeks to problematize the *substantive absence* of any idea or need for dance education in Portugal in discussions occurring between 1839 and 1930, a period in which consecutive policymakers consistently advocated for the Conservatory *to come*. This idealized, yet never materialized, institution kept alive the promise of a type of education in which the state never invested. By keeping dance, or pantomime, as a secondary art form, perpetually subordinated to theater arts, the Conservatory proposed a long, detailed and deeply technical education, while at the same time allowing two rationales to permeate and become endemic within the discourse on dance education. On the one hand, we identified the emergence of the notion of aesthetic grace, deriving from certain unfathomable innate gifts; on the other, the individualism of the genius, both unmanageable and non-transferable. While never actually opposing each other, the aesthetic grace and genius-function of the dancer, over time, became a durable pair that resisted the pedagogic potential of schooling.

We will use a timeline that refers back to the Conservatório Geral de Arte Dramática (General Conservatory for the Dramatic Arts), created in 1836 on the initiative of Queen D. Maria II, with the emergence of its inaugural dance lessons, in 1839, as a starting point, and the reform of the institution, in 1930, as our end date. A lengthy period of almost a century in which, as we were able to determine, there was an extremely limited number of dance students and an absolute void in terms of documentation regarding its teaching and learning processes. Examining the history of dance education in Portugal is, therefore, an opportunity to confront the non-existent practices concerning these arts of the body which were, themselves, barely existent.

As a research strategy, and without losing sight of this ample chronology, we propose an archaeological inquiry into a very specific transition period – between Monarchy and the First Republic (1910-1926) – during which the Portuguese cultural elites were able to impose themselves in the public and political spheres. We carried out a comprehensive collection of

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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materials divided into two series of documents, legislation on art education and lifestyle periodicals, in which a discursive formation reiterating the idea of dance as a *lesser art form* – most notably within the context of Portuguese theater – gradually began to emerge. In fact, its learning practices fundamentally dispensed with the variety of curricular solutions implemented both in mainstream education and in specialized arts education.

In any event, it is safe to say that this period marked the beginning of a discussion that would resonate in the future, whether it focused on equating the ballerina's position to that of the author-performer, with its genius attributes and its status as an object of idealization in the global market of cultural goods, or on dance itself as a discipline defined by strict rules and collective work. An analysis of lifestyle and culture publications of this era, namely *Ilustração Portuguesa* – the most circulated periodical of its kind during the First Republic –, reveals how far these educational practices really were from those that produced the dancers and companies who conquered international stages in those days. However, it was also during this time that the potential of the Conservatory, which remained the only public institution offering dance classes in the entire country, began to be truly recognized. Such an endeavor also reveals the extent to which, in fact, this dichotomy allowed everything to stay the same.

State of an ever minor art

In the last few words of the introduction to his latest book, dance historian José Sasportes (2018, p. 14) makes a statement that can be understood as both a diagnosis of the present and a summary of the track record regarding the practice of dance in Portugal since the 18th century: "there is a *lack*" – he unreservedly declares – "of what I would call a choreographic culture, or simply an artistic culture, among our decision-makers". As a justification, Sasportes suggests this happens "for", citing the immortal words of the poet Luís de Camões, "minds Art ignorant aye look down on Art" (Sasportes, 2018, p. 14; emphasis added). This diagnosis emphasizes the absence of any kind of history of dance education in Portugal, as if it were unnecessary to

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uncover the social and pedagogical foundations that have perpetuated the rarefaction of this type of training.

While dance studies and the historiography of Portuguese education have all but erased this matter, the multidisciplinary work organized by Daniel Tércio (2010) has, in turn, covered the history of dance in Portugal since the late 18th century, including a few contributions to art teaching and education. Among the seminal works on the history of dance, we can highlight the writings of Tomás Ribas (1959; 1962), who, without overlooking national or ethnographic specificities, endeavored to account for the *facts* connected to both *institutions and personalities*, all the while seeking to unearth and problematize some of the most endogenous characteristics in Portuguese ballet – a lack of performers, creators and market structures that would enable the national art scene to become self-sustaining. José Sasportes made an initial assessment (1970b) which was closely followed, in the same year, by a *History of Dance in Portugal* (1970a). Written in the context of the debate underpinning the major reforms in Portuguese art education, it is still considered a historiographical milestone for its sheer – although scattered – profusion of references to both teaching and its institutional organization, as well as for the resources it provides for comparative approaches, and has been an ongoing project whose completion the author continues to pursue (Sasportes, 1979; Sasportes; Ribeiro, 1991; Sasportes, 2018).

Following this tradition, other academic studies have begun, however marginally, to tackle the subject of teaching during the period in question. Maria Helena Coelho (1998), for instance, conducted an exhaustive review of the constitutive aspects of theatrical dance for the first period of Portuguese romanticism, from 1834 to 1856. In turn, Elvira Alvarez (1999) focused on the transformation of plastic values in dance, specifically displayed in early 20th century artistic festivities, showing how they emerged spontaneously at the hands of amateurs, incentivized by select audiences. These were later appropriated by, and normativized through, the patronage of the Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional (Secretariat for National Propaganda), or SPN, under the leadership of António Ferro, who, during the 1930s and the 1940s,

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served as a kind of minister of Culture for the Portuguese authoritarian regime, the Estado Novo.

We must also emphasize the institutional perspective. Our research found various efforts to tackle this category of teaching from a historical viewpoint in publications such as journals and conference proceedings, including the journal *Estudos de Dança* (Coelho, 2004, Alvarez; Coelho 2004, Tércio, 1994, 1995, 2004) and the 150 year anniversary celebration of the Conservatório Nacional (National Conservatory) (Silva, 1988).

Another highlight is Jorge Costa's study on the curriculum of the Conservatório Geral de Arte Dramática (1836), which in 1841 became the Conservatório Real (Royal Conservatory), an institution that, from the outset, included the Escola de Música, de Teatro e a Dança (Music, Theater and Dance School) (Costa, 2000). In this article, and by invoking institutional narratives involving great personalities who sought to define a specific way of being Portuguese in the context of dance education, we aim to identify the problematization with regard to artistic and pedagogical ideas that informed the choices and possibilities envisioned for this country. Finally, we hope to understand how the Escola de Dança do Conservatório Real de Lisboa (Dance School of the Royal Conservatory of Lisbon) came to embody the very principle of a future Conservatory, by identifying the main junctures in this debate up until the dawn of the First Republic, the first democratic experiment in Portugal, which began in 1910 – marking the epilogue of the Monarchy – and ended in 1926, giving rise to an authoritarian regime that would last almost five decades, collapsing on April 25, 1974, following the Carnation Revolution.

The archaeology of a discursive formation

While there are earlier reports of private establishments, and even public institutions such as the Real Colégio dos Nobres (Royal College for Nobles), in the 18th century, where lessons were provided, the truth is that "[…] the first project of a school intended for the professional training of dancers", as emphasized by José Sasportes (1979, p. 83), would only surface in 1839, in the context of organizing the activities of the Conservatório Geral da Arte

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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Dramática, created three years earlier under the impetus of the writer Almeida Garrett, who would also become its director. Its first regulation divided the institution into *three Schools: declamation, music, and dance and mime*. The latter's syllabus included two classes only, to which, by two consecutive decrees – May 24, 1841, and December 26, 1842 –, choreographic culture was added, to be taught alongside technique, which changed the establishment plan to comprise a director, who was also the dance teacher, and another instructor who taught mime. Against a backdrop of curricular scarcity – there was also a limited number of students, totaling a yearly attendance average of only 14 –, the school would eventually close in 1869 without causing any public reaction (Sasportes, 1979, p. 54). The practice of a formal dance education did not resume until much later, in 1909, at the Teatro Nacional de São Carlos (São Carlos National Theater), where a *dance* class taught by a female teacher was created, and whose purpose was to "[…] obtain Portuguese dancers that would justify dispensing with the annual arrival of foreigners" (Portugal, 1989). Soon after, the republican authorities – a coup in 1910 had abolished the Monarchy – reformed teaching at the Conservatory and created within its walls the Escola da Arte de Representar (School for the Art of Acting), whose educational project entailed the obligation for all students to be taught "dance and theatrical gymnastics classes" (República Portuguesa, 1911, p. 2111). We can thus conclude that the teaching of choreographic arts was never able to break away from actor training, curtailing the greater (and ultimately foiled) purpose, advocated since Garrett, of creating an opera house in Portugal.

If we focus our attention on the results achieved by these institutions, we can observe that they were rather "[…] poor", which is why it was impossible to establish "[…] a tradition" and, through it, "[…] allow the art of dance to take root in Portugal" (Sasportes, 1979, p. 83). Researchers point out the "[…] amateurish quality" of dance groups in Portugal, until the advent, much later, of Ballet Gulbenkian (1961), the most renowned Portuguese dance company of the 20th century, which remained active until 2005 (Coelho; Sasportes; Assis, 1994, p. 11). It is not, therefore, to provide answers to an inquiry focused on the real output of creators and performers, or,

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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indeed, on the evolution of choreographic culture in general, that it makes sense to reflect on this branch of specialized arts education between 1839 and 1930.

The *Memória Histórico-Estatística acerca do Ensino das Artes Cénicas e com Especialidade da Música* (1883), presented by the then director of the Royal Conservatory of Lisbon, Luís Augusto Palmeirim (1883, p. 6-9), reports that, with Garrett's resignation back in 1841, the institution had almost suffered "[…] a death blow" to its initial "bold march"; since then there had been a "[…] long period of decadence". To further underscore the contrast with the present, he decided to recount the first public display of the work produced at the Conservatory, in the presence of D. Fernando (the queen's husband and honorary president of this institution), on October 29, 1840, in a "[…] performance exclusively put on by students". This event allows us to draw a first genealogical line with regard to this institution's core mission while directly connecting it to the training of professionals. Palmeirim notes that "[…] cantatas" were then "[…] in vogue" and that the orchestra's delivery clearly demonstrated that "[…] the impetus" given by the Conservatory "[…] had not been unfruitful". The drama *Amor e Pátria*, written by Garrett himself, followed the cantata, receiving the audience's applause and admiration, not only for the "[…] excellence of the language", but also for the students' performance. The show ended with a performance of a dance in two acts, *As Três Cidras do Amor*, "[…] in which twenty or so figures took part". It is then made clear that "[…] none of the performers in Almeida Garrett's drama" would eventually "[…] appear in the extensive list of Portuguese dramatic actors", while a few female dancers "[…] received well-earned applause at the royal theater of S. Carlos" and other "[…] theaters in the capital" (Palmeirim, 1883, p. 6-9).

We can thus see that the goal of producing artists for the labor market, which was part of the Conservatory's mission statement, was to remain unfulfilled. Garrett himself had always been clearly aware of the problems and obstacles he would need to overcome to carry through with his intentions. Symptomatically, he had written in the school's founding diploma that Portugal had "[…] talents for everything", and even "more talent and fewer

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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refinement than any other Country in Europe" (Portugal, 1836, p. 1275). The fact is that, throughout the entire 19th century, the rule according to which schooling was unnecessary to produce artists prevailed. On this matter, a 1901 decree states that while some of them had "[…] risen up to great heights", it was in part due to "the diligence of a few and simple artistic intuition of others" (Portugal, 1901, p. 89). It became commonplace for consecutive governments, when legislating on art education, to assume the intention of swimming against the tide, advocating for what one might describe as a Conservatory that was *yet to come*:

> A school that provides knowledge of classical art, that issues corrections and straightens the lines, that educates style and embellishes the form, that plots another course for modern evolution when it is about to sink, always seeking to reconcile sentiment, without which art disappears, with the naturalness that makes it dominant, refraining from ornamenting the former or making the latter vulgar, such a school we do not possess. And without school the idea of creating a pleiad of artists is dead in the water. The ones that do exist are a product of chance; we need to stop relying on it (Portugal, 1990, p. 17-18).

But things did not happen in such a simple and linear fashion. We must also understand that, in the second half of the 19th century, the reconciliation between what was meant by *natural aptitude* and the *universal learning* of artistic vocabulary – or the prevalence of one over the other – was already an issue that divided the directors of the Conservatory themselves. Luís Augusto Palmeirim (1883, p. 14) admitted that he had "[...] the displeasure of contradicting" the views "[…] on the teaching of dramatic art" held by his predecessor, Duarte Cardoso de Azevedo e Sá, who was at the helm of the institution from 1870 to 1879. He even acknowledged a "[…] radical difference" between "[…] their beliefs". In his view, Duarte Sá was convinced that "[…] he could mechanically and mnemonically bring any neophyte to the font of artistic baptism by way of rules and precepts that good sense suggests *a priori* to those who possess it". Palmeirim was of the opposite opinion. For many years he had committed to the idea that "[…] nature" itself offered "its elected the aesthetic and plastic conditions to carry on, unrestrained, on the path to artistic glory", which was tantamount to saying that Conservatories

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
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did – or could do – nothing but "[…] illustrate these vocations" (i) "through the study of foreign and national dramatic art"; (ii) "through the study of straight and correct pronunciation"; (iii) and "[…] finally through the explanation and comparison between the most brilliant excerpts of compositions by ancient and modern dramatic actors, relating them to the characters they brought to life and the passions they intended to reproduce on stage" (Palmeirim, 1883, p. 14)

Two significant perceptions for the future emerge here. The first corresponds to the view according to which art education is meant for a restricted public, which later materialized in its specialized nature, as well as in the persistent reluctance to democratize access to this particular branch of the education system. The idea that a cultivated nature can preexist education, or, in other words, that the experience of aesthetic grace can be entirely unencumbered by cultural restrictions, and, consequently, largely unaffected by learning processes and the endurance they require, still governs us, and its roots can be traced back to considerations such as the one that occupied Palmerim's mind. The second, which stems from the myth of innate taste and accepts the individualism of the *genius*, would transpire in Portugal as a devaluation of technical training in favor of a spiritual type of learning, by conveying contents usually derived from mankind's artistic thesaurus that are designed to ensure the apprentice's cultural *nobility* (Bourdieu; Darbel, 1969, p. 161-166).

However, in the last quarter of the 19th century, the student body attending the Conservatory was still largely made up of working-class youth, which means that the accumulation of cultural capital was still far from being guaranteed by this type of learning. Sasportes (1979, p. 84 and 93) even mentions "[...] a general prejudice against artistic professions" and cites, in this regard, a mid-19th century Report asserting that it was mostly the children of the poor who attended classes at the Conservatory. The situation did not change in the following years, as the same Luís Augusto Palmeirim (1883, p. 53) reported that "[…] dropping out of classes at the Conservatory" was "[…] common" and was due to the "[…] material affliction of a great

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number of students". To demonstrate his argument, Palmeirim registered the professions of students' parents and concluded the following:

> [Before invoking the numbers], allow me […] to remind you of the essentially popular nature of this establishment, and to assert, based on the content of the registration books, that the students of the Conservatory are almost entirely the children of workers, artists and menial public employees. Moreover, the statistics pertaining to these students' filiation include orphans and those who are not fortunate enough to know the identity of their parents, an equally regrettable type of orphanhood. This greatly honors our Institute, for whom these enrollment books are like a gilded volume containing the names of diligent future citizens who in time will proudly extract their titles of nobility from it (Palmeirim, 1883, p. 21).

Another characteristic differentiated this student population from what could be seen in other public education institutions at the time. The same source states that "the Conservatory is frequented […] for the most part by female students". It was in capturing both the categories of marginalization and social and professional exclusion – the *poor*, the *orphans* and *women* – that this institution found a meaning for its actions. The liberal monarchists believed that specialized art education could truly enable the disowned to "[…] acquire the means for their own decent support", to experience their own "[…] material emancipation" (Palmeirim, 1883, p. 21). Later, this professionalizing impetus would be substituted by an opposing incentive, namely one that interpreted the mission of the Conservatory as a drive to produce lovers of art. It must be noted that, in the timeline we are discussing, feminization was considerably more significant in dance classes that in music or theater – contemporary documents always mention *ballerinas* –, as sex limitations acquired "[…] official status when Romilda Piazzola was hired, because it had been established, in 1868, that if a female instructor were to teach these classes, she would have to exclusively teach girls!" This provision would last until 1949, when the Dance School finally became open to boys (Sasportes, 1979, p. 93).

Waving the flag of education as a fundamental instrument for the progress and regeneration of the social tissue, the republicans soon displayed a concern for the reform of art education, even though, as we will see, they

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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ended up reproducing the terms and proposals under which the previous regime had initiated the debate. In a diploma issued on May 22, 1911, which founded the aforementioned Escola da Arte de Representar, we can read more of the same concerning the justification of artistic learning taking place in a school environment. After criticizing the "[…] systematic neglect" (República Portuguesa, 1911, p. 2110) the Crown's governments had condemned the theater to, the legislator took it upon himself to put an end to an "[…] incidentally quite common prejudice" ordinarily "[…] expressed in unclear terms: that, while instruction and education are necessary for all things, including the most modest skills and crafts, the *art of acting* should constitute the exception". Republican authorities thus echoed the *artistic intuition vs. preliminary training* divide, still so prevalent today, in order to advocate for the theory of a necessary balance, according to which one could never replace the other. "Certainly, genius and even vocation are products entirely foreign to learning", the same source clarified, adding that the practice of "[…] art education" was no "[…] less indispensable to privileged talent or even to genius" (República Portuguesa, 1911, p. 2110). The pressing need for this kind of training never became clear in Portugal. If it had not become so when the students of the Conservatory were amongst the poorest in public education, subsequent decades would drastically reduce the likelihood of its implementation, as the liberal and republican bourgeoisie began to construct much of its *symbolic difference* by entering the field of the arts. The argument of the artist's immanent genius and the refusal to accept the professionalizing aspect of this type of education would be further bolstered under the Estado Novo regime – prosthesis, prop or ornament are perhaps the best words to describe the debate that would take place then, but this a matter for another discussion.

For now, we shall focus on the republicans, who, in the 1910s and 1920s, formalized a study plan as a consistent whole and infused a specifically pedagogic reflexivity into the arts education agenda. The close proximity of many politicians and democratic leaders to the main reformist currents of pedagogic thought, most notably the Movimento da Educação Nova (New Education Movement) (Ó, 2003), is well established. In this regard,

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
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advocating for an active and custom-made teaching, that would deeply involve students in their own learning processes, naturally emerged as a rationality that should structure the Escola da Arte de Representar. It was necessary to make its "[…] teaching as useful and practical as possible" (Portugal, 1911, p. 2110), and for the teaching staff and performers to exemplify to the students, regardless of how "[…]learned" the "[…] explanation" happened to be, what they would not be able to "[…] otherwise assimilate". The Government promised to strive for the School's teaching methods to "[…] rest upon the processes and molds of modern pedagogy". The same diploma then concluded: "[…] this is not, in fact, an ornamental school, created for the purpose of foreigners knowing we have one; but, in accordance with the Government's intent, a program where teachers and students sincerely work, hand in hand, for the sake of aggrandizing National Art, for the glory of Portuguese Civilization and the Republic" (Portugal, 1911, p. 2110). The director of the Escola da Arte de Representar, Júlio Dantas, who was transferred to this post from the Secção Dramática do Conservatório de Lisboa (Drama Department of the Conservatory of Lisbon), explained in his initial report (for the year 1911/1912) that "[…] the general orientation" was to imprint "[…] an essentially practical nature to the teaching processes", which included rehearsals at the National Theater and organizing, in the same location, "[…] performances designed to enable pupils to come in contact with the audience and, at the same time, allow the histrionic application of the teachers' lessons and the live demonstration of multiple dramatic literatures". In total, students "[…] confronted the audience" on twelve occasions, at the S. Carlos, Nacional and República theaters, at the Conservatory's Salão Nobre and at the Presidential Palace in Belém, where the "[…] intensity of the training" and "[…] the efficiency of the adopted pedagogical processes" were clearly demonstrated. The director concluded that the School worked "[…] like it had not worked since Garrett's institution" (Escola da Arte de Representar, 1913, p. 4-5).

The syllabus for the Curso da Arte de Representar (Art of Acting Course) covered three parts – Philosophy of Art, Art Techniques and Scenic Art Direction –, seemingly representing the ambition to provide students

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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with as much theoretical-practical training as possible. It was a three-year course divided into eight subjects, topped off by the requirement for all students to attend dance and theatrical gymnastics classes. Dance itself would only be taught from 1913 onward, by Spanish teacher Encarnación Fernandez, who served in that position until 1939. In what is an extremely rare occurrence in the context of Portuguese specialized arts education, all teaching content is available to us. They can be accessed in the published *Programas-Sinopses da Escola da Arte de Representar* (School for the Art of Acting/Performing Programs-Synopses), approved by the School Council on October 11, 1913. It is an extremely valuable document to analyze the transfer of rationalist-humanist values into an educational universe whose goal was not so much to administer a stabilized type of knowledge, or to divulge an artistic know-how, but to unleash its production. A few themes and, especially, techniques oriented towards the performative comprehension of artistic vocabulary clearly stand out, against the backdrop of a *physiology and psychology of emotions*. The disciplinary programs naturally embody an encyclopedic aspiration, in what amounts to a telegraphic enunciation of various themes and issues. But we cannot avoid registering the typically modern effort of attempting to expand rationalization to the human soul and its multiple mirrors. Indeed, at this juncture it is important to note the *charismatic representation of artistic work* (Bourdieu, 2005) in the context of school interaction. By way of example, we selected a few passages where the same *psychologistic* taxonomy is juxtaposed to, and reverberates in, an economy that could be applied both to dramatic character building and the actor's own self-awareness, which, once again, emerges between the antinomic forces of talent and genius, on the one hand, in-depth study, on the other:

> - in the subject of General Philosophy of the Arts: "General idea of human anatomy; muscles and nervous system; the brain; psychological activity; emotions; joy, sorrow, fear, wrath, etc; multiple classifications; the mechanism of emotions; theories; cerebral locations; natural expression of emotions; gesture, cry, word; expressive function of facial muscles; nature of the comedic; laughter; Bergson theories";
>
> - in the subject of the Art of Acting: "Table of the passions. Expansive and depressive. Affects and hatred; joy and sorrow; love and jealousy; friendship

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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> and emulation; tenderness, rancor, envy; avarice and profligacy. Expressions corresponding to the different groups. Sudden and durable sentiments. Imitation and fiction in their corresponding expressions. Unfolding of the artist's personality: executant and observer of him or herself […]. Adaptation of the role to the artist or vice-versa. Personification, identification. Talent; genius; inspiration. The artist's learned nature; study completes it" (Escola da Arte de Representar, 1913, p. 9-11).

It is only in the subject of Aesthetics and Theatrical Plastics that we can find those course contents directly referring to the rationalization of body movement and expression, as well as references to dance and choreography. There are fewer than a dozen telegraphic instructions on the subject of pantomime, but we must recognize that this residue, defining the conceptual terrain of the teacher reflecting upon an artistic practice, is, nevertheless, the most we can hope the printed documentation to provide us in terms of visualizing the discursive formation within which dance as a practice began to be discussed.

> *Summary notions of plastic anatomy.* – Anatomy in general and its divisions. Plastic anatomy: its goal. – Overview on the human body. – Osteology of the head, in particular; of the torso and the extremities, in general. – Myology of the head, in particular; of the torso and the extremities, in general. – Plasticity of the human body. – Plasticity of the human body according to sex, age, race and temperament. – Physiognomy in general; physiognomic expression. *Mime*. – Ideas and general considerations. Exercises in flexibility. Minute and practical observation of upper body, arm and leg movements. Minute and practical observation of hand movements. Total expressions. Analysis of expressive movements. Expressions dependent on the will and intelligence (active). Expressions momentarily independent of the will and intelligence (passive). Practical exercises. Subordination of miming, in general, to character, temperament, social environment, race and other modifiers of characters to be performed. Specific subordination of face miming to characterization. (Visits to sculpture and painting museums). *Pantomime*. – Pantomime in theater. Resources and difficulties. Interpretation of the elements of a sentence and of the parts of discourse through pantomime. Artificial language of pantomime. Its difficulties. General notions on subject choice, how to write a pantomime and its reproduction on stage. Subsidiary use of theater artifacts and accessories. The staging of pantomime. Music and its influence on

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
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> pantomime. Dances. Mimes. Pantomimes. Choreographers, Dancers. Practical exercises. Staging of a pantomime (Escola da Arte de Representar, 1913, p. 13).

Isadora Duncan *vs.* Ballets Russes

In the prevailing forms of perception and evaluation of the artist in modernity, the dancer stands out as a figure that embodies *pure intentionality*, that is, a number of stylistic competencies in which the cultural, the sensual and the moral are essentially fused. This is a discipline that shapes the relationship between body and soul. From here on out, we will focus on the type of discourse conveyed by the Portuguese press in the early 20th century, particularly in the long series of the periodical *Ilustração Portuguesa*, to determine how, outside the educational field, this cognitive heritage often expressed in its midst was further reinforced. Indeed, by resorting to descriptions of foreign figures, usually portrayed as if they were levitating in the ethereal space of essentiality, we can observe how a rift between a worldview founded on the charismatic notion of natural gift and a perspective based on rationally developed pedagogic skills was magnified. On the one hand, we have the example of the dazzling Isadora Duncan, on the other, that of the extremely demanding Ballet Russe. It should be stressed that this dual perception was used by *Ilustração Portuguesa* chroniclers, in the 1910s, to explain the nature of the work developed at the Conservatory's Escola da Arte de Representar, as if to bind the circle on the same regime of intelligibility.

The image of the dancer-artist emerged in Portugal in the form of *genius* and was permeated by a discourse predicated on the moral idealization of women. Several critics, in an almost dramatic and obstinate way, attempted to understand the complexity of the ballerinas who visited us or starred in Parisian theaters. There was no similar interest displayed in the Portuguese press for home-grown ballerinas, who at the time did not stand out individually. It was, in fact, in the context of a debate concerning the morality of dances performed by foreign ballerinas – who were perceived as eccentric, blessed with strong characters and inordinate talents – that the idea of genius associated with dance was implemented in Portugal. This involved

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

overcoming the spurious dialectic opposing the morally dubious woman to the angelic woman. The ballerina of genius undresses for art's sake, thus consecrating an imagetic materiality that does not belong to her exclusively, but is properly classical in nature (Sasportes, 2018, p. 24). Isadora Duncan, who never performed in Portugal, represents one of the most significant examples of this trend. The following was taken from an article by Paulo Osório, appropriately entitled *Uma Dançarina de Génio* (A Dancer of Genius):

> She is a tall and blonde creature whose elegance draws on the types of beauty that ancient civilizations perpetuated in the marble of their deities: wide flanks, erect torso, shoulders slightly more slumped than the Venus de Milo's, but somewhat identical to those of the English beauties portrayed by Turner. It is a strange beauty (if we may call it beauty) which is further accentuated by her irregular facial traits, that have nothing Parisian or even southern about them, but, as they are, become a wonderful instrument of her art. This woman's dancing, so candidly displayed before one's surprised eyes, against a monochrome background, to an indecisive, dreamy light, excites one with a very pure and chaste form of emotion, despite conveying what one might call the excessive power of her bare feet and beautiful naked legs. A French writer once said that, upon watching her, one feels compelled to kneel in prayer, or to cry… Which is wonderful, is it not? that such a thing can be achieved through dance, nothing other than dance, the harmony of attitude, the melody of gestures, this mysterious and remarkable force which Rodin did not hesitate to call Genius. No matter which musical work she happens to perform, whether it is Gluck's *Iphigenia* or *Orpheus*, Schubert and Chopin's waltzes, or even, despite how difficult it is to perform as a single *danseuse*, *Tannhäuser*'s bacchanal, her supreme artistry always manages to subdue and carry one, perhaps to ancient Greece as some say, but, it any case, to somewhere that is infinitely more beautiful than the trite world we live in. Is this what is meant by evocation? I cannot say. But it should evidently be called Art, with a capital A – divine Art, supreme Art –, removing from this word all the blemishes that may still persist as a result of its general misuse (Osório, 1912, p. 77-78).

In an article written in Paris, in March 1913, we can find new developments in this thesis according to which beauty in art is beyond morality, a prerogative that is embodied in the ballerina of genius. At a time when numerous performative denudation scandals came to light, sometimes leading

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

to police intervention in the name of *decency* and *bourgeois morality*, the chronicler recounted an episode that involved Duncan two years earlier – "the illustrious American partially wrapped her body in discreet and prudish gauzes" – to once again dive into considerations regarding the relation between art and sensuality. Having declared that he believed "entirely in the good faith" of a woman who devoted her "life to her art", loving it with the "ferocious exclusiveness" of somebody who "thinks of nothing else", he imagines Duncan herself "gazing at her own sculptural legs", surmising that she probably "contemplated them like Paganini contemplated his Stradivarius" (R., 1913, p. 421-422). As a result, he found it hard to comprehend that others could perceive her "with less than noble ideas". He then concluded:

> […] let us not discuss Isadora Duncan's theories on art, or ascertain to what extent it is permissible to let Beethoven or Chopin be interpreted by the most beautiful limbs, belonging to the most gracious, agile and talented of women. Let us eclectically appreciate that dance is beautiful when it provides the eyes with a seductive impression of art, whether through the eurhythmics of a gesture, the divine beauty of an assemblage, or even the successful arrangement of colors and attitudes (R., 1913, p. 421-423).

Thus understood, the art of dance becomes a sort of apostolate, a practice of renunciation of all sensory attributes, allowing the dancer to detach him or herself from the world of ordinary mortals and ascend to an intangible plane belonging to the Olympian gods. However, asserting that her performance was not so much that of a living body, but rather of a passing spirit, is perhaps to overlook the most important aspect. Beyond this, Duncan appears to possess an additional efficacy, that of being able to rationalize the creative act while displaying an acute awareness of the artistic process she was involved in as a whole. Consequently, Duncan's most significant and enduring image is perhaps that of an artist who established a form of sociability in which her discipline's methods and practices are openly discussed, even though the outcome of this particular performance is, again, the notion that technical prowess is utterly untransmissible. There is no secret; on the contrary, everything is transparent. Duncan may well be presented as a teacher who works on her art form in a school context and in front of her pupils.

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

Nevertheless, the genius that is hers, and hers only, is not teachable or bequeathable. We can now return to the besotted Paulo Osório's description, now in greater detail:

> When I arrived at Neuilly it was already night. Next to a garden door there were a few cars. This was the place. […] The light came from above, filtered through windscreens and frosted glass. In the corner behind the door, a table where tea was being served; surrounding it, and along the wall next to the stairwell, that led to a gallery, a few *divans*, a *fauteuil*, stools, a piano and a group of men and women who, at first, were difficult to discern under the mysterious crepuscular light. There were writers, musicians, comedians, men of the world […] and, among them, doing the honors, Isadora Duncan, with her naked feet, wrapped in white gauzes under a clay and gold velvet tunic […]. When the great artist stated she would reveal the principles of her art and method, we were all already convinced that it was, in fact, the most beautiful of arts and the best of methods. The atmosphere had penetrated us and enveloped our spirit. We were experiencing a peculiarly enchanting dream, to which we had been transported, through her mere presence, by that woman with naked feet, moving slowly and gracefully, against a foggy background, against a vague, mysterious light. None of us spoke loudly, so as to avoid disturbing that pagan temple's serene majesty.
>
> – All dance, she slowly said in her *yankee* French – is nothing but the combination of three movements: rhythmic step, rhythmic run and rhythmic leap. However, it is very difficult to ably execute either of these movements. I have been working for five years to have my pupils reproduce them." (Osório, 1912, p. 76-77).

Osório's text is interspersed with images illustrating this pedagogical relationship under the primacy of aesthetic grace (Figure 1):

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

Figure 1 – Duncan and the *isadorables* in *Ilustração Portuguesa*

Source: Osório, 1912, p. 77 (credits: Hemeroteca Municipal de Lisboa)

He then goes on to exhaustively describe Duncan's pedagogical process:

> Isadora makes a gesture and the pupils come to her. Eleven, somewhat sturdy German girls, whose beauty is not impressive at first glance. All nude, under their short, white tunics, like Roman ephebes. The piano starts playing: and they come marching in, one after the other, and begin running, then jumping, and their figures, completely banal at first, begin transforming, and the magic of their statuesque gestures seduces us, and that whole scenario comes to life, and we become astonished, possibly recalling the bas-relief of a Greek vase or maybe even Puvis de Chavannes' frescoes, where the characters seem to become detached from the earth and where nature itself is as light as foam.
>
> – Dance – Isadora proceeds – is meant to express the human soul's most noble and profound sentiments, those that have come from ancient Greece. It serves to establish harmony in our lives. Such is the way the ancients understood it. Plato used to dance, as did the generals of the republics, and I believe that is what inscribed in their thoughts the grace and balance that immortalized them. All our gestures have, so to speak, a repercussion on our souls; there is no moral state a gesture is unable to express. A simple movement of the head backwards, made passionately, produces a shudder of bliss, audacity or desire in our entire being. He or she who dances must keep close and constant relationships with art and nature's creations […]. That is why the dancer must

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

> choose the movements that express what lies in all living things: strength, grace, health, nobility. And my ideal, by developing this school and creating others, would be to provide the conscious models for the future, as it were, the living and precious models, to the artists that shall require them from me […].
>
> – When I say such things in France – she continues, with a sad, ironic smile – I am told they are utopias.
>
> She pauses for a moment, as if ensnared by her own dream, and finally tells us, with an apprehensive look, perhaps dreading the mocking reaction of our skepticism:
>
> – One could create an entirely new race!
>
> And then my thoughts gravitated towards Isadora's brother, born in America like his sister, but living in Athens, wandering around Paris in a tunic and sandals, his head crowned with flowers. And I thought about Isadora herself dancing… apostles of a new faith, creatures in whom, through a strange form of atavism, the Greek soul is reborn and flourishes, willing to elevate these poor civilized souls to their pagan reverie. Theirs is an excessive ideal and they want to share it. But, for those girls I saw dancing in Neuilly to become Isadoras, it would require the great artist to teach them, not the step, how to run or leap, but what Rodin rightfully saw in her, which is called Genius, and which has never been taught by any school… (Osório, 1912, p. 77-79).

An article entitled *A Beleza Grega* (Greek Beauty; C., 1917, p. 82-83), from early 1917, stated that "[…] our Conservatory" could not "possibly be the Bellevue *Dionysion*, the most stunning classical Rhythm and Harmony school of our time" which Isadora Duncan had created "outdoors, on lush vegetation, lawns and promenades". But it had certainly drawn inspiration from the pedagogical initiatives of this "[…] priestess of Ancient Beauty" (C., 1917, p. 82-83). In Portugal, the Escola da Arte de Representar had embodied, as it was then recognized, "a brief attempt at Greek plastic and choreographic resurrection" (C., 1917, p. 82-83). The *Ilustração Portuguesa* chronicler (C., 1917, p. 82-83) held that the "sacred Hellenic evocations venture" was attributable to Júlio Dantas' "tenacity and intelligence". Even assuming that the Conservatory's "Greek resurrection" was mostly "erudite, carried out according to the milieu's indispensable compromises", and therefore unable

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

to produce a performance of true "rhythmic reconstitution", it was nevertheless possible to see that "immortal Greece's sacred soul" could vibrate "even more in musical and choreographic evocation" than in any other artistic language (C., 1917, p. 82-83). Here we can observe a clearly enunciated path of externalization for this branch of Portuguese arts education.

Let us now examine a tradition that went in the opposite sense. Accounts regarding the performances of Russian companies show the existence of another way of looking at the discipline, by emphasizing the sophistication of technical work, which in the eyes of their contemporaries made their dancers comparable to acrobatic gymnasts. The performances of Diaghilev's *troupe* did not fail to earn the admiration of European audiences, following the first few shows in Paris, in 1909. Some of the reviews sought to detect the signs of genius during the corresponding Lisbon shows, in 1917. Especially targeted was Nijinsky (Figure 2), a *prodigious artist* defined by Rui de Chaves in the following terms: "[…] handsome, of a classical, statuesque beauty, and endowed with a musculature that one might say was copied from the galleries of an old museum, blessed with the grace of an adolescent, the slender and ductile agility of a discobolus"; […] he dances beautifully, sometimes flies, gets lost in the air, and in all his gestures there is something of a melody and a harmony which dispels any thought of comparing him to an ordinary gymnast's acrobatics" (Chaves, 1912, p. 298).

Figure 2 – Nijinsky in *Ilustração Portuguesa*

Source: Chaves, 1912, p. 300 (Credits: Hemeroteca Municipal de Lisboa)

The Russian artists themselves, however, explicitly rejected this type of distinction, preferring to be associated with academicism and a mindset in which the collective prevails over the individual. The difference with respect

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

to the American dancer was also made clear: while Isadora and her school advocated a kind of "psychology" meant to awaken "a wholly intimate emotion, whether it be grief or delight" in one's spirit, in Russian ballet "the form" was "everything". "Its opulence dazzles us, its color fascinates us, its grace delights us" (Chaves, 1912, p. 297-298) – the same chronicler concluded.

Their underlying educational practice captured the attention of this critic, who described it in detail. He informed his readers that there were two choreographic groups in Russia, one in St. Petersburg and the other in Moscow, each comprising "100 female and 80 male dancers". Corps de ballet training in imperial theaters took place between the ages of nine and fifteen. Due to "a regulation of such great severity", these corps de ballet were "models of homogeneity", which made it impossible to "like the Italians or even most of the French, have one or two *stars* shining among a faded entourage of negligible celestial bodies" (Chaves, 1912, p. 297). It was, however, precisely this collective work dynamic which, to a large extent, constituted "[…] the reason for its success" (Chaves, 1912, p. 298). He then concluded by recounting an episode in which the same spirit of *rejecting the author function* – the company's trademark – is clearly displayed:

> Last year, following the Russian artists' glorious season at the Paris Opera House, a group of grateful admirers decided to invite the whole *troupe* to a chosen location, where it was most cordially presented with a farewell dinner. The proposal was joyfully welcomed and the invitation was accepted by a great number of people. The day was set and one of the most splendid hotels in Paris was chosen for the party. The tables were arranged to enable the formation of amiable groups and […] crews gathered at the doors.
>
> Rarely had such a select gathering been witnessed: at the table of honor, presided by the countess Greffulhe, seats had been reserved for the undersecretary of State for the Fine Arts, the princess Lucien Murat, Gabriel d'Annunzio, the duke of Rohan, Mr. Deutsch de la Meurthe, etc.
>
> They all came with extended hands and a smile on their face.
>
> However, in what was an unexpected and disconcerting turn of events, only the Russians failed to show up!

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

> But why? Were they disdaining the honor that had been bestowed upon them, or did they not care about it? Not at all! The company's director, together with Fokine and Nijinsky, showed up to present their excuses and regrets on behalf of the others. And why? It was an embarrassing and hardly comprehensible explanation: the French *dilettanti*, it would appear, had a very inaccurate idea of what Russian artists were like in their private lives. They are nothing more than tireless workers who surrender themselves entirely to their art form, but are devoid of any worldliness, have very simple taste and a renowned lack of ambition. They were without any doubt appreciative, moved, extremely grateful, but one had to forgive them: Russian dancers are nothing but dancers; if by any chance the audience had been pleased by their performance in the limelight, they felt more than compensated, and asked for permission to excuse themselves in the daylight (Chaves, 1912, p. 298).

Mutatis mutandis, this educational model seemed closer to the only description we have of the work carried out by the professor at Escola da Arte de Representar, the Spanish ballerina Encarnación Fernandez. Journalist Odemiro César visited the premises of the Conservatory "[…] curious to inquire about the functioning of a Dance course" (César, 1916, p. 106). The atmosphere he described had nothing in common, clearly, with the language of modern art provided by the Russians, but the ambition expressed in its practice did seem to follow in their footsteps. Here is another detailed description:

> Dressed in character, wearing powdered wigs, students Irene Neves, Maria Emília Leitão, Maria Alice Ribeiro and Lília Lopes gently glided, with a smile on their faces, that fresh and radiant smile of youth, as they performed the curtseys and gracious steps of Mozart's *Don.Giovanni* minuet. Sitting next to me was the poet Júlio Dantas, who, while affectionately aiming his monocle at the performance, declared to me as both the school's director and an authority in rummaging through antiques:
>
> – Notice this…It is a lesson in elegance!
>
> This lesson in elegance and grace is, in fact, taught twice a week by a dance teacher working at the S. Carlos and Coliseu companies, *la señora* Encarnación Fernandez, discovered in timely fashion by Júlio Dantas (who would have guessed?) for a Russian ballet that takes place the final act of Gorki's play *Dans les bas fonds*, performed in the past as an examination for students at the

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

> Escola da Arte de Representar. But this was only the historical part of our three-year course in Dance at the Conservatory.
>
> Next came the annexed ballerina course solely destined to the Opera Theater, where Pepa Ruiz, Maria Puebla, Laura Gutierrez, Josefa Lloriente and Vitoria Ruiz, an promising 9-year-old child, are now performing Weber's aerial and light *Les Sylphides*, in these dancers' classic *toutou*, their legs in rosy *maillots*, like flower pistils emerging from the inverted corolla of their short tarlatan skirts, their restless feet in their *pantorrillas*, with long tapes crossing at the ankles. And in succession, out of respect for their teacher, whose praises are sung by Júlio Dantas, they proceed, at the barre, with their arduous preparation work for the *puntillas*, learning the gestures, the attitudes, the first steps (César, 1916, p. 106-107).

Ilustração Portuguesa proceeds to show its readers how these exercises are conducted through the lens of photographer Joshua Benoliel (Figure 3):

Figure 3 – Cliché Benoliel in *Ilustração Portuguesa*

Source: César, 1916, p. 107; Credits: Hemeroteca Municipal de Lisboa.

Odemiro César continues:

> What we see is no longer the historicity of the gavotte, of the pavane or the minuet, of the fofa and the folies, of the chacotas and ensaladas in Gil Vicente's acts; nor the oitavado, sarambeque, chula, canário and zabel-macau's eccentric and sensual movements.
>
> What we witness, rather, is the slow and difficult, but sagaciously learned, preparation for the classical Opera ballets according to the rules of a sensible

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
E-ISSN 2237-2660

> muscular gymnastics, our well-known *Dance of the Hours*, from *La Gioconda*, for instance, or the evocative dance in Strauss' *Salomé*.
>
> – When is the most appropriate age to begin learning to dance?
>
> – Nine years old, replies the skillful teacher in half Spanish.
>
> But the course welcomes students up until the age of 20, when dancing in *puntillas*, up on your toes, becomes particularly difficult, as gracefully demonstrated by the youngest of the pupils as opposed to the others.
>
> – *Atención*!
>
> Encarnación Fernandez's ruler firmly hits the small platform, signaling the entrance of the two Historical Dance pairs.
>
> And once again a few bars from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* emanate from the open piano lid, as the two pairs, wearing their powdered wigs, like tiny figures of fops and coquettes plucked from the ivory sticks of a water-colored Watteau fan, slowly glide, with a smile on their faces, that fresh and radiant smile of youth, as they performed the curtseys and gracious steps of a by-gone and much-missed era's aristocratic minuet… (César, 1916, p. 107).

Conclusion

We have sought to identify, within dance education and in the interval between 1839 and 1930, the emergence of a number of diagnoses, solutions and attitudes that in subsequent decades, to a greater or lesser extent, would eventually pervade the debates concerning the ends and means of specialized art education institutions in Portugal. This text was an attempt to engage in an archaeological analysis where the scarcity of available supply and the ultimate failure of dance education itself became clearly apparent.

Nonetheless, and in addition to this, we were able to observe how, as early as the 19th century, tensions between *natural aptitude* and *universal learning* began stabilizing largely in favor of the former. This continuously discernible idea that a gifted and predestined artistic nature could dispense with the procedures and formalities of schooling hampered the opening up and democratization of specialized arts education in Portugal in the following decades.

P* Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença
Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies
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This idea, clearly rooted in romanticism, permeates the current notion that art is a field in which only remarkable works, whose exceptional nature stems from the author's virginal talent, may be inscribed. In our view, this circumstance of two foreign vanguard phenomena – Isadora Duncan and the Ballets Russes – being almost exclusively described by the Portuguese cultural press as if they were levitating in the ethereal space of their own exemplarity, allows us, in this instance, to understand the provenance of what is a structural and structuring fracture between the charismatic notion of natural gift and a rationale based on judiciously developed pedagogical techniques. In conclusion, the purpose of this article was to recognize that the initial discourses concerning the development of dance education at the Conservatório Nacional durably imprinted on the agenda of cultural debate the subordination of those who advocate for the importance of restrictions. In other words, for the endurance and patience required during the learning process, in which genius is nothing other than "[…] diligent work" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 12).

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