

CASA HOFFMANN:

a place for our time

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Gladis Tripadalli

“Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced upon them by our conviction that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our conception of them.”

(Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*)

Astonishment Creates Curiosity

A new history? A new dance? No. A new gaze over dance. A new way to understand time and how time is installed in the human body that has been dancing for so long.

Soaked in philosophy, the workshop ‘*O corpo que dança conta história*’ [The dancing body tells history], by Roberto Pereira,¹ brought about a wide range of questions to review the sometimes misunderstood history of dance. A history filled with undeniable truths, absolute thoughts, memorized dates, specific characteristics and names. A history stuck in linear facts and reasonings, reasons and consequences.

By questioning the formality that is generally related to its study, it is possible to philosophically approach the history of dance and provide it with new meanings. In the workshop, the approach caused interest for the things of the world, as it happens in philosophy itself. It was a way to review history, which seems to be so familiar, but is normally observed through ‘broken glasses’. History was not ‘a corpse to be dissected’ anymore, but questioned, breaking pre-conceived ideas about historical periods and styles, and also destroying some radical dichotomies. It was as if blindfolds were taken off, so that the eyes could be filled with new possibilities, with a new, broader, complex and less limited way of understanding how things exist, last and remain in the world.

The ability to see touches questions which are close to the art of today, leaving the static condition of traditional history and pursuing ways that are not linear, not circular,

but spiral, to foment the new. So, the dualism that would not allow the so considered opposing forces to coexist has been replaced by a new way of thinking that can show the co-dependence of culture and nature, for instance. More than pre-fixed answers, there are reflections pointing to a new way to live dance.

The word ‘dialogical’ means that two logics, two principles are united, so that duality won’t be lost in such unity. That’s where the idea of ‘uniduality’—which I suggested for some cases—comes from. So, people are unidual beings who are totally biological and cultural beings at the same time (MORIN, 1999).²

Giving the Body a Body

The major way to comprehend the history of dance is to focus on the body, in order to read the data it contains, or so to say to observe the ideas and thoughts that the body shows in a certain moment, in a certain period, and try to recognize the system that is there.

At each step that human beings take along life, the physical-chemical-biological support of them is crucial to enable someone to be biological and to pursue its possible flights. And culture makes possible to form their identities, first within the family and next in social groups (...) Biology makes life possible, culture makes transcendence possible. Biology grants heirs, and culture makes eternity possible (CAMPELLO, 1996).

So, the body is multiple and systemic and it is continually constructed by the relationship between mobile and immobile, precise and imprecise, natural and biological matters. Immobility appears in the biological system precision (the body and its laws). Mobility and impreciseness show up in the possibility of mutual combinations between the body and social/cultural media, for every new

[1] The workshop *O corpo que dança conta história*, with instructor Roberto Pereira, was held at Casa Hoffmann from September 25–28, 2003.

[2] Original text in Portuguese: “O termo dialógico quer dizer que duas lógicas, dois princípios, estão unidos, sem que a dualidade se perca nessa unidade: daí vem a idéia de ‘unidualidade’ que propus para certos casos; desse modo, o homem é um ser unidual, totalmente biológico e totalmente cultural a um só tempo.” (MORIN, 1999)

information re-combines and interacts with the existing ones.³ Dance is information. Dance is a combination between nature and culture, both crossed by the web of meanings that constructs and is constructed by dance at the same time. Dance emerges from the ability to read the meanings that are constantly around it. By using the signs that exist in its contextual environment, dance can provide the system with new meanings with such reading.

For instance, Louis XIV the Sun King was a great dancer. He fomented and disseminated dance. This is a historical fact. And to understand the codes created by his dance is to understand the culture inside those bodies, for such corporeal codes strongly communicated with the world at that time. The king and his followers created a production/reproduction system which tellingly contaminated many generations. This historical fact can only be seen if the social, cultural, aesthetic and economical configuration at that time/space is taken into consideration, for it all was somehow 'mapped' in those dancing bodies. Therefore, there is no way to understand Louis XIV's dance or any dance without thinking of system and culture.

To think of a system that penetrates the history of dance is to think of relations and complexity—exchange of information and the possibility of overcoming a so-called exclusive dance code and creating a dialogue with other information and systems:

Data act like viruses: they appear, become more specialized, disappear, and modify themselves in a constant interaction process based on adaptation exchanges. Virus and organism are mutually contaminated with suitability agreements, not only to keep alive their individual bodies, but mostly the information they carry. Because life's natural impulse is to preserve itself, rather than the organisms. So, the success of such adaptation exchanges cannot be locally measured according to gains and losses, but to the increase of complexity of the context where they happen.⁴

An Environment to Live

This new gaze over dance and dance history makes it possible to understand why contemporary tendencies took so long to appear in Curitiba's artistic production. For a long time, the dance based in a multiplicity of codes and concepts, informed by research made in several Brazilian cities as well as in other important cities all over the world

was not seen in Curitiba. Sometimes, it would appear in isolated but significant ways, normally predestinated to disappear.

That so-called contemporary dance probably couldn't find conditions to exist in Curitiba because the environment was not adequate for its connective pattern. Information from contemporary dance could not establish communicative links with reality, and other patterns were naturally selected to interact and expand inside such context.

However, the necessary environment for information transmission, exchange and connection exists today. That's why the links between contemporary dance and the world are now visible and becoming more stable. Casa Hoffmann, due to its transdisciplinary purpose, has brought teachers, artists, and theoretical researchers from different artistic areas. By doing so, it created a simultaneous dialogue between stocks of information that multiplied all over the city, in a particular innovative way, by means of pieces, performances, and all types of aesthetic experiences—playing a decisive role in the creation of a new thinking.

Many dance professionals could now realize how complex contemporary times really are, and make this new web of meanings interact with local minds. The debates, workshops, and events that took place at Casa Hoffmann put together dance and theater studies, artists from other areas, choreographers, and dance teachers. Also, other places spread that information, such as FAP [College of Arts of Paraná], ACT [Atelier of Theater Creation], CIM [Center of Investigation of the Movement], Companhia do Abraço, and Vila Arte, among others.

So, dance in Curitiba finally seems to take larger steps towards a more mature esthetic investigation, going way beyond the conventions that are learned and reproduced without the artist's critical intervention. If the system is

^[3] To learn more about these issues, see KATZ, Helena. *Um, dois, três: dança e o pensamento no corpo*. São Paulo, 1994. Tese de doutoramento em Comunicação e Semiótica da PUCSP.

^[4] BRITTO, Fabiana. "É agora ou já: a dança nos tempos das teses". Final paper presented at the Specialization Program of Performing Dance at UDESC [University of Santa Catarina State], 1999.

continually fed by Casa Hoffmann's works, gradually it will contribute for constructing a new artistic production, developing an audience and specialized criticism that is able to establish a dialogue between the artist, the audience and the artistic work in a truly flowing river:

When a river is cut, the river-discourse
it used to make is cut as well.
When the river is broken, the water
is broken into pieces, into water pools
of paralytic water.
In a pool situation, the water is like
a word in a dictionary situation:
isolated, stuck in the pool of itself.
Because it is still and stuck.
Because it is stuck and deaf.
Deaf because it doesn't communicate,
because the syntax of the river's cut,
the water string were the river ran is cut.
The course of a river, its river-speech,
is rarely resumed again.
A river takes lots of water strings
to spin the old string that it is made of.

(João Cabral de Melo Neto, "Speechless Rivers") ♦

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