

ARTICLE

TONS DE PELE: FLUXOS E FRICÇÕES

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ABSTRACT

The present article relates to the presence of several normal esthetic patterns in contemporary dance, with certain hegemonic cultural powers, using flow and friction concepts. The aim of this article is to highlight how much coreographic elements can show of political performances in it's esthetic performance. The axis of our thematic analysis send us thus to Canclini, Gilroy and Louppe concepts, processes and theorizes of hibridization, acculturation and assimilation.

Keywords: Performance. Contemporary Dance. Criation process. Cross culturally. Political Performance.

The body does not recognize it's own ruin
 In that unlikely body.
 Ah, frictions of memories
 and choices in that ...unlikely body...

Flows and conter flows

The coreographic element composition absorbed from diferente fountains and levels of energy, unveils as recurrent in contemporary dance set up. Such phenomenom has been happening since the 80s of the century and still today keeps constant levels of innovation, despite it is configured already as solid and recursive in current dance. Reason and causes pointed out for the excistence of this fussions are numberless: they blame trainnings for being ever more specific in the development of the dancers body, the eternal, almost alchemic nature of experiencing always the new in the new possibilities of the dancing body, the fugaciti with which time works in contemmporary routine actions, creating personal emergencies, the break up with the linear vision of dance history, as well as the so called loss of lineage of the 80's.

In 1980, the occidental world of dance in general, starts a paradigma shift of what used to be until then, the practices in the classical and after so called modern schools. This meant a creation style, a trainee and learning technic was developing, leading to a coreographic style of its own, defined and canonical. Then came an effective and long technical formation in a specific dance for the coreographic creation that had a clear identity, the ID of the creator, the DNA of the coreographer. Therefore the dancers body built itself in such a way that it turned into a recognizable body of that esthetic practice, and expressed in a clear and noticeable way through that specific dance technic learned at length. According to Louppe, it was " the shape of a body with a group of esthetic and philosophical tenets of a great creator", a creator of shows and bodies (2012, p.31). With the breakage of the patterns of the so called "dance lineage", and as a practical consequence of this facts, another particular way of percieving the work comes into evidence. What one observes now a days, is the presence of the criation of a dance culture that prioritizes visible and constant alterations of the body speech.

Not always good results of this body speech were obtained, after all, with the presence of dance fussions, some times you barely get to "juxtaposed engines" that frequently reach a "strange way of sliding incompatible corporeities", in a corporal speech that for many it might come to the edge of a caothic multiplicity (Louppe, 2000, p. 29). The purposeful mixture of artistic genders and technics comes from the plurality of ways and styles of thinking about the world, conceiving it, as wel as putting it into movement. The dancer that visits several fields without big fixidity, and/ or without deepening in each of them, linking just to the esthetic of the moment, runs the risk out of courage, ofblurring the speech of that body; as well as , with certain ammount of talent, the artist might take off in an unexpected quality and expertise flight.

We should reflect punctually on the so called contemporary hybridized dance in relation to the *Total Art Work* of Richard Wagner, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, because of the no incidence of relations among them. The first one works with more specific and directed fusions on the bodies and choreographic technics, the second one in fusions of the scenic show to be presented. While the first one has no commitment with the intention of reaching unity and/or harmony, Wagner's esthetic proposes and demands deep consistency in the reunited art areas.

It is understood then that, the combination of this artistic dance called contemporary, whether it's by contamination, mixture, movement, consistent or not with the adopted analysis perspective, happens within an intertwined net between global and local. And when called hybrid, it relates more with the diverse elements meeting to achieve the technical/ esthetic plots plurality that this diversity may cause, rather than serving to the conscious and harmonic elaboration of these materials. In dance, this phenomenon as a general rule, aims to provoke the contrast of the musical impromptu, which might come closer to the level of irreconcilable strangeness of a specific choreographic universe, than obliges itself to recognize or even get to know the used sources and tools, necessary to the reading of its own diversity. This is an issue that opens immediate questions for a better comprehension of the multiple technique coexistence, and the esthetic/ cultural approach encounters in dance, following the tenets of Flow and Frictions.

Talking about cultural/esthetic approaches and encounters in dance takes us to the idea of flow, which according to Hannerz (1997), indicates a nature of continuation, passage and mobility. The contemporary dancer goes through borders, artistically and frequently, as much in the local limits of one place to the other, in a certain time, "linked to a territorial matter, as also in the temporal dimension, no space implications necessary" (Hannerz, 1997, p.11). And in this constant flow, dance can obtain a wide multicentricity of flows and counter flows, and extend its chances of encounters, as for example the encounter of the vertical axis of classical dance with the lateralized axis of African support, which will take up an interesting pluralism of sights and results, when considering the resulting of such criss crossed flows.

The concept of flow in dance is in itself quite broad and equipped with a dense ballast, once the transforming process in dance culture, meaning its cultural dynamics are articulated to the contemporary world flows in which this dance circulates and dialogues. Amidst the approach of diverse and different "objects" (persons, artifacts, ideas, values) we have most of times, the production of a third "object", the sociocultural one. Those sociocultural procedures in which existing frameworks or diverse practices cross with others and dictate new and different practices, Canclini (2006) calls them hybridization.

Hibrid skins and frictions

The image of “hybrid skins” will take us to thinking categories, to talking about differences, about the Me and the Other, as well as the half-breed contemplated in the race /ethnic crossings, and about syncretism, more related to religion relations, this is, the concepts that are linked among themselves, and also constantly confronted.

As expected, the border lines between the three models, hybridism, crossbreeding and syncretism - are porous and their own, after all, these are correlated elements of biological cultural, spiritual and political synthesis, generated as a consequence of certain processes of border crossing. Nevertheless, you can't deny that the three patterns, in their most varied intense and thickening possibilities, take to an uprooting of the body, once they suspend their cultural comfort zone, misaligning old certainties for new re alignments.

The term “hybridization” was chosen by Canclini instead of “syncretism”¹ or crossbreeding², cause for the author hybridism is the concept that makes the contemporary fussions in general clearer, as technological, migratory or political processes; while the rest of the terms restrict to religious and ethnical fields respectively, hence, to indicate such arts compositions, the hybrid concept reaches a higher number of transcultural mixtures. We shall be addressing specifically that later on (Canclini, 2006.p.19).

It's important to emphasize that danced hybridism is in some ways predictable and part of the cultural conceptions, natural path since they are born, developing and changing along time and space. In reality, mixing is an artistic and natural human doing, and what comes into questioning in the danced art, looks more like a nostalgia of great creators and consagrated dance school times and their canonical repertoires.

As hybrid esthetic and reflecting specifically on our dance analysis, it presents itself as in cultural studies, via three models (Williams, 1981, p.89). The first one can be distinguished as “ hybridism by fussion” of elements model; born from the combination of movement practices, in which a dance will be totalky new and perfectly different from previous ones, like what Pina Bausch dance-theater is, reaching the coherence of reunited dance and theater

¹ For Canclini (2006, p.19) syncretism concept refers in general, to religious or traditional symbolic movement merges.

² Miscegenation for Grunzinski (2001, p.62), appoints mixtures that happend in the Americas XVI century among human beings, symbolic and imaginary fields, and life practices that came from Europe, Africa and Asian people. “Crossbreedings are never a Panacea, they express battles never won and ever restarted”, Grunzinski (2001, p.320).

materials, merged through the body dramaturgy³, be by the personal techniques previously acquired by the dancers, be by the sensitive and ideological corporal alliances of the dancers with their memories. The second model "hybridism by interpenetration", joins dance techniques and subsides in different forms and degrees, but does not merge totally and is fastly identifiable; such as Louise Lecavalier dance, that interpenetrates classical dance, pirouettes in dehors⁴, entrechat quatres⁵, with acrobatic rollings, contemporary dance supports and leverages, keeping themselves recognizably different for the educated eye.

The third model is the one that questions the notion of difference presented in both previous examples, mixing "hybrid by fusion" with "hybrid by interpenetration", using now one or the other in the same choreographic work, creating the most unusual and bold possibilities, which is done with excellence in the *Sacred Monster Work* by Akram Khan, in partnership with Sylvie Guillem.

This process still attains new outlines and sights when we understand the ways of appropriation or acculturation, present in this alchemic chores. Contemporary dance presents itself as innovative and transgressive, a fertile force capable of agitate, denaturalize or even destabilize dance hegemonic canonical conceptions. In this sense a peculiar gaze is that of Philippe Decouflé who choreographically develops "imagined polymorphic figures which simultaneously participate of the animal, mineral and vegetable world in a body destiny which alters its esthetic in images (Loupe 2012, p. 36).



Figure 1. Louise Lecavalier, from *La La La Human Steps*, by Sarah Elgart.

³ According to Pavis (1999, p.113) in its most generic sense, dramaturgy is the technique or the dramatic art poetry, that tries to establish the principles of work construction". And in Brecht and post Brechtian sense "dramaturgy is at the same time ideological and formal of the play" (Brecht apud Pavis 1999, p.113). We extend his concept for the body actions, while its inherent capacity of telling stories, exposing, creating thematic knots, presenting conflicts, concluding ideas and finalizing the told story.

⁴ It means a type of turn around the dancer-axis, specific of classic dance.

⁵ A step in which the dancer jumps into the air and quickly crosses his legs behind, one after the other. It exists the entrechat deux (one crossing), quatre (two crossings), six (the front foot flaps in the air once in the rear foot, and lands changing feet), cinq (same as quatre, except the landing is on one foot, the other descends on tip toes (sur le coup de-pied) . Available in <https://dance.wordpress.com/tag/dicionario-de-ballet>.



Figure 2. From *La_Villette*, direction by Philippe Decouflé.

This alleged, still young and not exhausted dance language points that if before the dancer gave in to the creator/ director – and/or the traditional coreographer⁶, figure, without this figure who conducted him through the artistic concept and translated it into dance technic, and/ or coreographic, now him, the artist⁷, could walk by himself. If before he followed a path pre defined by the traditional coreographer who used the rehearsal⁸, services, now he could act and be by himself if he wanted. Thus, such liberty points for more esthetic decisions, this is, or the artist follows the existing dance, chooses tradition, denying hybrid possibilities, or he breaks with the traditional chain and hybridizes.

If he hybridizes randomly for lack of concepts, he runs the risk of losing himself in the political process action and turn commercial and/or empty of cultural artistic sustance, even if he reaches high technical level and efficient danced movements. And if he wants to choose, he has to learn to create his own artistic concepts, his repertoires, find his place, what he can be and what he wants to do, he has to create his alchemic esthetics, his choices, his footprint in the world.

And for those latter ones, the ones who choose to make their own elections, it is necessary to cogitate how much of this doing really belongs to the performer/dancer in an individual and quite self relating circuit, supported in his personal capacity of constructing himself as a thinking being of his cultural and esthetic traditions, to consciously aquire his symbolic tools.

There is no doubt that the dancer/ performer who constructs himself from his knowledge and synthesis, nourishes his own esthetic choices. That's a fact. And we here quote the exemplar anthropological study practiced in dance as a cultural form, followed by Akram Khan, British with Bangladesian ascendancy.

⁶ We mention the creator/director as the work realized by the coreographer who is the one responsible for the movement production and coreographic assemblage work. Understanding a coreography (from the Greek, χορογραφία; χορεία "dance and γραφία graphic" written) as the art of composing tracks and/ or movements scripts that compose a dance.

⁷ Here we generally call "the artist", but the dancer fits into this category as well as the coreographer, who assumes the rupture with the so called big schools and dance lineage, and starts practicing such tenets and fusions in dance.

⁸ The rehearsal is the professional who executes the task of repeating certain coreographic work, under the supervision or not, of the coreographer, basically acting on repertoire ballets, canonized pieces which are studied and repeated, respecting total loyalty to the piece.

His capacity to assign a constructed cultural nature to the dance movements, develops and reveals knowledge about his world. In that case the coreographic product is an insight performance of himself, what, according to Clifford Geertz is a “a story they tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz, 1989, p. 448). His dance expresses the power of a tradition in which autobiography turns into a simultaneous autocreation and auto emancipation process or act. It’s models and cultural meanings set into action, collaborate for the formulation and establishment of it’s own values, when they fuse Hindy folcloric dances first, and then classical dance, Kathac style and occidental contemporary dance.



Figure 3. Akram Khan in Zero Degrees (photo by Jean-Pierre Maurin).

The description that Khan makes of his several dance “languages” learning process, and the way how he creates from there, a new language, is an example of how creatively and individually practices and habits are permanently re configured and re invented through lived experiences and transmitted canons. Khan explains that with contemporary dance “his eyes opened to a totally new world, different ways of expressing”. However, whilst developing his work around and about, contemporary dance, his body “ was getting confused” [...] as it is recognized by it’s own creator, his work is based on the research of a singular movement language, finding a style of his own that has a core the arms movement, speed and fluity of movements, and control of the rythm – characteristics of the North Indian style dance of which Akram Khan is an eminent interpreter. (Fazenda, 2010, p. 8)

Nevertheless there are other choices and involvements in the construction of this body crossed by the coreographic culture: the fact that he must always be aware of which cultures he wants to belong to, which cultures he wants to make his own. This is, which existing transnational structures in modernity are chosen, being this global or local technics, in their respective flows, fussions and cultural exchanges. On the other hand, this constructed hybrid also relates, and quite with a cultural dismantling, meaning that this body might end choosing very little, if somehow he is chosen when submitting, or is submitted by market laws, mainly to foreigner hegemonic dancecultures, and it can happen due to the denial of his own inheritance. This body that at the end chose little, can without noticing, deny the historical and ideological body conquers, and walk, not always conscious, towards the dream of a dance with no origins. A dance that, concealing it’s history, even if technically perfect, can show a bit of a blurry life.

Maybe that's why the danced hybrid esthetic shows something that bothers, that seems not to work well, it frictionates, be it cause the hybrid dance establishes a break up with borders, be it for having the temporal space conception altered, or even cause it talks of a cultural not belonging, and so, it's going to suggest the presence of a weak and unstable force equilibrium and a lack of accordance related to the harmony of it's final product. A displaced uneasiness of the body which does not constitute from a continuous or harmonic consciousness of itself.

The plurality of cultural plots, a natural globalization phenomenon, when exceeding certain parameters, invades and risks the slow and natural epidermal impregnation, necessary for the sense of belonging that dance needs to acquire to be truth in the body. The meaningful issue here to be considered is, that far from being a harmonic composition of differences, hybridization in antropology, as a general rule, is also employed in violent procedures and processes of cultural crossings and encounters (Gruzinski, 2001, p 62).

There are lines of thoughts which reject assigning hybridism a political position, no matter if it's good or bad, so they make a geographical and historical reading of this phenomenon, analyzing in a closed, limited cutout, the complex ways, as a "non power" that circulates in danced reality. There are others that don't deny the politics, but keep the acceptance in which hybridism is the opposition outline to all supremacies of nature, dwarfing thus the pre existing effective power relations, a counter culture of power in which when hybridizing, command disappears. What we are treating here, dancing, is not only about bodies being crossed or not by several streams, but identifying these streams: if they are politics that submit, if they are innovator politics of hegemonies annulation, if they are apolitical tries or just a choice of following this or that creator, not pretending hybridizations.

In Brazil, even with the increasing amount of dance research groups, there still exist a priority, though less accentuated, of eurocentric and/or american dances which remain or try to remain, in the modern concepts domain, rooted in their categories, experiences and subjectivities. Hybridism is growing exponentially and less and less represented by classical dances. Nevertheless you still hear the speech of the huge subservience to the so call classical dance through the motto "who dances ballet, can dance anything", speech nourished of course by specialized ballet schools, at not so moderate prices.

Should this one sided unbalanced weight be something inevitable and foreseeable, an absolute participator of the hegemonic and cultural formations in it's usual power course? And not being aware of this unbalance, there is a risk of falling into a romantic utopy and finding that this movement of decolonization in present dance, since it's existence, gives us a sensation that uniting we will all get stronger and be equal?

Is it particular greatness of the privileged and an imperative destiny of the power deprived, to accept the relation city center -suburbs, First and Third Worlds, the Me and the Other? But it is also true that as the center of power in dance develops and changes over space and time, new sound transforming and complex realities will appear.

Always temporal concluding

Be it "hybrid by fusion", hybrid by interpenetration, amalgamated or juxtaposed, the dance hybrid movements, in its gestures birth, is always in constant mixture with the eternally mixed, and points out that divergent crossings within losses and gains, reveal new materials.

In this opportunity of discussing the complex crossing, it is for us to think over which power of esthetic or esthetics cross the dancing body, and catalogue several types of styles, till reaching an ethnical-transcultural principle.

Who benefits, two ways or unilaterally, with this dream of a dance with no origins, if there is a dance without origin?

How can the coreographic art with no borders, admitting globalization as an irreversible process, but wanting to warrant expressive cultural identities such as Middle East and Africa for example, can establish coreographic structures from small parts in constant reconstructions?

What is there behind the ethnical, transcultural and multifaceted coreographic act, resistance or acceptance, a real cauldron of innovation or continuism?

Hybridism results from some type of domination. What do we want to talk about, what way, or where from do we talk, what do we talk?

What do we defend and expose, or deny, therefore invisibilize, what do we want to remember, what to forget?

Doubt always remains if hybridism is imposed or assumed, and in these sorrows the revolutionary act constitutes by regressive nature, once there's always the perception that hybridism derives of a colonizer domination. Being so, it hybridizes but stays in command, approaches only to oxygenate the old and used, as a new recipe of making money out of the so called exotic. Is it so?

We clearly have a wide range of questions to think about contemporary dance, when we give more attention and respect to the values that rule it, its possible lineages in ethic and choices made, after all, danced poetics support courage, reminding us once again the identity notion.

At the beginning of friction, of intermediate space, abandoned fields or producer of new artistic forms, there is something that grinds, that seems not to work, resulting in an ephemeral chaos, or even a lasting one.

Facing delimitations, fusions, interpenetrations, recyclings, cultural mixtures, uneven in general, a constant construction establishes continuous dance regenerations.

What we realize in a paradoxal course of time, is that friction grabs it's vitality in some way, from its own gaps, ruins and rubble, making us notice there is almost always an unbalanced way leaning towards certain side, in the diverse art and cultural encounters.

It is necessary to reflect on the relational qualities of this dance, with it's conflicts and frictions, and before marking off esthetics, it urges to delimitate the place art has in our political and ideological imaginary. More over since this dance shows us an inter communication strategic locus, it is necessary to know if it fullfills with justice it's real and needed roll within our imaginary. Then we will have a strength in the body that will exhale life in it's multiple and possible skin tones.

Ahh, the frictions of the memories, and the amble of choices in that unlikely body...

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