



Dance Narratives by a Black Artist Mirroring the Knowledge and Concepts of Female Black Authors

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ABSTRACT – Dance Narratives by a Black Artist Mirroring the Knowledge and Concepts of Female Black Authors – This article presents aspects of the life and professional narratives of a Black dance artist, Rubens Oliveira, and how his sensitive, poetic and creative experience as a Black man opposes stereotypes of hegemonic masculinities. The aim of this article is to highlight the life story of a Black Brazilian man who makes dance his profession. Issues concerning the process of being a Black man in Brazil are problematised, using Conceição Evaristo's (2020) concept of *escrevivência* (writexperience) and Lélia Gonzalez's (1988) concept of *amefricanidade* (Amefricanity). The article, mostly based on Black authors, highlights Black epistemologies as a form of representation.

Keywords: **Dance. Rubens Oliveira. Black Man. Escrevivência. Amefricanity.**

RÉSUMÉ – Récits de danse d'un artiste noir reflétant les connaissances et les concepts d'auteurs noirs – Cet article présente des aspects des récits de vie et de profession d'un artiste de danse noir, Rubens Oliveira, comment son expérience sensible, poétique et créative en tant qu'homme noir s'oppose aux stéréotypes des masculinités hégémoniques. L'objectif de cet article est de mettre en lumière l'histoire de la vie d'un Brésilien noir qui fait de la danse son métier. Il problématise des questions concernant le processus d'être un homme noir au Brésil, englobant le concept d'écriture, de Conceição Evaristo (2020), et d'africanité, de Lélia Gonzalez (1988). L'article, qui fait principalement référence à des auteurs noirs, met en avant les épistémologies noires comme forme de représentation.

Mots-clés: **Danse. Rubens Oliveira. Homme Noir. Escrevivência. Amefricanité.**

RESUMO – Narrativas de Dança de um Artista Negro em Espelhamento a Saberes e Conceitos de Autoras Pretas – Este artigo apresenta aspectos de narrativas de vida e de profissão de um artista negro da dança, Rubens Oliveira, e como sua experiência sensível, poética e criadora de homem negro se contrapõe a estereótipos de masculinidades hegemônicas. O objetivo deste artigo é evidenciar a história de vida de um homem negro brasileiro que faz da dança sua profissão. Problematizam-se questões referentes ao processo de ser um homem negro no Brasil, abarcando o conceito de *escrevivência*, de Conceição Evaristo (2020), e de *amefricanidade*, de Lélia Gonzalez (1988). O artigo, tendo como referência, em sua maioria, autoras negras, coloca em evidência as epistemologias pretas como uma forma de representatividade.

Palavras-chave: **Dança. Rubens Oliveira. Homem Negro. Escrevivência. Amefricanidade.**

Introduction

The aim of this article¹ is to highlight the life story of a Black Brazilian man who makes dance his profession. His position at the head of the dance field sheds light on the historical erasure suffered by Black artists and Black subjects as a result, among other factors, of Brazil's colonial regime. This text relies on the collaboration of Rubens Oliveira through two narrative interviews (Muylaert et al., 2014) granted at two different moments in the research, the result of which he is a part. Based on these records, we set out to identify the plurality of his poetic practices and languages that can be recognised as aspects of Amefricanity.

Being a Black man in Brazil is a task of daily struggle in the face of constant clashes of all kinds, since they are constant targets of countless epistemicide statistics. As Sueli Carneiro (2022, n.p.), one of the most combative voices against racism, points out, “[...] genocide is there [...] either I die fighting or I die like a sparrow [...] there’s an agreement there, the police don’t even have to get involved, the agreement is with the other side there who are administering justice as to who will live and who will die.” From this perspective, Black men are victims of the system of privileged white hegemony that has been and is in power since the time of colonisation. There are many aspects related to the aesthetic standards of Black men and women, such as frizzy hair and skin colour, which, despite the fight against racism in recent years in some sectors of society, are still seen as something negative, the result of prejudice and discrimination. These developments have created stereotyped, historical webs in relation to this subject in his quest to build a Black identity (Gomes, 2003).

This highlights the hierarchies and power relations in which Black masculinities² are subjected to what is inferior, and what is most serious is the stripping away of their humanity, a product designed by colonialism according to Aimé Césaire (2020). In this sense, Elza Soares (1930-2022) reminds us, in the chorus of her song *A Carne*³: “the cheapest meat on the market used to be black meat – now it’s not” – about the reality of Black people, in this case in national territory, to make it clear that structural racism is the most perverse system of discrimination against human beings despised by Eurocentric hegemony. According to Silvio Almeida (2020, p.

50), structural racism is present in the social structure, which normalises political, economic, legal and even family ties. “Individual behaviour and institutional processes are derived from a society whose racism is the rule and not the exception.” In this way, we realise that racism is made up of inequalities that privilege, empower and legitimise certain white social groups to the detriment of others.

The artist Rubens Oliveira

Artists such as Rubens Oliveira are exceptions. A Black man⁴, 38 years old, married, father, choreographer, dancer, director and art educator who, through a lifestyle within the field of dance, manages to survive and stand out in the difficult universe of the arts in Brazil, thus countering class and gender stereotypes regarding Black men. Rubens de Oliveira was born in Vila Velha, Espírito Santo. His parents moved to São Paulo, where he grew up in a modest family in a peripheral neighbourhood and began his dance training between the ages of 14 and 15 through social projects. At the same time, to make ends meet, he worked odd jobs, such as office boy and leaflet delivery boy. Around the 2000s, he joined the artistic and social project *Arastão*, in Campo Limpo, a poor, migrant neighbourhood in the South Zone of São Paulo. Another project that marked his experience as a young 17-year-old artist was the *Dança Comunidade* project, run by São Paulo choreographer Ivaldo Bertazzo. Rubens Oliveira has completed secondary school, but like most Black males, he doesn't have a college degree.

The artist is the director and choreographer of the renowned company *Gumboot Dance Brasil*, which tours different Brazilian capitals, and Rubens Oliveira also has a solo career and has toured internationally as a dancer in countries such as the United States, France, England, Austria and Africa. His research into dance body techniques includes the use of the *Gumboot technique*⁵, originally from South Africa. Founded in 2008, the company has taken part in important national events such as *Dança em Cena* (2022)⁶, *Bienal Sesc de Dança* (2021)⁷ and the 14th *Festival Palco Giratório* (2019)⁸. Lately, he has also been promoting *aulões* (extended classes), which are two hours long and accompanied by live music.



Figure 1 – The show *Subterrâneo* (2018), by Rubens Oliveira. Source: Photo by Mario Cassetari.

In his creations, the cast is mostly made up of Black people and what interests him is the discourse on “[...] expression; it’s about narratives, it’s about art, [because Black bodies already carry their race on their skin, so ethnic-racial issues are not the centre of the work] [...] in recent works I’ve tried to be more inspired by a subject, a theme that makes me vibrate so that I can take it to the stage. And I know that my condition [as a Black man] is always what traverses me there” (Oliveira, 2023⁹, n. p.).

Rubens Oliveira’s artistic and movement research is based on exchanges with recognised choreographers in the field of dance, such as Antônio Nobrega, Inês Bogéa, Susana Mafra and Benjamin Taubkin, among other important artists on the national scene. He was responsible for creating the Pélagos Group – a project for young people from Campo Limpo, in São Paulo/SP, and the surrounding area – and the Chega de Saudades Project, which aimed to put non-professionals on stage. He was awarded the Paulista Association of Arts Critics (APCA) prize in 2018 for his show *Subterrâneo*.

The participation of Luciano Tavares, one of the authors of this article, in an Artistic Residency (2020) promoted by the Serviço Social do Comércio (“Social Service of Commerce”) (Sesc) in Paraty/RJ, through the Zoom platform, as his student, was how he (re)discovered and experienced

the notion of ancestry. Based on oral stimuli, “imagine the creaminess of the movement” (words spoken during the artistic residency), musical stimuli (Rubens composed the music for each class), bodily stimuli (there were times when the participants were stimulated by videos, images and movements by Rubens himself to create) and visual stimuli (the latter was complemented by orality, as through it they were encouraged to use their imagination)¹⁰.

Rubens Oliveira has found a profession in dance that, in some cases, runs counter to unemployment statistics¹¹ and the genocide that falls on Black men, as the poet, artist and journalist Abdias Nascimento (2016) already said in his texts and research. These facts are related to what Achille Mbembe (2018) says about sovereignty. According to him, it is the way in which control is exercised over mortality and life is defined as the implementation and manifestation of power. It is on the basis of this relationship that power games are established, which operate in all social spheres, one of which is the labour market. On the other hand, Rubens Oliveira, at the beginning of his career, went through a process of discovery within himself and in relation to the social environment, as he explains:

[...] when I was a teenager, at least where I went, there was a lot of separation. Say you were into popular dance and in that dance, if the man had fluidity of movement, that fluidity was part of some ritual structure there, but not internally consciously thinking ‘I know I’m in this moment of gyrating, or this other thing’. Urban dances have always existed [...], for example, today we experience Funk more intensely. In São Paulo, in my day they called it Lagartixa, it’s a dance [...] it’s - how can I put it? - it’s a current dance, built by young people from the periphery, just like Funk, before that [...] there was already a bit of Funk and so on, but Lagartixa was a kind of choreographed group dance that was practised on the slab, on the pavement with music, mostly international songs and they were there, the continuation of the dance moves, you know. Those dance moves that everyone did together and so on. But this Lagartixa dance brought a bit of the man twerking thing, the first time I’d seen a man twerking, dancing. It’s [...] but it was still a man dancing his image like this: ‘I’m twerking because I am [...] because it’s a body of conquest for a woman, right. It’s a body of conquest, to show this body is to talk about this sexuality, based on a conquest. So, I liked that a lot, you know, and it also made me move around in these circles (Oliveira, 2020, n. p.).

The interview¹² was carried out based on the ideas of Camila Junqueira Muylaert et al. (2014), when the authors talk about narrative interviews, which aim for depth, from specific angles, from which life stories emerge. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, with the purpose of understanding the process of the artist collaborating in the research, recognising himself as a Black man who dances and its implications and consequences. During the restrictive phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, Rubens Oliveira produced artistic works in the virtual environment and disseminated them on social media, in the form of drops of classes, video dances, shows, artistic direction and music. The resources of the virtual medium were the main escape valve for the artistic class, since the arts of the body in movement are based on face-to-face contact. Among the actions carried out by the artist is the organisation of the Conexão Diáspora International Festival, held in partnership with Portal MUD¹³. The programme included the launch of Rubens' first song, called Ancestral do Futuro (Ancestral of the Future), and videos of performances by Black artists from six countries.



Figure 2 – Publication of the Movement Class (2021). Source: Author's file.

The prints above were taken in August 2021 via *Instagram*, when the limitations of Covid-19 were easing. Offering the narratives experienced by Rubens Oliveira is intended to be shared in the academic sphere as a space of power and representation for Black men, since writing, according to

Conceição Evaristo (2020, p. 37), is “a need to apprehend the world”. In a way, it is also a form of power, of memory and a way of telling a little-referenced dance story: a Black man who made dance his profession. This was unusual until a few years ago, given how much the media exalts models of whiteness and, on the other hand, strengthens negative stereotypes of Black people, making achievements and singularities invisible. In relation to the Brazilian reality, little is shown about the complex and painful reality of the statistics on violence perpetrated against Black men. In this sense, whiteness is understood here as that privileged and favoured group that trivialises racial inequalities (Santos; Melo, 2022)¹⁴.



Figure 3 – Conexão Diáspora International Festival (2021). Source: Portal MUD.

In general, the media, run by white people, represents Black men, for the most part, as being associated with violence, practising it or suffering it, which is a Brazilian reality as a result of social inequality. However, the media does little to promote Black representation in soap operas, in the arts or in places of power, where more and more Black artists are seeking a place. In view of this, the concept of *escrevivência* (writexperience), coined by Conceição Evaristo (1946), can provide support for the experiences of Black men and women. The author says that the term *escrevivência* may have emerged with the text *Samba Favela*, the precursor to the book *Becos da Memória*, “I created that text, the first, from a specific, particular place, my experience as a young woman living in a favela” (Evaristo, 2020, p. 33). It’s a word that, when it emerged, wasn’t intended to be a concept, but rather a term for the bodily writing of harsh memories, “skin-memory”, of her experiences on the outskirts of Minas Gerais. The games she played

with the words “write”, “live” and “see” in her master’s dissertation in 1995 sustained the term, which began to take on the shape of a literate, academic, wise and scientific Black writing. In other words, the term established itself as a Black epistemology within literature and consequently spilled over into other fields of knowledge. In one of her speeches, she explains a little more about the emergence of the term:

It was a play on the words ‘*escrever*’ (write) and ‘*viver*’ (live), ‘*se ver*’ (see oneself) and culminates in the word ‘*escrevivência*’ (writexperience). It’s a good historical term. In fact, when I think of *escrevivência*, I also think of a history that is based on the speech of enslaved Black women who had to tell their stories to the masters. And *escrevivência*, no, *escrevivência* is a reverse path, it’s a path that blurs this image of the past, because it’s a path already trodden by a Black author, mainly women. This doesn’t stop other people from other realities, other social groups and fields other than literature from experimenting with *escrevivência*. But it’s very much based on the authorship of Black women, who are already the owners of writing, blurring that image of the past, of African women who had to tell the story to lull those in the big house to sleep (Evaristo, 2020, p. 2).

Proposing *escrevivência* as a way to “write”, “live” and “see oneself” is to highlight Black epistemes in the field of scientific knowledge, knowledge of the body, experienced and lived mainly by the Black body within a historical process that is brought up to date in the present. From an ethnographically-inspired perspective, within the field of dance, it can be said that “*escrevivência*” as a methodological character of writing about oneself, seeing oneself in the collective, has a degree of kinship with autoethnography, because “The practitioner-researcher who turns on him/herself cannot stay there. Their discourse must drift towards others” (Fortin, 2010, p. 83).

From the point of view of the use of words, Conceição Evaristo has an insight into the reality of underprivileged minorities in relation to the word mastery, especially Black people. For her, “[...] my subjectivity, the word mastery does not verbalise my experience at all. I would say, for example, that writing is a need to apprehend the world, but the world escapes me. I wouldn’t say that writing is a possibility of mastery” (Evaristo, 2020, p. 37). In this sense, it involves the subjectivities of Black people, within historicities that, in a way, are repeated in the present in a different guise, since they were never given any rights but rather had them taken away¹⁵. It also relates

to existence, to a way of being, of thinking, of confronting, of recognising oneself, of living in the world.

Along the same lines, Black researcher and actress Celina Alcântara (2022, n. p.) emphasises: “In order for us to get closer [to *escrevivência*], it is important to look respectfully, deeply at this way of existing, looking at and narrating the world”. The world that speaks of the experience of the body and in the Black body. From this perspective:

Escrevivência, before any mastery, is interrogation. It’s a quest to insert ourselves into the world with our stories, with our lives, which the world disregards. Escrevivência is not about abstracting from the world, but about existence, about the life-world. A world that I seek to apprehend so that I can inscribe myself in it, but with the understanding that the writing is not mine alone. That’s why I’m repeating a reflective question that I asked myself one day when I was thinking about my own writing and that of others. I wonder about the audacious act of women who break through imposed domains, especially Black women, and embark on the path of writing: ‘What would lead certain women, born and raised in non-literate environments, and at best semi-literate, to break away from the passivity of reading and seek the movement of writing?’ (Evaristo, 2020, p. 35).

In the same way, the concept of *escrevivência* encourages epistemological discussions in the game of knowledge hierarchies from a perspective that makes us rethink certain understandings that have long been established as unique. Maria Nazareth Soares Fonseca (2020, p. 65) stresses that the term “[...] gradually becomes a signifying power capable of shaking the foundations of an established literary order”. It could be said that not only does it shake the foundations of literature, but it also rocks the foundations of the order of traditional erudite writing, since this space was structured from a Europeanised writing of certain classes. And these meanings are specific to the cosmologies of the life experiences of Black women, who have broken with the historical past. This feminine universe, leading to reflection, “goes beyond the limits of a perception of life” (Evaristo, 2020, p. 35). In this regard, the author comments: “The place of writing is an active force when you think about *escrevivência* [...] writing, no matter how much you accompany or try to be close to speech, is another story [...] writing can’t cope with the body that speaks” (Evaristo; Martins, 2021, n. p.)

Based on this discussion, it is possible to present Rubens Oliveira's process of discovery, when he recognises himself as a Black man who dances at the beginning of his trajectory, in other words, he begins to trace his experience as an artist, writing his dance through the discourse of the body.

My art begins within a religious system, within the church, in short, where the Black man can't really dance, you know. He can't dance, he can't be seen as someone who moves his body. He can be a lot of things, he can be a pastor, he can be a [...] group leader, he can be a lot of things, but he can't dance. So that was my first [...], my first challenge to be overcome as a teenager (Oliveira, 2020, n. p.).

Rubens Oliveira's lived experiences within a system of prohibitions for a Black man reverberated in his body, a body traversed by perceptions, pulsations, senses of movement. Narrating this story can also mean that "writing can't cope with what the body says" (Evaristo; Martins, 2021, n. p.). For a young Black man, the fact that he can't express himself through gestures and movements, for reasons of hegemonic masculinity, is as if he wasn't allowed to use his voice, since for those who dance, the grammar of movements can be similar to the use of words. They are vibrant movements, full of energy, power, vigour, intensity, lightness, cadences, rhythms and undulations. It's safe to say that the transposition of *escrevivências* beyond writing transits through this space. We can see some of these aspects in the extract from the interview with Rubens Oliveira (2020, n. p.):

So, as a young Black teenager, beginning to realise that my body was an instrument that would bring me closer to my desire for expression, knowing that my whole family are musicians, my brothers, my parents. There I was looking for my expression of so many things, feelings, states, experiences, of my state of presence in the world, I realised that my body was that instrument, but the first challenge was to face [...] this social block, which is to be able to see that this body has another layer, which is the layer of bodily expression. So, the first challenge was at home, for my family to accept and understand [...] and every now and then, in the first moments, they started to get suspicious and say: 'But, well, there's that thing, you can dance, but at some point, you're going to have to work as well', the other place is: 'um, you're already dancing around with these tighter clothes, what's going on?'

From these considerations, it is clear that for a Black man, in order to dance he has to go through a series of familiar confrontations, involving both gender issues and the world of paid work; in other words, class issues.

Despite these confrontations, Rubens Oliveira opted for dance as a profession, and today he is well recognised in the artistic world, a fact that demonstrates the discontinuity of paradigms associated with Black men.



Figure 4 – Video dance *Cura*, de Rubens Oliveira (2021). Source: Danilo Rosa.

As such, talking about Black dancers in an unequal and (pre)judgmental world implies knowing their backgrounds, their realities, their tastes, their routines, their dance practices and their resistance strategies. Especially in a country ruled by structural racism, in which skin colour historically implies relations of inequality in the social, political and financial spheres and, fundamentally, in the sphere of the human condition. This is because, according to Almeida (2020), society is marked by clashes of class, race, sexuality and gender, which is reflected in all areas of the social structure. What's more, Brazil is a country where artistic endeavour is established in a very economically unstable field.

However, *escrevivência*, in turn, has other intricacies as Ângela Maria de Souza states (2020, n. p.):

More than a theoretical concept, here we are talking about a perspective that traverses those who carry out the research in the relationship they establish with their interlocutors in the research spaces. Their writings are permeated by pain, bravery, resentment, joy, renewal and resistance. It involves orality, listening as a way of constructing writing about and as women, be they female palenqueras, quilombolas, or priestesses. In the pedagogical practices of the Hip-Hop movement; in the challenges of Black mothers, or incarcerated mothers fighting for visibility, of the Afro-Paraguayan, Afro-Colombian and Afro-Argentine populations; in poetry, in fabrics, in dances, in searches that fight against violence; in the various writings that mark bodies, movements, feelings and knowledge. In other words, in the many forms of *aquilombamento*, as Beatriz Nascimento proposes.

In this way, we can dimension the workings of Afro-Latin art by citing the choreographer, poet and theatre director Victoria Santa Cruz (2013), with her activist poem *Me gritaron negra*, considered a symbol in the fight against racism. One might think that the poem refers to the writings not only of the artist, but of a collective of Black women. In this sense, this text recognises the perspective of writing as a notion that articulates experience, culture, class and ethnic-racial issues based on the Black body. These same aspects can be applied to the artist researched in this article. In the following section, we will highlight some of the points of the author Lélia Gonzalez's notion of Amefricanity, in an attempt to make the concept of writing more elastic.

Perspectively, Amefricanity

The Amefricanity category proposed by Lélia Gonzalez (1998) takes a broad look at the Americas, considering not just a specific place on the American continent, but all the countries that make it up. In other words, her reflection demystifies and questions US imperialism, which has created the idea that America is only located in the United States, erasing the other Americas: South, Central and North. In this respect, Gonzalez, with her revolutionary stance on the dominant, patriarchal and conservative view, considers that:

The political and cultural implications of the category of 'Amefricanity' are indeed democratic, precisely because the term itself allows us to go beyond territorial, linguistic and ideological limitations, opening up new perspectives for a deeper understanding of that part of the world where it manifests

itself: AMERICA as a whole (South, Central and North). Beyond its purely geographical character, the category of Amefricanity incorporates the entire historical process of intense cultural dynamics (adaptation, resistance, reinterpretation and the creation of new forms) that is Afrocentred. ... [...] (Gonzalez, 1988, p. 76).

The dynamics of this category are not limited to fixed delimiting characters, i.e. those that mark out a physical space, a language and a single conception of certain territories across the globe. In this sense, it is plural, encompassing all the notions of negritude and Amerindians recovered through the struggles, clashes and resistance of the Black, Black feminist, Amerindian, Latino and Latina movements. Today, their demands have had a certain effect in view of the emergence of non-white people occupying prominent social and artistic spaces. The cultural dynamic cited by Lélia Gonzalez brings the idea of re-signifying oneself and one's values in order to find strength and pass them on to future generations.

Consequently, the character of this *escrevivência* (writexperience) leads to reflections that seek to identify the specificities and phenomena of the artist as a social subject of African descent working in the field of dance in Brazil in the context of Latin America. Through observation, description and analysis of interviews, we investigated Afro-diasporic values that can be recognised in strong aspects of Amefricanity –especially with regard to the reinterpretation of oneself, one's poetic actions, ancestral values and the creation of new ways of being in the world. We can think of these creations as being in the act of inventing a new choreography, questioning themselves about their artistic endeavours in the face of reality, taking a critical look at the Westernised ways that are configured in the artistic field, verbalising movement quality strategies in their classes. In addition, they perceive their art as having the power to transform lives, understanding that the categories of race, class and gender (Gonzalez, 2020) are guiding social hierarchies. And yet, these are aspects that touch, in the dimension of the sensitive, what is disregarded and unwanted for a Black man. It's as if he's experiencing a non-place; in other words, it's as if the erudite environment of dance is not the place for a Black man¹⁶.

From a general point of view, one might think that the sensitive in art is inherent to all artists, and that everyone produces and feels. However, for Black men who are constantly discriminated against by white patriarchal

hegemony and don't have the same opportunities or privileges, we should value this fact to such an extent that they are seen as beacons to be appreciated by young people. This contrasts with statistics on Black people in prison, which show that suspected crimes and deaths are unequally and unfairly coloured and classed. It is important to reflect that, for a Black man, life is not separate from a colonial historical process that surrounds them in unequal racial terms within the Afro-Atlantic context¹⁷.

Therefore, Amefrica, as an ethnogeographical reference system, is a creation of ours and of our ancestors on the continent in which we live, inspired by African models. Therefore, the term Amefricans designates an entire descendancy: not only that of the Africans brought by the slave trade, but also those who arrived in AMERICA long before Columbus. Yesterday as today, Amefricans from many different countries have played a crucial role in the development of this Amefricanity that identifies a common historical experience in the Diaspora that needs to be properly known and carefully researched. Although we belong to different societies on the continent, we know that our system of domination is the same in all of them: racism, this cold and extreme elaboration of the Aryan model of explanation, whose presence is a constant at all levels of thought, as well as part and parcel of the most different institutions in these societies (Gonzalez, 1988, p. 77).

The notion of *Amefrica* is associated with the system of *escrevivência* in the sense that the term Amefrican implies going against the imperialist system of oppression that imprisons social behaviour in language; while *escrevivência* emphasises the lived experience, mainly of Black bodies in Brazil, marked by colonial imperialism, unfolding into Amefrica Ladina¹⁸. It is known that each locality has had its own forms of confrontation, resistance and artifices within its own historicity. In this respect, Beatriz Nascimento (2021) emphasises that we cannot allow the history of Black people in Brazil to be understood only through ethnographic and sociological studies. She says that we need to make our own history, in which our values are recovered, throwing frustrations and complexes into our unconscious, so that they can be effectively studied and not denied. Only “[...] in this way will we be able to understand ourselves and make ourselves accepted as we are, first and foremost, Blacks, Brazilians, without being confused with Americans or Africans, because our history is different, just as our problems are different” (Nascimento, 2021, p. 45). So, in view of the magnitude of the terms and concepts, the notion of Amefricanity and the term *escrevivência*

are gaining momentum, enabling research studies to continue from a decolonial perspective, valuing knowledge that comes from negritude, and Black knowledge¹⁹. This gradually shows the multiplicity of (r)existing knowledge that is chafing/tensioning/transforming structures.

In this light, Conceição Evaristo (2020, p. 35) states:

Escrevivência can be as if the subjects of the writing were writing to themselves, being the fictional reality, the very inventiveness of their writing, and they often are. But by writing to oneself, one's gesture expands and, without leaving oneself, reaps lives, stories from the surroundings. And that's why it's writing that doesn't end in itself, but deepens, broadens and encompasses the history of a community.

To summarise, writing by seeing oneself in other bodies is a way of creating a plural narrative, a narrative that is not unique, since they are stories shared by the collective, when living in similar perspectives of life. This is the case, for example, of a Black man dancing in Brazil. All the conceptions about this are intrinsically linked, both on the positive and negative sides of Black masculinity, even today. According to Rolf Malungo de Souza (2014, p. 36) "Masculine social practices can change according to society, or even within the same society, because masculinity can vary according to region, class, ethnic origin, religion, etc.". This proposal, which goes against heteronormativity²⁰, makes us think that masculinities can change, be malleable and adaptable according to the context and carry within them the expectation of fulfilling social gender roles. From another perspective, the art of dance works with a series of layers, sensory, perceptual, sonorous and oral layers, which writing sometimes fails to take into account, because it is the sounds that are produced in the body and are in the body.

From this perspective, Rubens Oliveira (2020, n. p.) comments:

Well, when I got to know contemporary dance, when I got to know more about my body, there at work, at Ivaldo Bertazzo's company, when we went to physiotherapy classes, to touch another man's body and understand, bone, pelvis, it's [...] femur, understand, touch, massage, swap massages. We'd swap, we'd do it, we'd spend two hours swapping massages, one hour each. And so, reducing this [...] tension in relation to the body was a very arduous process, very difficult, because it's an internal process first, it's a personal process. And then, when you go home, you leave with all that in your head, with all those sensations of having touched someone else's body,

someone else's body, you know. And often of another man, something that in adolescence, in the periphery, this is [...] these touches, these encounters happen in football. So [...], gradually breaking down these languages, these internal thoughts, both in myself and in my community, in my family, was really challenging.

The idea of masculinity, according to Tom Farias (2022, p. 9), in the etymological sense of the term, “comes from the quality of being ‘masculine, virile and of a manly character’ according to recurring definitions”. In this way, as a result of social conventions, it structurally leads to hegemonic thinking about what it is to “be a man”. However, being a Black man brings a fundamental layer to defining power relations, related to the colour of one's skin, and consequently subjected to discrimination, hostility and racism. Cotta et al. (2021, p. 6) state that: “The body identified as male is expected to be strong, virile, protective, a provider, insensitive, ‘macho’. There are many meanings and attitudes that are instilled, taught and repeated to men from childhood onwards”. Breaking down these paradigms is a revolutionary act for confronting the world. Rubens Oliveira notably expands on breaking expectations for a Black man. His life stories, together with his artistic career, form a rich framework of his *escrevivências* through the discourse of the body, dance. To value these stories is to give another direction to the events experienced by Black men in Brazil, given that, on a daily basis, the facts linked to these people are related to violence, racism and social inequalities.

Introducing other conceptions of life is the starting point for creating a culture of praise, intrepidity and tenacity in the face of non-consideration, non-recognition, being forgotten and erased. Actions that lead to the projection of the future, to having hope in life, to imagining oneself living in a possible, fair and equal world. It's thinking beyond stigmatisation, it's thinking about a *life-world*, a place where Black people recognise themselves through other people, a place where representativeness gains the status of normality. Thinking about Black representation in spaces of visibility, where the presence of white people is dominantly normalised, is a way of subverting the system, even if there is resistance from whiteness²¹.

Amefricanized forms of writing about oneself

Discussing writing about oneself in the context of *escrevivência* is a different mode of collectivity, as Conceição Evaristo puts it, even if the modes of writing are similar. For her, *escrevivência* has an independence from the patterns of “[...] writing of the self, autofiction, memorial writing... I dare to believe and propose that, despite similarities with the types of writing mentioned, *Escrevivência* goes beyond the fields of writing that revolves around an individualised subject” (Evaristo, 2020, p. 38). At this juncture, the idea of writing about oneself formulated for discussion is based on a Black, poor, peripheral subject, in a similar way to the emergence of the term *Escrevivência*, which has “Black, female and poor” authorship at its core (Evaristo, 2020, p. 38). The confrontations with racism, prejudice, silencing, lack of privileges and mistrust make for an extremely painful experience for Black people, and their contours are delimited when it comes to Black men, as we have outlined through certain aspects here in this article.

Evaristo (2020, p. 38) adds: “[...] *Escrevivência* is not a narcissistic writing, because it is not a writing of the self, which is limited to a story of a self alone [...]”. From another point of view, an Afro-Latin American person, at the core of their subjectivity, differs in many ways from the Narcissus figure. In this case, there are two points of reference: on the one hand, an aspect of Greek mythology and all its meanings, and on the other, an aspect of African cosmogony re-signified in the Americas. It doesn’t refer to a value judgement, but rather to a reading of how the world presents itself. As such, within this writing, the *forms of Amefricanised writing of oneself* distort these oppositions, as we’ll see in the next few lines.

The inspiration for introducing Amefricanised Ways of Writing about Oneself, of a reinvented, historical and corporeal writing, comes from two excellent sources: Achille Mbembe and Luciane Ramos Silva. *Formas africanas da escrita de si* (African Forms of the writing about oneself) (Mbembe, 2010) and *Formas africanizadas de escritas de si* (Africanised Forms of the writing about oneself) (Silva, 2017). These references deal with Black African studies in Africa and the Americas. With regard to Africa, in Luciane Silva’s reading of Mbembe’s thinking on this term:

[...] criticises the ideological currents and thinkers on the African continent who have developed discourses claiming an African identity linked to symbolic elements, political demands, racial and geographical correspondences that were intended to justify a possible autonomy (Silva, 2017, p. 26).

In the Americas, specifically in the Afro-Brazilian diaspora, the discourse in search of the recovery and re-signification of identities, of belonging, of their roots, in the field of dance, can be inspired by the ideas of Luciane Ramos Silva. In *Formas africanizadas de escritas de si*, the author “[...] [makes] reference to ways of imagining and constructing existence based on values that, intersectionally and dynamically, refer to African foundations reworked in the Americas” (Silva, 2017, p. 26). By associating the terms *African forms of writing about oneself*, *Africanised forms of writing about oneself* and *Amefricanity*, the category *Amefricanised forms of writing about oneself* was created to re-dimension the cultural values of the enslaved Africans who were forcibly brought to Brazil and the American continent, as well as the people who already existed there before the colonisers arrived in Latin America. Looking at the multiplicity and breadth of the term *Amefricanised forms of writing about oneself*, it can be said that it involves the reformulation of an Afro-Brazilian and Amerindian identity connected to what was built and reinvented by Black and indigenous ancestry in Brazilian territory. They relied solely on the wisdom of their bodies and of nature, which highlights the bravery, persistence and resistance of these peoples. This term says a lot about how people organise themselves in environments covered in the traces of imperialist colonialism, where strategies are needed to survive. This opens up a critical view of what the body no longer sees as a naturalisation of the various things they try to naturalise, but rather with the insight to understand that it is not being outraged. In this process, you gain freedom of thought, attention to what’s nearby and dexterity in self-recognition.

In this way, by analysing interviews and observing the subject of this writing, within his/her Amefrican *escrevivências*, it was possible to perceive traces of an Afrocentric dynamic in the verbal, bodily and poetic discourse²² of Rubens Oliveira in his dance creations, performances and classes. In the artistic universe of the movement arts, the artist, in his trajectory, presents a body language that is very powerful, political, creative and full of value in the sense of the production of ephemeral art. The production of this sym-

bolic value in the context of dance is what gives rise to enchantment, realising that it is also a strategy for confronting our reality.

Seeking a link between the notions of *escrevivência* and Amefricanidade in terms of research is to strengthen Black Brazilian authors and their epistemologies, Black knowledge, which is still little valued in the academic world. The authors' strength lies in their life experience and articulation of literate knowledge as a fight against racism, in Black persistence within academia, which is still very much whitewashed. We believe that the authors highlighted in this article, such as Conceição Evaristo and Lélia Gonzalez, can present a vector of methodology within the scope of Black epistemologies that add the confrontation of Black skin colour as a life experience that can permeate writing in the quest to value aspects of the construction of Black identity. The artist Rubens Oliveira, analysed in this article, is a source of inspiration and mirroring for one of the authors of this text: Luciano Tavares, as he is a Black artist who overcame social barriers of gender, race and class when he began studying classical ballet at the age of 14. This experience enabled him to perform in local and international companies. In this sense, there is a link of life experience that unites these artists in the movement.

Final considerations

The epistemological propositions of Amefricanidade and *Escrevivencia* are analogous to the different perspectives on confronting the violence founded by colonialism, which has left deep scars. However, we still find traces of it. The scope of these terms may have validity in the art of creative endeavour, as Rubens Oliveira shows us in his artistic productions as a whole.

Writing, seeing and seeing oneself in the bodies of other Black men becomes a way of glimpsing the collective embodied in similar life stories, since at some point in their lives these stories cross paths, with only the address seeming to change, which reinforces the ways of understanding, organising and living in the world in response to racism. In this case, Black artists seek to own their dances, their poetics, their ways of representing and expressing their subjectivities and represent successful experiences of Blackness. For the reality of a Black man in Brazil, it is necessary to go through strong struggles to find new vectors of masculinities that can break, deconstruct and make

more flexible the plastered structures of hegemonic masculinities. The experiences, perceptions and confrontations narrated and described here in this article are in the real and subjective field and traverse one of the authors of this text because, as a Black man, he feels the subject of the article in his skin in certain situations that revolve around the Black body.

We believe that the female Black authors mentioned in this article, as well as the artist in question, Rubens Oliveira, through their Black knowledge, can help us find some ways forward. Returning to Conceição Evaristo (2020, p. 35), these are “stories that the world disregards”, which is why it is so important to bring them to light so that they are made visible, valued, respected and, above all, told by Black people. As Nascimento (2021) emphasises, we need to tell our own story. As the musical group Racionais MC’S, puts it in *Voz Ativa* (1993)²³:

Eu tenho algo a dizer	I have something to say
E explicar pra você	And explain it to you
Mas não garanto porém	But I can't guarantee
Que engraçado eu serei dessa vez	How funny I'll be this time
Para os manos daqui!	For the brothers here!
Para os manos de lá!	For the brothers over there!
Se você se considera um negro	If you consider yourself black
Pra negro será mano!	You'll be black, bro!
Sei que problemas você tem demais	I know you have too many problems
E nem na rua não te deixam na sua	And they don't let you off the hook
Entre madames fodidas e os racistas fardados	Between fucked-up madams and racists in uniform
De cérebro atrofiado não te deixam em paz	With atrophied brains they won't leave you alone
Todos eles com medo generalizam demais	They all generalise too much out of fear
Dizem que os negros são todos iguais	They say black people are all the same
Você concorda	You agree
Se acomoda então, não se incomoda em ver	So you settle down, you don't bother to watch
Mesmo sabendo que é foda	Even though you know it's fucked up
Prefere não se envolver	You prefer not to get involved
Finge não ser você	Pretend it's not you
E eu pergunto por quê?	And I ask you why?
[...]	[...]
Chega de festejar a desvantagem	No more celebrating disadvantage

E permitir que desgastem a nossa imagem	And letting them wear down our image
Descendente negro atual meu nome é	Of actual black descent, my name is
Brown	Brown
Não sou complexado e tal	I'm not neurotic or anything
Apenas Racional	Just rational
É a verdade mais pura	It's the purest truth
Postura definitiva	A definitive stance
A juventude negra	Black youth
Agora tem voz ativa	Now have an active voice
[...]	[...]
Você gosta, gosta, gosta de Nós	You like, you like, you like Us
Somos nós, nós, nós, nós mesmos	It's us, us, us, ourselves
[...]	[...]
Então, Lecy Brandão, Moisés da Rocha	So, Lecy Brandão, Moisés da Rocha
Thaíde e DJ Hum, Ivo Meireles, Mole-	Thaíde and DJ Hum, Ivo Meireles,
ques de Rua e tal	Moleques de Rua and so on
E da Zona leste de São Paulo Grupo	And from the East Zone of São Paulo
DMN	Grupo DMN
Pode crer é isso aí	That's right

Notes

- ¹ This article is part of doctoral research being carried out in the Postgraduate Programme in Performing Arts at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, entitled: *Escrita amefricana de si na prática da dança: três estudos de caso de bailarinos negros*. (Amefrican writing about oneself in dance practice: three case studies of Black dancers). The article is written by a Black man and a white woman, who is the research supervisor.
- ² It refers to a multiplicity of Black masculinities which, in the end, are equally stereotyped within the singularity of each subject. We will use masculinity in the singular, which refers to the conceptual sense of the term, normative, stereotyped gender, including fluid genders of masculinity.
- ³ Song released in 1998, composed by Seu Jorge, Ulisses Capelletti and Marcelo Fontes do Nascimento. Recently there was a tribute to Elza Soares at Rock in Rio (2022), where this song was performed with this line.
- ⁴ Due to the limitations of this article, we won't deal with issues related to the sexual orientation of the artist mentioned.

- ⁵ Gumbboot is an African folk dance that was created by enslaved people in gold mines as a way of communicating without using their voices, using the sound of their boots. Gumbboot emerged in the mid-19th century during the period when diamond and gold mines were being discovered as a result of long years of Dutch and British colonisation. Choreographer Rubens Oliveira went to South Africa, where he was able to experience the technique.
- ⁶ It's a dance festival that takes place in Florianópolis/SC and aims to democratise access to the art of dance, both for the artists who take to the stage and for the spectators.
- ⁷ An international dance event now in its 12th year. It brings together the different languages of this medium, such as video dance, film collections, artist residencies and training activities.
- ⁸ It is a national performing arts festival that mobilises hundreds of artists from all over the country, reaching an average of 5 million people.
- ⁹ Interview conducted by video call via WhatsApp Messenger on 4 April 2023.
- ¹⁰ The latter are familiar with autoethnographic data, which, according to Mônica Dantas (2016) and Sylvie Fortin (2010), refers to reports about oneself, about writing about oneself, which allows the researcher to "[...] move back and forth between personal experiences and cultural dimensions, seeking to recognise, question and interpret the very structures and politics of the self" (Dantas, 2016, p. 173).
- ¹¹ The Black population is highly vulnerable to lethal violence, and Black men are the biggest victims of homicide, according to the Brazilian Public Security Forum, recorded in the Unemployment Atlas (Cerqueira et al., 2021).
- ¹² Two interviews were conducted with Rubens Oliveira, the first took place on 16 September 2020, via the Zoom platform (70 min), and the second took place on 4 April 2023, via WhatsApp video call (20 min).
- ¹³ It is an online platform created by Natália Gresenberg, a cultural manager and lawyer, and Talita Bretes, a postgraduate in cultural management, teacher and dancer. For more details on the Conexão Diáspora International Festival, visit: <https://portalmud.com.br/portal/ler/festival-internacional-conexao-diaspora>. Accessed on: 8 June 2021.

- ¹⁴ Proof of this is that the majority of directors of major Brazilian companies are white. One of the only highlights, years ago (2017), was Ismael Ivo, who directed the Balé da Cidade de São Paulo, after having had an international career.
- ¹⁵ Some of the laws that were part of the Brazilian social structure reveal the structural racism faced by the Black population: Law No. 1 of 14 January 1837, for example, prohibited Black people from attending public schools, as it compared them to people suffering from contagious diseases; slaves and Black Africans, even if they were free. Law no. 601 of 18 September 1850, which regulated the use of land, in which Black people could not own land, i.e. the Empire granted land by title deed to foreigners (immigrants) and private companies. Decree no. 847 of 11 October 1890, which criminalised vagrancy and capoeira. In 1888, the abolition of slavery was instituted, and when Black people were freed, they had nowhere to go and no support, as was the case with other immigrants, such as Italians, Germans, Azoreans and Japanese.
- ¹⁶ Lindete Souza de Jesus (2021) analyses the life story of the dancer Luiz Bokanha, critically describing the passages in his life since his training in dance. It also presents a portrait of the structural foundations of racism, with a view to denouncing the continuity of these discriminatory practices in society to this day.
- ¹⁷ This term refers to the displacement of enslaved Africans, captured and taken to the Americas across the Atlantic Ocean in subhuman conditions of treatment.
- ¹⁸ Lélia Gonzalez (1988) proposed replacing the t with a d, because the formation of Brazil was not specifically by Europeans, as has been idealised, but by an African majority, in other words, she says that we are an African America, where Latinity is not sustained.
- ¹⁹ Lately, Affirmative Action policies have shown a movement in academic spaces that have been prioritising issues related to Black knowledge, precisely so that they become reliable elements for research. But even with the progress of this reparative action, Black people continue to be attacked in the social, cultural and institutional spheres.
- ²⁰ Beatriz Preciado (2002) argues that the heterosexual system is a social apparatus for producing femininity and masculinity that operates by dividing and fragmenting the body, in other words, certain parts of the body are valued in order to make them the centre of power. In this way, anything that deviates

from the established standard is regulated, which takes on the character of prohibition and subversion.

- ²¹ Maria Aparecida Bento (2002) points out in a study that whiteness is the silent guardian of privilege. White people don't think about the meaning of their whiteness, and have the option of externalising or omitting their own whiteness, i.e. it doesn't matter, because it's a given fact, invisibilising the existence of the other, the Black person.
- ²² The term poetic is used here in the sense of creative endeavour.
- ²³ Translator's note. The following is a loose translation of the lyrics of the rap music cited.

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