

**Dance Discourse and the Concept of Genre – Some Interpretive Elements / *O discurso da dança e o conceito de gênero – alguns elementos de leitura***

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**ABSTRACT**

The objective of this article is to examine dance as visual and verbal-visual discourse, and to identify the components that foster the production of meaning for an audience without any specialized training, but who are merely amateurs, and who attend dance shows. The first part of the article establishes the theoretical-conceptual basis for the study, supported by excerpts from the works of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov, which converge with the perspective of dance theorist, Rudolf Laban, who conceives of dance as language. Secondly, a corpus consisting of four discursive fragments from different genres are analyzed: classical ballet, modern ballet, hip-hop and street dance. The analysis focuses on the concepts of discursive genres, intonation, and value systems.

**KEYWORDS:** Dance; Genre; Utterance; Value; Intonation

**RESUMO**

*O objetivo do presente artigo é tratar a dança como discurso visual e verbo-visual e identificar alguns de seus componentes que permitem a construção de sentido para um público sem formação específica e que seja mero amador e frequentador de espetáculos de dança. Na primeira parte, busca-se estabelecer as bases teórico-conceituais do trabalho e, para tanto, percorrem-se trechos da obra de Bakhtin, Medviédev e Volóshinov que convergem com o pensamento de Rudolf Laban, teórico da dança que a concebe como linguagem. Na segunda parte, analisa-se um corpus constituído de quatro fragmentos discursivos, exemplares de diferentes gêneros – balé clássico, balé moderno, hip-hop e streetdance. Mobilizam-se para a análise os conceitos de gênero discursivo, entonação e sistema de valores.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Dança; Gênero; Enunciado; Valor; Entonação

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The realm of this reflection is delimited to dance-show,<sup>1</sup> executed for a particular audience by professionals or semiprofessionals who are proficient in specific corporal techniques. In this field, the term “dance discourse” is frequently used by artists and other specialists. This expression appears in interviews or documentaries about dancers and choreographers, and also in the programs distributed at the beginning of dance shows. By refraining from approaching dance as ritual, in which gestures are previously codified, with fixed and univocal meaning, and by excluding traditional dance with its repertoire of gestures and movements that are unchangeable, as well as spontaneous party dancing practiced randomly, collectively or individually, we can ask the following questions about our object of study: what does the dance-show discourse say? Aside from the movements of pantomime that can eventually integrate a choreography, and have meaning through iconic reference, how does choreography make meaning? We begin with the idea that the dance-show needs to “reach” the spectator. This is only possible insofar as it actually speaks to the spectators – as abstractly and vaguely as this communication may be – justifying their presence at the event. As discourse, it is addressed to someone, and the utterance itself contains the supposed addressee (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.126).<sup>2</sup>

This question deserves careful attention with regard to the supposed addressee of the dance discourse. Therefore, this article does not reflect on the vocabulary and language of the dance discourse with regard to what it means to professionals. On the contrary, such a reflection would be in the field of specialists and technicians in the art of dance; rather, what we would like to investigate is dance in its capacity to mean for the layperson as spectator – those who are amateurs, but frequently attend this type of show, which is, in fact, our case.

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<sup>1</sup> TN: The expression “dance-show,” here and throughout the text, is standardized for the translation of “espetáculo de dança” in the sense of a staged event – “performance” or “spectacle.” The term “spectacle” has declined in use, and is an unlikely/uncommon/infrequent collocation with “dance.” Moreover, “performance” is generally linked to ‘high-brow’ genres or an individual event, whereas ‘dance show’ is used for the 4 genres of dance (ballet – classical and modern –, hip-hop and street dance) in this work (<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/arts/london-dance-shows-2019-ballet-contemporary-street-a4025861.html> ). The use of “dance show” will refer to the performance of all or any one of these genres.

<sup>2</sup>TN: We adopt the term ‘addressee’ for the Portuguese ‘destinatário,’ here and throughout the text, according to the version translated from the Russian by Vern W. McGee. See Bakhtin (1986). BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.103-131.

Thus, this article is developed in two parts: the first sets out the theoretical foundation that outlines our reading of the dance-show; the second employs the use of this theoretical approach to the treatment of four discursive fragments.<sup>3</sup>

## 1 Theoretical Elements

We attempt to answer our research questions by inscribing them in the context of a broader discursive problematic. To do so, we draw on an approach based on the studies on discourse of Bakhtin and his Circle, as well as the work of dance theorist Rudolf Laban,<sup>4</sup> which contains elements that presumably justify this interface.

In Laban's book, which is referenced here and was designed as a stage manual, the author analyzes and describes the relationship of the body and space. His intention is that "[...] the appreciation and understanding of human movement is broadened and deepened" (LABAN, 1978, p.56).<sup>5</sup>

The first indication that the interface we are proposing is justified appears with Laban's treatment of dance as a language:

The isolated movements are evidently similar to the words or letters of a language, not providing any definite impression, nor a flux of coherent ideas. The fluency of ideas must be expressed in sequences of movement as in sentences of speech (1978, p.141).<sup>6</sup>

This resonates, unwittingly, with Vološinov's concept of language when he affirms:

For him [the speaker] the center of gravity lies not in the identity of the form, but in that new and concrete meaning it acquires in the particular context. [...] No, the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to

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<sup>3</sup> We speak of discursive fragments insofar as we make a selection to constitute the corpus, which, rigorously, from the perspective adopted here, occurs in all research, since the utterance is part of the chain that supersedes it.

<sup>4</sup> Dancer and choreographer, he was also the creator of a system of Kinetography (the graphic representation of movement) known as Labanotation.

<sup>5</sup> Text in Portuguese: "[...] se amplie e se aprofunde a apreciação e a compreensão do movimento humano."

<sup>6</sup> Text in Portuguese: "Os movimentos isolados são evidentemente apenas semelhantes às palavras ou às letras de uma língua, não dando nenhuma impressão definida, nem tampouco um fluir coerente de idéias. A fluência de idéias deve ser expressa em sequências de movimento como as sentenças da fala."

understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e., it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.68).<sup>7</sup>

Laban states:

The exclusive use of movements with a fixed meaning will never result in a work of art, since it is precisely the rare combination of movements that make them interesting to the public (1978, p.142).<sup>8</sup>

We know that the social and ideological anchoring of the art is central in Vološinov's philosophy of language:

*What characterizes aesthetic communication is the fact that it is wholly absorbed in the creation of a work of art, and in its continuous recreations in the co-creation of contemplators, and does not require any other kind of objectification. But, needless to say, this unique form of communication does not exist in isolation; it participates in the unitary flow of social life, it reflects the common economic basis, and it engages in interaction and exchange with other forms of communication (VOLOŠINOV, 1976, p.98; author's emphasis).<sup>9</sup>*

The same anchoring appears indicated, although without elaboration, in Laban's reflection on dance. Could Laban have been familiar with the work of the Bakhtinian Circle?<sup>10</sup>

What it seems is that, during many hundreds of years, there came general modalities of easily recognized movement: those of the upper class and the lower class, with perhaps an intermediary style between the two (LABAN, 1978, p.204).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Text in Portuguese: "O uso exclusivo de movimentos com um significado fixo jamais resultará num trabalho de arte, pois é precisamente a combinação incomum de movimentos que os torna interessantes para o público."

<sup>9</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V. Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art. In: VOLOŠINOV, V. *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*. Translated by I. R. Titunik. New York: Academic Press, 1976. pp.93-116.

<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Laban was born in 1879 and died in 1958, and therefore was a contemporary of the authors in the Circle. Hungarian by birth, when Laban lived in Germany, he upheld the ideology of the Third Reich, although he was unauthorized by Goebbels when he then relocated to London. Ideologically, in this case, it seems that his ideas were not in line with those of the Circle. Nonetheless, we pose the question.

<sup>11</sup> Text in Portuguese: "O que parece é que, durante várias centenas de anos, vieram se opondo duas modalidades gerais de movimentação passíveis de fácil reconhecimento: a da classe alta e a da classe baixa, havendo talvez um estilo intermediário entre os dois."

A large part of Laban's analysis focuses on his work on the dancer-actor, which directs him to the foundations of mime or, if we prefer, pantomime. However, on analyzing the components of mime, which integrate the language of dance, he states: "The nutrient rich soil on which the tree of mime is nourished is in the world of values" (LABAN, 1978, p.187).<sup>12</sup>

Directing himself to the student dancer-actors, he guides them to take, in the first place:

[...] the character of the people to be represented, the type of values for which they struggle and the circumstances in which this struggle occurs. Thus, as part of their creative function as actor, they must select movements appropriate to the character, the values and the situation in particular (LABAN, 1978, p.194).<sup>13</sup>

Vološinov affirms:

The sign is a creation between individuals, a creation within a social milieu. Therefore, the item in question must first acquire interindividual significance, and only then can it become an object for sign formation. In other words, only *that which has acquired social value can enter the world of ideology, take shape, and establish itself there* (1986, p.22; author's emphasis).<sup>14</sup>

He adds, moreover: [...] No utterance can be put together without value judgment. Every utterance is above all an *evaluative orientation* (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.105; author's emphasis).<sup>15</sup>

As the book closes, Laban points out that modern dance does not accept the steps of the classical repertoire nor the vocabulary that is based on mime for meaning making.

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<sup>12</sup> Text in Portuguese: "O solo nutritivo onde se alimenta a árvore da mímica é o mundo dos valores."

<sup>13</sup> Text in Portuguese: "[...] o caráter das pessoas a serem representadas, do tipo de valores pelos quais lutam e das circunstâncias nas quais esta luta ocorre. A seguir, como parte de sua função criativa enquanto ator, ele deve selecionar os movimentos apropriados ao personagem, aos valores e à situação em particular."

<sup>14</sup> For reference, see footnote 7.

<sup>15</sup> For reference, see footnote 7.

For many modern dancers, a “literary dance”, the one whose content can be described in a summary, is not, in any way, dance, but rather mime-dance. The movements, which are familiar to the spectator due to their similarity with those that they use in daily activities and behaviors are suspect to these modern dancers. [...] The modern dancer demands the right to create personal inventions in dance, based on non-conventional body sequence evolutions (1978, pp.235-236).<sup>16</sup>

However, we agree with Grillo when she says that “[...] visual language is based on an indicative matrix that enacts an iconic relation or similarity to references in the world” (2012, p.241).<sup>17</sup>

If we presume that, for the spectator, the dance-show is a predominantly visual language, we can say that all choreography contains iconic references, but, once they are managed in sequences, they call for an interpretation that escapes both dictionary classification and immediate comprehension.<sup>18</sup> It seems to us that, if dance can make sense to a broad range of interlocutors, the audience, this is because it presents a totality that, in its turn, is organized as a discursive genre. According to Bakhtin/Medvedev, “Poetics should really begin with genre, not end with it. For genre is the typical form of the whole work, the whole utterance” (1978, p.129).<sup>19</sup>

The recurrence of particular sequences of movement presupposes that the addressee-spectator will identify this regularity as something that will typify the discursive genre in question. The genre will provide the spectators with interpretive clues even if they are not professional dancers. To transpose the concept of discursive genre from Bakhtinian texts and those from the Circle to a language of dance does not seem to contradict Laban’s ideas. In fact, we find, in his analysis of movement, elements that converge in this transposition:

Although we do not intend to offer even an outline of the history of the movement, it can be said that in certain eras, in select parts of the

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<sup>16</sup> Text in Portuguese: “Para muitos bailarinos modernos, a “dança literária”, aquela cujo conteúdo pode ser descrita num resumo, não é dança de modo algum mas, sim, dança-mímica. Os movimentos familiares ao espectador devido a sua semelhança com os que se usam nas ações e comportamentos cotidianos são suspeitos a esses dançarinos modernos. [...] O dançarino moderno reivindica o direito de criar invenções pessoais na dança, com base em sequências de evoluções não convencionais de seu corpo.”

<sup>17</sup>Text in Portuguese: “[...] a linguagem visual funda-se sobre uma matriz indicial que comporta uma relação icônica ou de semelhança com os referentes do mundo.”

<sup>18</sup> Not to mention that any symbol, even motivated as an index and icon of Pearce, requires previous knowledge of the conventions of the cultural context in which it appears.

<sup>19</sup> BAKHTIN, M./MEDVEDEV, P. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Translated by A. J. Wehrle. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

world, in certain occupations, in the cherished aesthetic beliefs or in utilitarian skills, some corporal attitudes are preferred, and used more frequently than others. [...] It is easy to understand how the selection and the establishment of preferences for certain corporal attitudes create a style [...] (1987, p.135).<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, we can say that the authors in the Circle authorize expansions of this type. According to Brait:

The origin and development of Bakhtinian thought suggests this broadening gesture of the object *language*, if we take into account mainly that, at no moment, the work of the Circle is defined exclusively as a linguistic theory or a literary theory (2012, p.2).<sup>21</sup>

On identifying regularities in the dance, the spectator will find the equivalent to the relatively stable forms of utterance that characterize the discursive genres. According to Bakhtin, “We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction* of the whole” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.78; author’s emphasis).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Bakhtin adds that: “Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances, which we call *speech genres*” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.60; author’s emphasis).<sup>23</sup>

Our hypothesis, then, can be formed as such: the active understanding of the audience and the work of producing meaning is based on elements of the socio-cultural reality shared between it and the artist creator-interpreter of the dance. However, this does not mean that the dance discourse copies or imitates the shared reality. It is through the genre that the relation with reality illuminates the work and allows us to understand it and not just through the iconicity of its signs. Bakhtin/Medvedev explains the nature of the relation between discursive genre and reality:

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<sup>20</sup> Text in Portuguese: “Embora não pretendamos oferecer sequer um esboço da história do movimento, pode-se adiantar que em certas épocas, em partes definidas do mundo, em certas ocupações, nos apreciados credos estéticos ou em habilidades com fim utilitário, algumas atitudes corporais são preferidas e usadas com mais frequência do que outras. [...] É fácil compreender como a seleção e o estabelecimento de preferências de certas atitudes corporais criam um estilo [...].”

<sup>21</sup> Text in French: “La genèse et le développement de la pensée bakhtinienne suggèrent ce geste amplificateur de l’objet *langage*, si l’on tient compte notamment de ce que, à aucun moment, les travaux du Cercle ne se définissent comme une théorie linguistique ou une théorie littéraire tout court.”

<sup>22</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.60-102.

<sup>23</sup> For reference, see footnote 22.

An artistic whole of any type, i.e., of any genre, has a two-fold orientation in reality, and the characteristics of this orientation determine the type of the whole, i.e., its genre.

In the first place, the work is oriented toward the listener and perceiver and toward the definite conditions of performance and perception. In the second place, the work is oriented in life, from within, one might say, by its thematic content. Every genre has its own orientation in life, with reference to its events, problems, etc. (BAKHTIN/MEDVEDEV, 1978, p.131).<sup>24</sup>

In short, “Genre appraises reality and reality clarifies genre” (BAKHTIN/MEDVEDEV, 1978, p.136).<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, we can conceive of a shared reality that makes genre comprehensible by the fact that the art, as a secondary discursive genre,<sup>26</sup> is developed from everyday genres. According to Vološinov, in common everyday discourse we find “the bases, the potentialities of artistic form” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.98).<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand how everyday genres are created, Vološinov offers the following synthesis: “Each situation, fixed and sustained by social custom, commands a particular kind of organization of audience and, hence, a particular repertoire of *little behavioral [everyday] genres*” (1986, p.97; our emphasis).<sup>28</sup>

We understand, thus, that the relatively stable utterances of dance discourse genres provide the spectator with vestiges of the *little everyday genres* of everyday discourse and install, in this way, a shared discursivity. The recurrences and regularities that the spectator perceives and that we designate here as *recurring forms* convoke in them the production of meaning. Insofar as they typify a genre, other elements – the concrete spheres of production and circulation, the relationship among the interlocutors, the theme and the affirmed values – can configure a general framework of references. From these, an interpretive reading, even a spontaneous and unsystematic one, will make particularities emerge, both from the work and/or its interpreter in that which they bring again, and each spectator in his or her own discursive network.

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<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 19.

<sup>25</sup> For reference, see footnote 19.

<sup>26</sup> The terms *secondary and primary* are proposed by Bakhtin in *Speech Genres* (1986; reference on footnote 22). We believe it is possible to correspond them with the relation Vološinov made between art and what he calls *everyday genres*. See, also, Vološinov (1986). For full reference, see footnote 9.

<sup>27</sup> For reference, see footnote 9.

<sup>28</sup> For reference, see footnote 9.



In the process of the following reading, we examine determinate recurring forms, which of course are not exhaustive, in an attempt to identify a general framework of reference. Other spectators can perceive other recurrences contained in the same discursive genre, and even forms that would evoke other discursive genres. Finally, there is nothing that impedes the same discourse from being embedded in more than one genre. This is, in fact, the case of the following discourses. For this reason, we speak of *discursive fragments* to emphasize that we are operating with a section of the discursive flow in which they appear, and within the complex network of genres that infuse them. As previously indicated, this research is informed entirely from the perspective of Bakhtin and the Circle, taking into account the fact that responsivity of the utterances always harkens back to other discourses, whether they are analyzed or not.

## **2 Interpretation**

### **2.1 First Fragment: Aiming for the Heights**

We begin with an exemplary fragment from classical choreography, the celebrated ballet, *The Swan* (aka *The Dying Swan*) (FOKINE, 1907). The choreography was created by Mikhail Fokine and is considered the greatest expression of classical ballet from the romantic period, whereby the virtuosity and technique are not considered the only value. The romantic character gives value here to the expressivity of a state of pain and fragility when confronted with death. The music, by Saint-Saens, C. (1886), used in the ballet, is a section from the satirical and jocund piece, *The Animal Carnival*, (SAINT-SAENS, 1886), composed especially for carnivalesque parties of the time. Later, the composer prohibited the distribution of the piece, considering it too lowly for his renown as a serious music composer. The section used in *The Swan* was the only part he authorized to be distributed, as it is dramatic and not jocund. In the following link, we find a video available on Youtube<sup>29</sup> with the ballet staged at the Marinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2007, on the centennial of the debut of the work in this same theatre in 1907. According to the indication on Youtube, it is interpreted by

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<sup>29</sup> Accessed on Feb. 19, 2018.

ballerina Ulina Lopatkina: La Mort du Cygne Ulina Lopatkina 2007 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmlpxIJ1BqY>

Firstly, the use of a video on Youtube deserves some methodological consideration. This sphere of circulation of audiovisual documents merits a study of its own, as its specificities confer on videos a particular discursive condition: the format, the information posted on the image (for example, the duration of time), the interactive resources offered to the spectator to interrupt the visualization, freeze frame, playback, fast forward, repeat, etc. Besides this, each video is presented in a discursive environment saturated with the ads for other videos, commentaries by people surfing the internet, etc. All of these aspects seem to configure our material of analysis, a Youtube video, as a discursive subgenre although its analysis diverges from the object of our text.

Youtube will then be seen as a research space holding the archives that make up the corpus of this research. This means that the use of and gaze toward the object-video is limited to the research questions, and the theoretical approach. In some way, we can see a parallel with Vološinov's methodological concerns when he upholds artistic utterances as everyday discourse, as in the following:

This method [...] is something, of course, that is scientifically risky and only admissible under exceptional circumstances. As, however, we do not have a gramophone record to give us a true record of conversation between living people, we have to make use of literary material, constantly, of course, taking account of its special, literary, character (VOLOŠINOV, 1983, p.130).<sup>30</sup>

In our case, we must *forget that we have agreed to assume*, to use Voloshinov's expression (1983, p.130),<sup>31</sup> that we are dealing with a video on Youtube, to focus on our questions relative to dance. What seems to occur with regularity in the choreography? Regardless of the recognition of the steps or the basis that the professional or those versed in technique would design as vocabulary of classical ballet, we can observe some recurrent forms:

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<sup>30</sup> VOLOSHINOV, V. The Construction of the Utterance. In: SHUKMAN, A. (ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers*. Translated by Noel Owen. Oxford: RTP Publications, 1983. pp.114-138. (*Russian Poetics Translation*, v. 10).

<sup>31</sup> For reference, see footnote 30.

- Movements unfold in a continuous line, without interruptions, or obstacles – from one side of the body to the other, from the foot to the hand or vice-versa, and from low to high.
- The emphasis is put on the line in detriment to the volume – more drawing than sculpture, almost in two dimensions (vertical and horizontal or height and width).
- The thin and lithe bodies seem as if suspended by invisible threads due to the apparent levity.
- The clothes tend to accentuate these aspects – tights flush with the body, shoes follow the lines of the foot. Also, the tight hairstyle of the women, which pulls back and flattens the hair so that there is no volume or loose strands.
- Effort and tension are hidden by obscuring weight, and eliminating noise – the body could almost float.
- Gestures are clean, precise and pure – aiming to exhibit the perfection of the gesture and body.

The following design illustrates this schema (Fig. 1).<sup>32</sup>

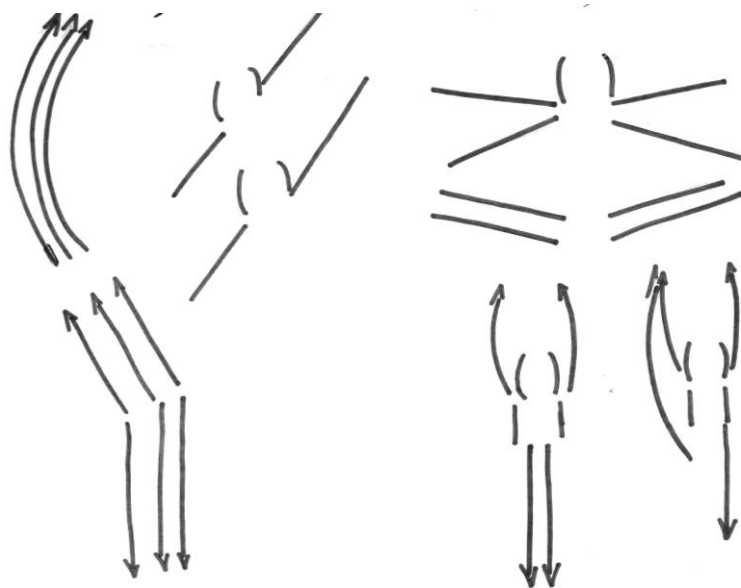


Figure 1

The recurring forms inscribed in the discursive genre provide a general framework, not at all exhaustive, within which the spectator can identify other elements and construct their unique interpretation. In our hypothesis, just like the artist, the

<sup>32</sup>This schema and others in this work are of our authorship.

spectator will be the creator of a unique interpretation from the common basis to the genre.

As in every artistic discursive genre, the forms typified here embody values that are simultaneously aesthetic and social. The choreographic evolution aims for height as its direction<sup>33</sup> – to be able to fly, to reach the sky or the celestial spheres, far from the earth. In this specific example, the theme of death and the swan engender movements of trembling members that evoke the flight or the last attempts at flight, in a dramatic tension of resisting death. The upward direction accentuates the drama of the agony of facing death that pulls the body to the ground. Similarly, the music follows the movement increasing in pitch, and going from low to high, in the same way that the continuous line of the arm, on breaking, dramatizes the impossibility of achieving flight with the broken wing. Just as the music returns to the low notes and breaks – is dramatically interrupted, again, with high notes. The figure of the swan accentuates the lengthy form, ascendant and elegant. And the white costume is associated with values of celestial purity. In works of the same genre, the stage is frequently enveloped in a fine mist, recalling, again, the celestial spheres. The verticality of the body points up and the prodigiousness, that is, the key point of virtuosity is the *pointe* and the leap – *the grand jeté*.<sup>34</sup> In these moments, the audience applauds, and is authorized to break and interrupt in the middle of the show. However, it all must appear light and natural. This is because the aesthetic values of classical choreography are typically about sublimation: the imprecisions of life and everyday movements must disappear, and be forgotten, following an ideal of perfection, balance, symmetry, levity, and harmony. From the pure gesture, there is a homologation of the pure sound of crisp melodic lines in a perfect transmission (executed live by an orchestra, or, in other cases, a sophisticated sound system).

This effect of meaning is upheld in the sphere of production and circulation of the discursive genre: we are in a theatre where the stage and the audience are clearly

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<sup>33</sup> Without restricting to any particular style or genre, Laban gives some indications with the same meaning: “A body stretched upward offers a different impression of one curved downward. [...] Classical ballet, heir to the ceremonies of the courts of the last three centuries, is an artistic form in which high-dance movements prevail.” Text in Portuguese: “Um corpo esticado para cima oferece uma impressão diferente de um curvado para baixo. [...] O balé clássico, herdeiro das cerimônias de corte dos últimos três séculos, é uma forma artística na qual prevalece o movimento de dança-alta [...]” (1978, pp.206-207).

<sup>34</sup> Although it does not appear in this ballet, the *grand jeté* is a typical utterance of this genre; thus, we include it in our schemata. Similarly, the leg lift to the height of the arm was also included. We address this point elsewhere in the text.

separated. On the stage, the artist is the owner of the space. The space is wide and carefully waxed where s/he can slide, jump and move in all directions. Everything there is designed so that his or her art is perfectly seen and appreciated. It is a protected space and unreachable for those who do not belong to it. Facing the stage, the audience is perfectly installed, in seats and chairs conceived especially for them to fully appreciate the show. In the dark of the room, and in the surrounding silence, the spectators find themselves protected. They see without being seen, and their gaze is directed precisely toward the stage.

It is a space that facilitates and provides a withdrawal from the everyday world. In it, another world, the world of the perfection of the lofty, must be able to emerge. Both the stage and theatre space of the audience constitute exclusive spaces in which only those who are fit for them enter: the artist, the professional who is specialized and trained in the best schools, masters of technique and the art; and the audience who can and chooses to pay to be there, theatre goers who know the clear and rigid rules of behavior, which they adopt. The relationship between the interlocutors – the artist and the audience – is entirely pre-regulated: where and when to sit/stand, applaud/or not, maintain almost complete silence, etc.

The theatre is like a temple dedicated to the values of that art: nothing must get in the way of the reaching for the highest spheres, not the slightest noise, nor the slightest false move. Only there and in this way can the diaphanous body of the ballerina(o) take flight to the heavens. Bakhtin/Medvedev (1978) sheds light on this state of affairs:

What, in fact, is the element which unites the material presence of the word with its meaning? We submit that social evaluation is this element (p.119).

It is impossible to understand the concrete utterance without accustoming oneself to its values, without understanding the orientation of its evaluation in the ideological environment (p.121).<sup>35</sup>

The apparatus of the stage sets up a play of presence/absence, visibility/invisibility, with the help of lighting, scenography, and through the alternating entrances and exits on the stage. The dark, which the artist penetrates, disappearing to

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<sup>35</sup> For reference of both quotations, see footnote 19.

the audience and from where he or she emerges without being seen, engenders a theatricality of apparition and mystery in which, once again, the value of the heights/loftiness is consecrated.

The stage is lined with long velvet curtains, noble and imposing material, which intensifies the theatricality while isolating and protecting the artist. The relationship between the interlocutors – artist and audience – is thus delimited, contributing to the thematization of the separation between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

At the entrance, a printed program, provided by the theatre to each spectator, comments, informs and explains aspects of the show: the title of the ballet, which often involves a story, a legend, etc. summarized in the program; the choreography, which can be commented on by the author and also an art critic; the professional biodata of the artists – composer, choreographer, dancers, set designer, costume designer, etc. – which provides, *a priori*, social value and legitimacy, which is conferred by the theatre-institution hosting the show. The entire text that accompanies the dance discourse forms with it a verbal-visual unit addressed to the spectator and deserves to be analyzed at length, in a longer article, had we had access to the theatre and the aforementioned material. By collecting the data from Youtube, the researcher is deprived of this verbal material, which co-exists within the scene of the show. We can, however, suggest that the dance discourse be characterized as visual-verbal, inverting the customary configuration (verbal-visual), given that the visual material – not the verbal – predominates.

Once again, we highlight that the interpretive elements that we are examining are not exhaustive, but rather subsidies. Dance discourse is made up of multiple discursivities and voices, such as music, scenography, costuming, lighting. What we represent here is just a general framework that indicates values of the genre.

Besides the general framework outlined here, it is necessary to identify and integrate the specific recurrences of the work. In our example, although they do not appear in this ballet, the leap/*grand jeté* is a typical utterance of the genre, and for this reason we include it in our schema. Likewise, the elevation of the leg to almost coincide with the line of the arm was included as a key point in the virtuosity and affirmation of the socio-aesthetic values of the genre. However, in *The Swan*, we understand that the absence of this feat indicates a specificity of the work in which the proximity of death in

the scene is precisely what makes it impossible. Besides the specific forms and meanings of a work, those that correspond to the style of the choreographer and the style of the dancer integrate the interpretive work.

## 2.2 Second Fragment: Dribbling through the Street

The effects of meaning of dance discourse unfold and multiply even more when we dialogue with different genres. For the objectives of the present study, the greater the contrast of the comparison, the clearer the utterance type appears. We proceed, thus, with another discursive genre in order to contrast with the first. It is urban dance, which is known by many as hip-hop, as it appeared in its early days of dissemination and adoption in France in the 1980s.<sup>36</sup> The video chosen as an example<sup>37</sup> is a fragment of the documentary Jean-Pierre Thorn, *Faire kiffer les anges*<sup>38</sup> from 1996 where the pioneers of hip-hop in France appear.<sup>39</sup> The documentary shows various elements of the so-called hip-hop culture – graffiti, different genres of dance on which it is based (break, battle, etc.), different musical genres, such as scratch, rap and others – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6N6CB38BdM> . The fragment 7/7 from the same documentary is also added:<sup>40</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEgLroN83pM>

We need to *forget that we have agreed to assume* both the sub-genre YouTube video and film documentary<sup>41</sup> in order to concentrate on the dance.

In this one also, verbal elements are included as material in the interpretation that spectator and/or dancer makes of what s/he watches. Given the informal situation of the scene, among the group of pairs and partners, many things are said verbally, and

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<sup>36</sup> Hip-hop began in the United States long before it spread to innumerable countries. We work with the French material since it is the material we have greater access to because we live in France.

<sup>37</sup> Available on YouTube, fragment 1/7. Accessed on Feb. 20, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> The title is comprised of the slang “kiffer” and “gens” in *verlan* – the popular language that inverts syllables or letters inside the word Kiffer, which comes from Arabic and originally means hashish, then evolving to mean pleasure, or ecstasy. One of the meanings of the title of the documentary would be *For the delight the angels (and/or people)*.

<sup>39</sup> As there are many dancers who are often together or alternating, see their names in the documentary.

<sup>40</sup> We add this fragment for two reasons: firstly, because it brings elements of constant evolution in dance discourse. For example, elements of flamenco dance can be identified in it. In addition, we can clearly see the prodigious, the key point of virtuosity in the genre. We will address both aspects in the following analysis.

<sup>41</sup> The documentary was produced and distributed by the prestigious Franco-German TV network ARTE. Thus, it gives hip-hop institutional value and legitimacy, which comes well after its initial emergence and its subsequent spreading throughout France.

participate in the production of meaning. Once again, however, the researcher is not present in the scene and does not display this material for analysis. We work then with choreographic discourse in which it is possible for us to identify some recurring sequences of gestures and movements:

- The movements and gestures are decomposed and deconstructed here. Each part of the body – head, shoulders, upper arm, lower arm, hand, each finger in the outstretched hand – become some highlighted piece of a machine or robot.<sup>42</sup>
- The broken line<sup>43</sup> and in each joint is a site of tension. The tense and broken gesture, with the use of slow-motion movements, accentuate and reveal the deconstruction of a pre-established rigidity.
- The choreography operates with weight and volume. The bodies are not displayed as in classical ballet. On the contrary, they are hidden and enlarged by big clothes and heavy, voluminous tennis shoes.
- The weight and volume pull downward, the choreography evolves in this direction: toward the ground and down. The space is reduced and many times involves merely the region between the line of the waist and the lower part.
- The movements tangent to the solo unfold with the help of the outstretched hand on the ground. Here the virtuosity is accentuated by the speed with which the movements are executed having as a single support of the body with one of the hands.
- The key point of the virtuosity is the spinning sequence, with the head down, the whole body supported on the ground by the upper parts of the body – the back at the level of the shoulders or the head. The body and head spins and the longer the spin, the greater the virtuosity of the artist and the greater applause inspired. The sequence uttered transgresses ordinary spatial order: high is inverted to low, the world is upside down.

We have designed a schema of the recurring forms mentioned here (Fig. 2):

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<sup>42</sup> In the American version, referred to as the *robot dance*.

<sup>43</sup> In English, it's called *break dancing*.





Figure 2

If we take into account, the dimension of the sphere of production and circulation of the genre, we have a space that is physically and socially reduced. Originally, this dance genre occurred in the hallways of housing projects located on the periphery of the big cities or on the narrow sidewalks of a neighborhood. Even when there is ample space, the dance area is always conquered through some struggle. In general, the ground is rough, and it is impossible to slide on it. Sometimes the dance is produced away from the periphery, for example, in the center of Paris, at the Les Halles subway exit or in the hall of the shopping mall where the ground is smoother. The space does not belong to the dancer, who must “step to the music,” according to whatever space remains for him or her. Unlike the classical ballet stage, we recall the concept of Michel De Certeau (1984),<sup>44</sup> who designates what he calls the “proper” and “not proper.” On analyzing forms of knowledge related to positions of power, De Certeau distinguishes the intelligence of those who dominate a space (who are disposed to the “proper”) and can, from it, have a view of the set and elaborate a strategy of action, from the intelligence of those obliged to act in spaces that they do not dominate (“not proper”), to which they do not belong, and to create specific tactics in function of what to him or her is presented in each situation. For example, De Certeau speaks of the

<sup>44</sup> DE CERTEAU, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

utterance of pedestrians in the streets of a city, and treats it as being a tactical type. We can then say that the classical ballet artist develops strategic utterances, whereas the utterance of hip-hop artists is produced through a tactical mode.

The rhythm of the dance follows the rhythm of rap, with well marked scansion in the rhymes and gestures. The music and the sound are revendedicated as impure, insofar as they do not require clean acoustics that pay attention to melodic lines, but integrate fragments from various sound sources. Often, they integrate noise, as in the case of scratch compositions in which the music is made by “scratching” vinyl records with the needle of the record player by manually twisting the record back and forth. Thus, we are smack dab in the middle of the street or city, with the insistent and intrusive noise, far from the velvet swaddled space of the theatre. The sound system and the soundtrack are brought by the dancer him or herself, who show up in the group carrying his or her radio or boom box, or turn the radio of their car or another’s parked on the street beside the sidewalk space where the dance will occur. The sound is loud, sharp and takes up space, but is also subject to other noises in the street and eventual obstacles in the functioning of the equipment.

Some hand movements evoke imprisonment, and the barrier of a wall or bars. This world-space is not easily crossed. The city damages bodies and puts up barriers. The interrupted and angular movements bring tension to the pathway. They need to come up from below and dodge obstacles – through waves and circular movements starting from the ground. The dimension of humor and play appear then, as if they were playing like kids or circus acrobats, with somersaults that provoke the laughter of their peers and passersby. They are rubber bodies that dismantle their original rigidity. The acrobacy presents the value of challenge and conquest in a hostile universe that needs to be confronted. This is the violence and the aggressiveness of life, resignified through distance, transformation and derision. The art, the technique and the virtuosity “side-step” life.

The clothes facilitate the broad movements, and also contribute to the theme of daily life insofar as they are not costuming of characters, but normal street clothes. They accentuate, thus, the permeability between art and life. Without any division between stage and audience, the latter approach the dancer, applauding and egging him or her on. The spectator is visible, has a face, a voice, and enters the scene. The dancers alternate

positions from spectator to dancer, who enters and exits the circle in an improvised way. Moreover, they alternate in their position as choreographers. Thus, we can speak of an alternation of speakers, and of finishing utterances. This is addressed to the interlocutors as a *dixi*, to use Bakhtin's expression (1986, p.72; p.76),<sup>45</sup> and acquire the meaning of challenging the other to speak up, that is, enter the circle to show their moves: the other is called to represent by dancing as good or better as the previous one. The challenge here, contrary to life, has a festive character, and the success of each one is celebrated by all. The dialogue and the challenge/response utterances appear here clearly, while in a ballet this dimension is not always visible to the spectator. Although one could suppose that, in the theatre's backstage, the competitive spirit and challenge directed at other dancers is equally present. However, this is not ostentatiously exhibited, and perhaps just glimpsed at, sometimes, in the dancer's reaching for heights, and the pride exhibited in the bodily attitude of the classical ballerina(o).

In hip-hop, improvisation and creation of the choreography must affirm the style of each dancer who, starting with a type of utterance that is common to the genre, reinvents the art each time. The dancer as author appears here more clearly than in classical ballet, where, despite the interpretive authorship of the ballerina(o), it is the choreographer who appears in a greater position as creator. Also, in modern and contemporary ballet, the creation is presented always associated with the name of the choreographer. Or rather, the constitutive distinctions of classical ballet, and those that persist in the so-called contemporary dance – stage-audience, choreographer-dancer, composer-set designer-costume designer-lighting director, etc. almost<sup>46</sup> disappear in hip-hop on the street.

The socio-aesthetic values embodied in the typical forms of the discursive genre of hip-hop rely on those of popular culture in Bakhtin's analysis of the works of Rabelais (1984).<sup>47</sup> The inversions of high/low axis, the shattering of the perfectly sculpted body, the indistinction between stage and audience, and the chronotope of the town square in the Carnival of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, everything seems to

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<sup>45</sup> For reference, see footnote 22.

<sup>46</sup> What remains, for example, is the distinction composer-dancer.

<sup>47</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

point in the direction of the dethroning and dismantling of the rigidly hierarchical and oppressive world in order to celebrate life, and its power of creation and transformation.

The opposition of the values affirmed in the two genres, classical ballet and hip-hop, has already been very thematized and even vulgarized in the American films such as *Take the Lead* (2005) and *Street Dance 3 D* (2010). Here, it appears as the result of our choice of corpus. We seek contrasting forms to carry out our reading/interpretation, but, in truth, these forms develop others that are more complex to analyze. The dialogue and the hybridization among genres are always present, and in constant transformation. Classical ballet itself, analyzed in its history and origin, can also be seen as the result of others that come before it. Today hip-hop appears on theatre stages, and is part of the vocabulary of contemporary dance choreographies. We believe, however, that the typical forms that we identify remain as a possible referential for the understanding of the renovation of the genres, including those to be transgressed. Bakhtin affirms:

Always preserved in a genre are undying elements of the *archaic*. True, these archaic elements are preserved in it only thanks to their constant *renewal*, which is to say, their contemporization. A genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre. This constitutes the life of the genre. Therefore, even the archaic elements preserved in a genre are not dead but eternally alive; that is, archaic elements are capable of renewing themselves. A genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning. Genre is a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development. Precisely for this reason genre is capable of guaranteeing the *unity* and *uninterrupted continuity* of this development (1984, p.106; author's emphasis).<sup>48</sup>

In his turn, Laban indicates to us that the opposition to the typical established forms is in the origin of the creation and renovation in dance:

After the discovery of each new combination of effort that, for a period, is venerated as the perfection of the habits of movement, there is a temporary return to the more primitive forms as one perceives that the specialization in a restricted number of qualities of effort have there their dangers. [...] The preference for some few combinations of effort merely results in a lack of balance of effort. This lack is not

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<sup>48</sup> BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

always noted on the conscious level, but people, tired of a given way of moving, try to introduce new forms that, very frequently, contain qualities of movement in accentuated contrast with those that are being previously used (1978, p.2011).<sup>49</sup>

Laban does not explicitly mention the ballet *Rite of Spring* (Vaslav Nijinsky, 1913), but seems to think of it when he states:

More recently, we can see the introduction in classical ballet, of folkloric dance steps and forms of movement predominately Slavic in origin. [...] The rigid tension inducted in the ballerina(o) in an acrobatic way of dancing on pointe was later corrected with the introduction of more impulsive movements, such as those that one sees in the so-called modern ballet.<sup>50</sup>

### 2.3 Third Fragment: Transgression

It is relevant to remember the “scandal” provoked by the ballet *Rite of Spring*, debuted in 1913 at the Champs Elyssées Theatre in Paris. Created by Nijinsky,<sup>51</sup> from popular Slavic rites and legends, the movements of the choreography completely break with the norms of the classical genre. Likewise, they break with the rules of interaction between the interlocutors. Even though it deals with a theatrical device where the relationship stage-audience must be obeyed in the genre of classical spectacle, the boos and the whistles impede the dancers from hearing the music and the Russian director and businessman, Serge Diaghilev, responsible for the show, was obliged to bring up the lights on the audience numerous times. In the following video,<sup>52</sup> the ballet is

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<sup>49</sup> Text in Portuguese: “Após a descoberta de cada nova combinação de esforço que, para um período é venerada como a perfeição dos hábitos de movimento, ocorre um retorno temporário a formas mais primitivas pois se percebe que a especialização num número restrito de qualidades de esforço tem lá os seus perigos. [...] A preferência por umas poucas combinações de esforço apenas resulta numa falta de equilíbrio de esforço. Essa falta nem sempre é notada a nível consciente, mas as pessoas, cansadas de uma dada moda de movimento, tentam introduzir formas novas que, bastante frequentemente, contêm qualidades de movimento em acentuado contraste com as que estavam sendo previamente usadas.”

<sup>50</sup> The effort employed is one of the elements that compose the analysis of movement developed by Laban. Text in Portuguese: “Mais recentemente, presenciamos a introdução, no balé clássico, de passos de dança folclórica e das formas de movimento predominantemente eslavas quanto a sua origem. [...] A rígida tensão induzida no bailarino pela maneira acrobática de dançar nas pontas dos pés foi posteriormente corrigida pela introdução de movimentos mais impulsivos, tais como os que se veem no assim chamado balé moderno.”

<sup>51</sup> Vaslav Nijinsky, Russian ballerino and choreographer of Ukrainian origin (1889-1950).

<sup>52</sup> Accessed on Feb. 21, 2018.

interpreted by the American company, the Joffrey Ballet, in 1987  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iH1t0pCchxM>

Were it within the scope of this article, an analysis of the “scandal” of *Rite of Spring*, including in our approach to the distinction between the presumed addressee, and the real addressee would be telling. It would be pertinent to articulate these according to the Bakhtinian concept of the superaddressee, since it was only in hindsight that the work could be understood and recognized as founding a new aesthetic, and a new universe of values.<sup>53</sup>

We return, then, to the approach that we use here, and in an effort to identify some utterance-types of this discourse. In *Rite of Spring*, even when sequences of leaps and ascendant movements of verticality appear, the sequences stem *from* and return *to* the lower region. For the most part, we see the movements that tend downward (the *low-dance* of Laban) or that are produced entirely on the soles. This is not gratuitous because one of the sections of the ballet is the Song of the Earth, where the ground is played by the dancers and, frequently, is the place of support of the hands. What is at play in the rite and what is thematized in the choreography is being able to achieve the union between the heavens and the earth.

The wonders on pointe shoes disappear. The feet appear in an original posture and unprecedentedly turned inside.<sup>54</sup> The continuous lines of classical ballet, in which the feet prolong the entire leg or the hands, which prolong the entire arm, disappear completely. Instead of this, we have lines cut at the height of the wrist, and hands that face palm down or palm up. We have closed fists pointed high, in collective scenes which, at least for the contemporary spectator, evoke a gesture of struggle, and solidarity in popular, political manifestations. The hair is shown in long, feminine braids, as if in the voluminous and disheveled shocks of hair of old wisemen. In contrast with the modeled and exhibited body of classical ballet, here the clothes, as essential elements of the visual language of dance, and the costumes recall folkloric rural origins. Created by painter Nicolas Roerich,<sup>55</sup> with their vibrant colors and prints, and their volume, they erase the sculpture of the body as modeled in classical costuming. At

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<sup>53</sup> For a distinction between the supposed addressee and the real addressee, see Amorim (2001). For the concept of the supradressee, see Bakhtin (1986) – for the full reference, see footnote 2.

<sup>54</sup> Considering that the feet constitute a central element in the body that dances, another example of founding transgression of modern ballet was Isadora Duncan who danced barefoot.

<sup>55</sup> Nicolas Roerich, Russian painter, poet, writer and historian (1874-1947).

times, an accentuated dissymmetry appears in the movements, with upper and lower limbs that are directed in a disordered fashion. Bodies in a lunatic state, or, if we hold to the literal theme of the ballet, bodies possessed by the operating forces in the pagan ritual.<sup>56</sup> The emphatic, rhythmic keeping time with the feet, marching or stomping, produces a sonority that, contrary to the classical ballet, does not hide the weight, and the force of the bodies.

The movements, which are repeated in an almost obsessive way, are marked by the imposing rhythm of Stravinsky's<sup>57</sup> music, which brings the same emphatic repetition. This music<sup>58</sup> was also seen, and heard as "scandalous." The rhythmic element, which, in general, is a support to other musical components, and which is maintained in the background on the second plane, is transferred here to the forefront. In the same way as Nijinsky's choreography, his music was considered "primitive" or "savage" by a large part of the public and the critics of the time. Stravinsky brings popular themes from rural Russia to the sphere of production and circulation of the art of the elite. The first musical phrase that is executed in solo by a bassoon and that becomes a type of registered mark of the work is the exact reproduction of a Slavic rural song.<sup>59</sup> Debussy was known to consider this work a great revolution in music of the 20th century, insofar as it split with the established musical norms adhered to until then.

We indicate here just some intuitive elements of Stravinsky's movement. This was the precise and detailed object of study for musicians and musicologists, such as Pierre Boulez and Olivier Messiaen. Stravinsky<sup>60</sup> himself, shortly before the debut of the ballet, published his analysis of each one of the parts of the work. The following is an excerpt in which he addresses the *Prelude*:

[...] I have excluded from this melody, strings too evocative of the human voice, and I have put in the foreground the woodwinds, drier, crisper, less rich in easy expressions and, for this reason, more moving in my view. In short, I have wanted to express, in the *Prelude*, the

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<sup>56</sup> Note the subtitle of the work is *Scenes of the Russian Pagan*.

<sup>57</sup> Igor Stravinsky, Russian composer (1882-1971).

<sup>58</sup> Stravinsky composed the music for the ballet by the director of the ballet of the Marinsky, Diaghilev theatre, who commissioned Nijinsky to do the choreography, and Nicolas Roerich the libretto-theme to the set design and the costume design.

<sup>59</sup> According to Stravinsky himself. Cf. the program brochure for the concert *At the Sources of the Rite / Aux sources du Sacre*, presented at the *Cité de la Musique* in Paris on Sept. 24, 2017.

<sup>60</sup> For analysis by Stravinsky, Boulez and Messiaen see: <https://www.symphozik.info/stravinski-analyse-son-sacre-du-printemps,583,dossier.html>. Accessed on Nov. 08, 2018.

fearful “panic” of nature at the beauty that arises, a sacred terror faced with the midday sun, a type of cry from the god Pan; this musical material itself swells, mounts, spreads out. Each instrument is like a bud that shoots out from under the bark of an ancient tree; it is a part of a magnificent ensemble. And the whole orchestra shall have the energy of the birth of Spring.<sup>61</sup>

The “scandal” of *Rite of Spring* can be considered a true event of meaning. For spectators of the time, we can suppose that their response, whether supporting or rejecting, results in the confrontation between at least four discourses, and universes of values – the classical and modern, erudite and popular. Could it be that, even unconsciously, the theme of the encounter between heaven and earth functions as a metaphor of the encounter between these discourses, superaddressed to our eyes and ears of the present day?

On this, Bakhtin (1986) states:

[...] the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher superaddressee (third), whose absolutely just and responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (p.126).

The author can never turn over his whole self and his speech work to the complete and *final* will of addressees who are on hand or nearby (after all, even the closest descendants can be mistaken), and always presupposes (with a greater or lesser degree of awareness) some higher instancing of responsive understanding that can distance itself in various directions time (p.126; author’s emphasis).

For the word (and, consequently, for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a *lack of response* (p. 127; author’s emphasis).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Translated from the French: “[...] j’ai exclu de cette mélodie les cordes trop évocatrices de la voix humaine, et j’ai mis au premier plan les bois, plus secs, plus nets, moins riches d’expressions faciles et, par cela même, plus émouvants à mon gré. En somme, j’ai voulu exprimer dans le *Prélude* la crainte ‘panique’ de la nature pour la beauté qui s’élève, une terreur sacrée devant le soleil de midi, une sorte de cri du dieu Pan ; sa matière musicale elle-même se gonfle, grandit, se répand. Chaque instrument est comme un bourgeon qui pousse sur l’écorce d’un arbre séculaire ; il fait partie d’un formidable ensemble. Et tout l’orchestre doit posséder l’énergie du printemps qui naît.”

The question of meaning in Stravinsky’s work is however controversial material since years later, in 1935, he would say that it became known as *The Stravinsky postulate*: “I consider music, at its essence, powerless to express whatever it may be: a feeling, an attitude, a psychological state, a phenomenon in nature.” Translated from the French: “Je considère la musique, par son essence, impuissante à exprimer quoi que ce soit : un sentiment, une attitude, un état psychologique, un phénomène de la nature, etc.” Available at: <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/igor-feodorovitch-stravinski/6-le-postulat-de-stravinski/>. Accessed on Nov. 08, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> For the reference of the quotations, see footnote 2.



We can also ask: in this Russia, bubbling with modernity, would the authors of the Circle have attended the vanguard of the Marinsky Theatre?

Returning to the recurring forms worked with in this study, Figure 3 illustrates our schema of the *Rite of Spring*.



Figure 3

It does not seem irrelevant to stage a dialogue between the discourse of hip-hop and the discourse of ballet created by Nijinsky. In both cases, components of popular culture and aesthetics appear, such as those indicated in Laban, and plentifully treated in Bakhtin, leaving its traces on the construction of the utterances. However, a problem for the dialogue between the two genres is the disparity in the sphere of production. *Rite of Spring* was created having been commissioned by Diaghilev, director of the ballet of the Theatre Marinski – the Russian temple of classical ballet. Its circulation included shows in theatres of the same type, for audiences “accustomed” to these theatres, their genres and their repertoires. The Parisian scandal, on the opening night of the ballet’s debut in 1913, occurred at the inauguration of the Champs Elysées Theatre. Rather, despite its revolutionary character, various elements of the genre oblige us to circumscribe it to a universe of an audience that is economically and culturally elite. Its discursive memory, from 1913 and even to the present, acts to compare other ballets, other choreographers,

who passed through, and continue to pass through the same sphere of circulation, and reception, and, we can even say, the same chronotope<sup>63</sup> – the theatre as establisher of a specific spatiality and temporality in relation to the stage-audience. Both discourses in question (“Hip-hop” and “Rite”), despite containing common elements of popular culture identified by Bakhtin, establish a relationship between interlocutors that is by nature distinct. The reading/interpretation, and the production of meaning obeyed, and will obey, the various differences of the two genres.

However, what remains as a link is the finding that the evolution of the art and the genres are always produced on the border between different languages, and fields of culture. In his critique of the formalists approach to the art, Bakhtin argues:

[...] [they] have ignored questions of the interconnection and interdependence of various areas of culture; [they] have frequently forgotten that the boundaries of these areas are not absolute, that in various epochs they have been drawn in various ways; and [they] have not taken into account that the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity (1986, p.2).<sup>64</sup>

It is important to remember that the renewal of the art cannot be understood as a successive, and irreversible chronology. The “new” and the “old” can be simultaneous, and do not mutually suppress one another. In the case of dance, for example, the so-called classical ballet continues to be an admired genre, and its spectacles continues to have abundant audiences. *Rite of Spring* was created by Nijinsky in the same institution as *The Swan* by Mikhaïl Fokine – the Mariinsky Theatre.<sup>65</sup> The latter, just three years before “Rite”, in 1910, in the same theatre, and also with Stravinsky, and the choreography of *Firebird* was created in the style of the classical romantic ballet he was known for

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<sup>63</sup> If it were not beyond the scope of this article, it would be fruitful to conduct a Bakhtinian analysis of dance discourse with regard to the chronotope of the genre.

<sup>64</sup> BAKHTIN, M. Response to a Question from the *Novi Mir* Editorial Staff. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.1-9.

<sup>65</sup> Embora estreado em Paris, no *Théâtre des Champs Elysées*, a obra foi executada em Paris pelo corpo de baile russo do Teatro Mariinsky.

## 2.4 Fourth Fragment: The Name of Desire

We close with an example of discourse taken from the genre of street dance, which, as an urban dance, is composed of various other genres originating in popular culture and street culture – hip-hop, capoeira, etc. Notably, increasingly street dance, just as hip-hop, is produced in institutional spaces for shows, and no longer on the street as its name indicates. However, frequently they are spaces that hold a popular trace and/or link to the masses, such as in a gymnasium in which festivals or competitions are held. The following example was produced in an open Brazilian TV program – the reality show called *Se ela dança eu danço* (If she dances, I dance), by the SBT Channel in 2011. It is a dance competition, and the young candidates are from humble origins, in general, residents of neighborhoods on the periphery of the city. In our fragment,<sup>66</sup> the dancer, John Lennon da Silva, won the “New Talent” prize of the program (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnZB1pE6tNQ&app=desktop>)

Unlike what was done with previous fragments, here we have selected this example to emphasize the uniqueness of the work, and not the general framework of the genre. Street dance created and interpreted by John Lennon da Silva (JLS) dialogues directly and explicitly with the original ballet, *The Swan*. The dialogism of the discourse staged by JLS presumes that its addressees have previous knowledge of the classical discourse of origin so that an active, and dense comprehension of the permanent interaction between the two discourses is produced.

From the original ballet, the music and the title are preserved, and also a solo dance interpreted on stage. The same tremulous movement of the arms indicates the flight, and the effort to resist death. The lengthy arms design the broken wing on the body that is debated: an angular line that breaks the undulating lines of the flight. The sense of drama of the classical version is restored, but updating it in a radically distinct context, which allows for a new meaning: the pain and fragility of a young resident of the periphery, constantly exposed to death. Highlighted here, in the original classic, the swan dies on the ground with its body laid over its legs and, therefore with its chest protected. Here, our brown swan dies, having fallen on its back, open chested, and exposed: a head-on death, with no protection.

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<sup>66</sup> Accessed on Feb. 21, 2018.

The skinny and tall body does not bring the same value as the thin and sculpted body from the classic ballerina(o). Here the verse to the popular song seems fitting:<sup>67</sup> *merely skin and bones, almost entirely unfilled.*<sup>68</sup> The short-sleeved shirt and baggy pants accentuates the skinniness of the arms and legs. The street clothes, fitting for the genre of street dance, indicate a thematization of daily life. Death becomes daily life.

The unique creation is of such weight that it puts the regularities of the genre on the second plane. It seems that here these elements mark more than the genre; they mark the work, and the style of the artist. At the same time, without the discourse of street dance and without the discourse of the classical genre, and even more so, without the discourse of the other work in question – the classical version of *The Swan* – the discourse of the dance of JLS would lose a lot of density in its meaning. Here, the answerability of the utterance is clear: his dance responds to the classical dance.

The choices of our choreographer and dancer – the object (the death of the swan) and the dialogue between two precise genres, urban dance and classical ballet – indicate an intentionality. Addressing the Bakhtinian methodology in the understanding of artistic works, Grillo sums up the relation between the author and the genre:

The relations between the discursive intention of the speaker (author or subject) and the genre is given in two moments: firstly, the speaker or author chooses the object of the meaning; but this choice is not free, it is conditioned to the sphere of the discursive communication; and next, it must be adapted to the chosen genre (2012, p.240).<sup>69</sup>

Below (Fig. 4), some of the recurring forms evoked here.

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<sup>67</sup> *Partido alto*, by Chico Buarque de Holanda.

<sup>68</sup> Text in Portuguese: “pele e osso simplesmente, quase sem recheio.”

<sup>69</sup> Text in Portuguese: “As relações entre intenção discursiva do falante (autor ou sujeito) e o gênero se dão em dois momentos: primeiramente, o falante ou autor escolhe o objeto do sentido; mas essa escolha não é livre, está condicionada à esfera da comunicação discursiva; e em seguida, deve adaptar-se ao gênero escolhido.”

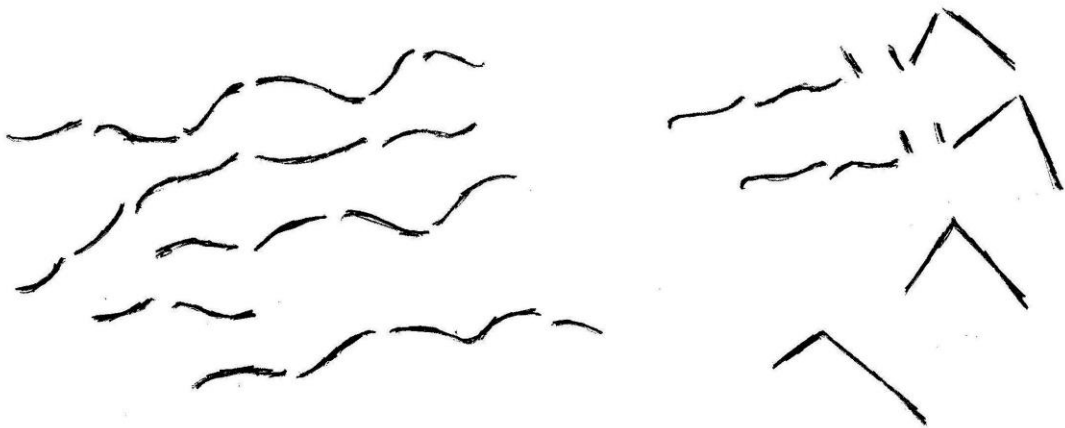


Figure 4

The sphere of circulation and reception of JLS's dance is the stage of the TV program, entirely stripped of set design or specific lighting. It is a stark stage with a dark background. The clothes of the dancer are also stark. Dressed in predominately dark tones, his costume recalls the origin of the genre. This origin recorded in the "non-costume" of the street dance genre will become a great part of the meaning of his utterance. John Lennon's dance comes from the street, and he is called da Silva!

We arrive then at another specificity of this material of analysis: the presence of the verbal-visual element. If there were no other words than just the artist's name, it would already constitute a voice that speaks to the spectator. John Lennon da Silva is a provocative name. We can almost say that, in the manner of the names of Ancient Greece, it is a name that has meaning in itself. It is itself an utterance. What does it mean? It aims to manifest something of the order of art. This desire of art re-presents itself making the British artist present in what, here, is the metonymy of art, of a culture of art. This culture of art, this cultivation or this desire for art often inspires Brazilians to don artists' names. For example, there are many Brazilian boys named 'Roberto Carlos' in honor of the celebrated singer. However, since the chosen name is foreign, the desire for art is further projected, crossing the seas and landing in England, the US, etc. It is a name that crosses the seas instead of swimming in a lake: more seagull than swan.

The audacity of desire is marked also by the fact that it will cause estrangement each time it is uttered, since it is notably the name of a foreign celebrity: *John Lennon*.

But perhaps what intensifies it, this desire for art, is the *da Silva*. It is one thing to be *the* John Lennon. It is another thing to be *a* John Lennon in an English-speaking country, which, in Brazil, connotes a privileged socio-economic condition: the English language resounds in Brazil as something coming from a rich country. However, it is altogether another thing, even more radically other, to be John Lennon...da Silva! The last name pulls, and anchors the desire: it is from here, from this land where English is not spoken, from some peripheral neighborhood that is not on any map, that the desire for art is uttered! Exclamation point because that is what resonates in our heads as Brazilian spectators.

As the video shows, the program, and not just the dance show, participates in the production of meaning with the innumerable spoken phrases. John Lennon says, “I already have an artist’s name” or he relates how he crafted the choreography within the context of a vocational training he attends, or that he wanted to do something revolutionary in his dance, etc. His speech will not be analyzed here because it is beyond the scope of this article and converges with what we have already identified. As for the television program and its production, they utter and take JLS’s dance as the object of discourse, constituting a distinct discursive genre. However, we will use it in our analysis in the aspects that concern the present reflection.

The speech of the jurors that precedes the dance seems to stage a mistrust in relation to the quality of what will be presented: the clothes that “are out of place,” their probable unfamiliarity of the original ballet, etc. The impression is that this speech is directed at the spectators more than the dancer. The initial reserve and the mistrust direct the understanding of what is going to be seen by the spectator. On explaining beforehand of what the original version of *The Swan* consists, the juror understands that one must take into consideration the relationship between the two choreographic discourses. By explaining this in a serious tone, almost severe, he prepares and underlines his prior reaction when he appears moved to tears with JLS’s dance. Another juror registers this crying as “a first” for that juror. We suppose it is part of the discursive genre of the program (which is not the object of our analysis) to provoke emotions, suspense, controversy, etc. so as to turn a *reality show* as close as possible to the supposed reality of a dance competition.

As we have said, this verbal material seems to converge with what we have already identified, even if, in appearance, the jurors' speech questions John Lennon da Silva's competence toward what he desires to present. In any case, at the end, there is unanimity, and he is given the prize. However, the meaning that has been produced here, based on the first presentation, is destabilized in the second presentation of JLS's dance presented in the following link.<sup>70</sup>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4kCpLv\\_CcQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4kCpLv_CcQ) .

In the second presentation, John Lennon da Silva, awarded and consecrated, has the right to the stage of a professional artist: with lighting and special effects, he dances through white mist, a prop frequently used in classical ballet performances. In the video itself, there is an intentional marked change in the production of the program that, in the position of chosen speaker, sets up the object – JLS's dance – which aims to direct the spectator's interpretation. Often filmed from above, in *plongée*, the dancer-choreographer seems enveloped in "clouds." Once again, it seems that the desire is to evoke a celestial sphere, away from the earth and of everyday life. Although he wears informal, every day, street clothes – pants and shirt – it seems now to constitute a costume: white shirt and white tennis shoes that are highlighted by the light-colored set design, bluish, and with the white mist. The contrast with the set of the first presentation is flagrant. We question the resultant effect of this meaning. In our view, there was a loss. The whitening of John Lennon da Silva's discourse diluted the meanings, weakened the tension underlying his discourse that dialogued with, but also confronted, the discourse of classical ballet. The tension bristles even in his name: John Lennon ... da Silva!

To better understand what occurred from the first to the second presentation, we take Faraco's formulation (2011) about the aesthetic object in the approach of the Bakhtinian Circle, to understand that this is not a mere artefact, nor metaphysical essence.

On the contrary, it is effectively a set of axiological relations (the aesthetic object is therefore relational) which is concretized in the artefact. [...] the great force that moves the universe of the cultural

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70 Accessed on Feb. 21, 2018.

practices are precisely the socio-evaluative positions put in a dynamic of multiple responsive inter-relations (2011, p.23).<sup>71</sup>

In JLS's second presentation, it is as if the dance discourse had been treated as an artefact; thus, it would have remained the same and the technical treatment of the scene (lighting, costuming, etc.) would only serve to highlight it, and give it value. In fact, the aesthetic object changed because the production of the television program altered the axiological relationships. The starkness of the initial set, lighting and costuming, which evoked the street and anchored the discourse, bringing new social-aesthetic values in response to the classical, *The Swan*, by being "in increments," brought back the white and the celestial. In the first presentation, the desire for art shoots forth from the asphalt, in the second, it becomes a TV production.

## Conclusion

Our study originated from the hypothesis that dance-show discourse contains within its supposed audience spectators who must be able to produce meaning for what they are seeing even without being versed in the techniques, and art of dance. The work attempts to answer the following questions: which elements of dance discourse are provided for this spectator to grasp an interpretive work? Is there a general basic framework that guides this work?

Based on the concepts of discursive genres by the Bakhtin Circle, we sought to identify some of the recurring forms that constitute relatively stable utterances, spheres of production and circulation, types of relations among the interlocutors, and the aesthetic-social values that are affirmed and upheld in dance discourse. In short, we can affirm that the construction of meaning operates with totalities that, once they are organized according to demands and peculiarities of the genre, establish one valued discursive reality that is shared between artists and their public.

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<sup>71</sup> Text in Portuguese: "Ao contrário, trata-se efetivamente de um conjunto de relações axiológicas (o objeto estético é portanto relacional) que se concretiza no artefato. [...] a grande força que move o universo das práticas culturais são precisamente as posições sócio-avaliativas postas numa dinâmica de múltiplas inter-relações responsivas."



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