



Between the Dance that Registers and the Library that Dances, Dimenti turns Memory into History

Jacyan Castilho de Oliveira¹

¹Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro/RJ, Brazil

ABSTRACT – Between the Dance that Registers and the Library that Dances, Dimenti turns Memory into History¹ – Created in 1998, the Dimenti Group from Salvador (BA) produces artistic works that blur the lines between scenic languages and modes of production, until finally becoming Dimenti Produções Culturais, a creative environment that today encompasses audiovisual, editorial and phonographic productions, events and festivals, among others. In this article the focus is on *Tombé* (2001) and *Biblioteca de dança* (2017) dance performances, as examples of this diversified production. The aim is to point out, from the perspective of its members, the authorial traits that persist in Dimenti's creative trajectory, such as comicality, non-linearity and the incorporation of an ideological discourse of otherness.

Keywords: **Dimenti. Tombé. Biblioteca de Dança. Dance. Comicality.**

RÉSUMÉ – Entre la Danse qui faire Tomber et la Bibliothèque qui Danse, Dimenti Transforme la Mémoire en Histoire – Créé en 1988, le Groupe Dimenti (Salvador/BA) a produit des œuvres qui brouillent les frontières entre langages scéniques et modes de production, jusqu'à devenir enfin Dimenti Produções Culturais, un environnement de création qui englobe aujourd'hui l'audiovisuel, l'éditorial, la phonographie, l'événementiel. et festivals, entre autres. Dans cet article, l'accent est mis sur les performances de danse *Tombé* (2001) et *Biblioteca de Dança* (2017) comme exemples de cette production diversifiée. L'objectif est, du point de vue de ses membres, de souligner les traits d'auteur qui persistent dans la trajectoire créative de Dimenti, tels que la comique, la non-linéarité et l'incorporation d'un discours idéologique de l'altérité.

Motes-clés: **Dimenti. Tombé. Biblioteca de Dança. Danse. Comicité.**

RESUMO – Entre a Dança que Tomba e a Biblioteca que Dança, a Dimenti faz da Memória a História – Criado em 1988, o Grupo Dimenti (Salvador/BA) vem produzindo obras que borram as fronteiras entre linguagens cênicas e modos de produção, até finalmente se constituir como Dimenti Produções Culturais, ambiente de criação que hoje engloba produção audiovisual, editorial, fonográfica, eventos e festivais, entre outros. Neste artigo são abordados os espetáculos de dança *Tombé* (2001) e *Biblioteca de dança* (2017) como exemplos dessa produção diversificada. Busca-se, a partir da perspectiva dos seus integrantes, apontar traços autorais que persistem na trajetória criativa da Dimenti, como a comicidade, a não-linearidade e a incorporação de um discurso ideológico de alteridade.

Palavras-chave: **Dimenti. Tombé. Biblioteca de Dança. Dança. Comicidade.**

How does Socrates dance in front of the mirror?

In the book *Penser et Mouvoir: une rencontre entre danse et philosophie*, by Marie Bardet (2014), we find a seductive image. According to the author, “[...] among the first occurrences of the dancing movement in philosophy, we find in Xenophon a dancing Socrates” (Bardet, 2014, p. 10, our translation). Bardet says that Xenophon, in his *Symposium*, suggests that Socrates has the experience of dancing in his house in front of a mirror, in a situation of intimacy, casting an eye upon himself that,

[...] on the one hand, sees himself dancing in a mirror, studies his movements and his attitudes in a confused confrontation with his reflection; and, on the other hand, does it away from the eyes of others. [...]. Therefore, we are on an encounter. An encounter with oneself dancing (Bardet, 2014, p. 11).

The image of a Socrates who dances in front of the mirror is too tempting to begin this journey through the history of a dance project that continually reflects, ponders, transforms and reinvents itself, casting sometimes conspicuous eyes at itself, sometimes challenging eyes, as is the case of the collective of artists discussed in this article.

However, we cannot take the risk of starting with a mistake; we must clarify that there is uncertainty as to whether this scene would not have been only imagined by the author. That is because in Xenophon’s *Symposium* (2008), at least in the Portuguese translation, there is nothing that suggests this dancing movement in front of the mirror. If the same scene is seen in the original version, Socrates (certainly a much more mundane and relaxed character in Xenophon’s *Symposium* than in Plato’s *Symposium*) reports dancing alone (searching for an essence of movement?), away from the sneering eyes of his friends before the sight of an old man’s inadequate body. However, he does not mention the mirror object, nor the act of looking at himself. What a pity for us readers: apparently, our beautiful initial image is dissipated.

Not at all, though. Bardet (2014, p. 11, emphasis added) uses this scene that she imagined to outline the “[...] liminal issue of a philosophy *about, of or in* dance, since it [the scene] redistributes the habitually disjunctive relations between theory and practice.” It so happens that this article also intends to contribute with modes of operating some changes of place —

such as discursive ones — in a phenomenal and sensitive approach to dance. Here, the attempt is to capture a history of dance that was and is at the same time theory and practice, at the same time phenomenon and observation of itself as phenomenon, structure and fluidity. A task characterized by complexity, and that, therefore, is not intended to be exhaustive.

However, after all, is not every dance like that, a constant transition between thinking, acting, feeling, and moving? Moreover: is not all contemporary dance self-reflective, even those that are not consciously intended as such (Rocha, 2016)? By agreeing with this, it is admitted that the reflection presented here is just a specific view, a skewed view at a specific phenomenon — or a specific way of doing dance, historically situated and geographically selected: a trajectory, exemplified by some achievements of Grupo Dimenti, originally from Salvador, until it became Dimenti Produções Culturais, a collective creation environment in continuous renewal of partnerships throughout Brazil and the world².

In order to embark on this journey — a metaphor that sounds appropriate for the type of undertaking that will be carried out here — we will resort to what, in the study of History, are considered material and immaterial sources. That is, in parallel with the analysis of documents produced, preferably, by the social actors of this story (articles, interviews, newspaper articles, press releases and academic works related to those involved or researchers of the Dimenti collective), we also resort to the immaterial sources of the memory, without disregarding its share of inversion and rearrangement of the order of facts (Le Goff, 1990). Because, just as it happens in the trajectory of this collective, memory is the engine of both processes and critical approaches; constantly remaking the *mise-en-place*, it is choreography of senses and remembrances, ignition of new creative arrangements and connections.

A history of genre transition

Founded in 1998, Dimenti is an environment of artistic creation and cultural production that coordinates diverse interests such as dance, theater, cinema, curatorship, communication, and management. Its activities include the annual arts meeting called 'Interaction and Connectivity.' Over the years, Dimenti's modes of organization and creation have been in constant mutation (SescBrasil, 2013, online)³.

Founded in the city of Salvador, Bahia, Dimenti began as a group of schoolmates aged between 17 and 19 years — some of whom had just entered college — willing to put on a play, led by Jorge Alencar. The director (of the group and of the stagings he produced) had been, throughout his adolescence, the *star* in the school canteen during class breaks: he sang, danced and dubbed national and international singers with the ease of someone who avidly consumed musical films and romantic comedies in the evening TV sessions, cartoons from Disney Studios, Warner Bros. and Cartoon Network, and choreographies by national musical groups. In his first production, Alencar already began to mix the pop influences of his adolescence with that range of school literature traditionally required from adolescents, such as the classics by Machado de Assis. It was precisely *O Alienista* (1998) (novel required to read for college entrance exams and which, therefore, promised a guaranteed audience) the kick-off for the group's debut, which, without shame, took Machado de Assis as the beginning of a long (and in no way sacralizing) affiliation to those who challenge the system.

The play (Image 1) began with a direct clarification to the audience that it was a “free, very free, extremely free adaptation of the short story by Machado de Assis” (Cruz, 2020). This freedom afforded the staging a personal characteristic, which would remain as an authorial trait of the group in the following productions, notably in the always renewed use of elements such as humor, nonsense, self-irony, and fragmented narrative; with explicit influence of cartoons in the exercise of deconstruction of body structures; the use of clichés from the musical and pop universe; and references to this universe, notably musical films. Here, Machado de Assis' narrative acquired an air of contemporaneity, seeking dialogue with the young audience to which it was intended. Contributing factors to this were references to cartoons and talk shows, a dialogue with live Brazilian Popular Music (MPB), and fantastic *interventions* by the late author, via cell phone (a consumer novelty on the rise at the time), which implored fidelity to the text. According to researcher Leonardo Sebiani Serrano (2010, p. 81-82)

The conception of Dimenti as a group was marked by *O Alienista*. The year of creation of the play provides clear evidence of the youth of the performers, who started a project based on the premise of doing theater together, posing their questions from a youthful imagination. In *O Alienista*, there is a freshness of emotions, a willingness to create by playing, and a playful abil-

ity to place oneself in the scene [...]. I consider that the show *O Alienista* is a field to explore the group's genesis, interests, and future research lines. Cartoons and clichés are present, as well as nonsense and dramatic non-linearity. Appropriating texts and reworking them, based on their universe, is an interesting value, as it will be a trait in the group's future works.



Image 1 – *O alienista* (1998). From left to right: Marcio Nonato, Lia Lordelo, Daniel Moura and Fábio Osório Monteiro. Source: Photo by Almir Junior.

The authorial trait was repeated in the following show, *Chá de cogumelo* (1999), which

[...] proposed a re-reading of old wives' tales for adults and used a fragmented narrative, intertextual and citational discourse, with marked physicality and choreographic emphasis, questioning the cultural codes of a consumer society [...] (Cruz, 2020).

After the deconstruction of a literature classic, the group took poetic liberties with children's fictional tradition (Image 2), making their show (recommended for those aged over 14 years) a lysergic rereading of princes and princesses outside the characteristic *modus operandi* of fairy tales.



Image 2 – *Chá de cogumelo* (1999). Performer Vanessa Mello. Source: Release photo.

In 2000, therefore in its third year of existence, the then Dimenti Group premiered *A novela do murro* (2000), another loose, very loose, extremely loose (sic) adaptation of a Machado de Assis work, in this case the novel *Dom Casmurro*. The *marked physicality* referred to by Ellen Mello Cruz — the group’s executive producer — in the description of the previous show was increasingly evident. The novel, a fantastic pseudo-autobiography (because it is the autobiography of a deceased person), establishes an unstable narrative between the narrator’s increasingly distant memory and the supposed veracity of the facts. This opaque, digressive, non-linear narrative would be a boon for the language research that the group had already started to conduct in an authorial way. Machado de Assis’ digression enabled an exercise in intertextuality; the literary metalanguage became body in the choreographic metalanguage (Image 3). As a founding aspect of comicality, the immediate identification with the melodramatic aspect of Brazilian telenovelas — fertile ground for clichés about love, betrayal, death and revenge, mottos of the memories of Dom Casmurro.



Image 3 – *A novela do murro* (2000). From left to right: Vanessa Mello, Lia Lordelo, Paula Lice, Jorge Alencar, Marcio Nonato, Adelenia Rios, and Fábio Osório Monteiro. Source: Release photo.

In 2002, the Group won for the first time a staging edict⁴ for the staging of *Pool Ball* (2002) — a very personal (needless to say free, very free...) reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. At that point, the company was already organized as a Legal Entity, with responsibilities and tasks distributed among its members, of which one of the most active, and not only administratively, was production director Ellen Mello. Since the incipient marketing vision of *O Alienista*, a text chosen for having a *guaranteed audience*, the group maintained both a proposition of professionalism — with (whenever possible) remuneration proportional to the tasks assumed by each member — and a constant attention to the diversification of processes and products related to the scenic work. In a critical year such as 2001, with little distribution of resources for culture throughout Brazil, the premiere of *A novela do murro* was followed by a CD, a retrospective printed portfolio of the group's four years (!) and an exhibition of photos, with evident production and recording quality. From the beginning, Dimenti sought to align its aesthetic research with constant reflections on modes of production and access to its shows, a characteristic that made it change, throughout its 22 years of existence, the forms of relation between the steps of creation and production. With that, the Dimenti group, after 15 years and after a diversification of languages that led it to venture into the audiovisual, editorial, phono-

graphic production, musical direction, performances and curatorship of its own arts festival, officially transformed into *the* Dimenti, cultural producer and creative environment — in an original and surprising genre transition. More than a company or production center, today Dimenti gathers creative artists and curators from different contexts in occasional or continuous partnerships, diversifying their activities in different strata of cultural situation.

The creative boldness of *Pool Ball* (Image 4), in which the nobility of Denmark was portrayed as a ballet company in swimming pool attire and wallowing in vices, resulted in financial damage to the group, for daring to put on the scene, with the modest award from the public edict, “[...] a show with a band playing live, eleven actors, headset microphones that consumed 24 AA batteries per performance” (Cruz, 2020, p. 71).

At that moment, the will to deal with the canons was already well defined: a mixture of challenge, fascination, reverence, and affront. The play coordinated ‘Hamlet’ to the codes of Broadway musical theater with a setting composed of colorful pool inflatables, voluntarily producing aesthetic noises through the juxtaposition of elements of very different natures, relating apparently disconnected universes. In this composition, Dimenti cast its eyes on the products of the cultural industry – telenovela, sitcoms, music videos, advertising, musicals and other products of entertainment and mass culture to capture the procedures of creative construction that are recurrent in them and point out their stereotypes (Cruz, 2020, p. 71).

Because of its high cost, *Pool Ball* was Dimenti’s show with the shortest career, with only two short seasons. It was an exception in the group’s trajectory, which kept the first shows in an intermittent repertoire for years, recycling the casts, while it lasted as a theater group. Even having a short life, *Pool Ball* sealed the floor, or rather, the linoleum through which Dimenti would cross the most diverse diagonals of interest, always anchored in that *assemblage* of cultural industry products, in that exposition of stereotypes and in the self-reference to the body of dance, or rather, to the dancing body.



Image 4 – *Pool Ball* (2002). Banda Setembro and Grupo Dimenti. Source: Photo by Adelmo Santos.

One of the most enduring shows, which premiered a year prior, in 2001, and which occasionally returns is *Tombé*, whose main theme is self-reference and is, therefore, one of the objects of special attention in this work.

How do you dance the dance in front of the mirror?

Tombé premiered in 2001 and continued to be performed in several seasons to date. In 2013, the show was selected by the Palco Giratório project, of Sesc Nacional, having been taken to 36 Brazilian cities, in a combo format that included workshops and debates (Cruz, 2020). If there is any doubt about the reception of a show that criticizes clichés, pedagogy, poetics and the relations on/of/in contemporary dance (‘whatever that is’, according to the text of the show itself), its longevity and good receptivity among the public composed of both lay people and dance professionals (with more intense reverberation with the latter) attests that laughing at oneself is always a possibility of reflection with empathy.

Tombé is — according to the definition of its authors — “a spectacle that laughs at itself” (Santos, 2009). It is a dance that laughs at itself when it dances, inadequate as if it were Socrates’ old body in front of the mirror.

In its first production, which shuns the adaptation of preexisting stories, Dimenti makes explicit — without shame and with maximum humor — the issues and tensions internal to the dance world, known only by those who are ‘*of the métier*’: the hierarchy that subordinates dancers to the choreographer’s thinking; authorship claims; the greater or lesser technical mastery; the dogma of ballet as the foundation of the dancer’s training; the delimitation of the borders between dance, theater, performance and other languages; the inclusion of dance in universities and in the guidelines of academic thought; finally, the thorny task of delimiting whatever ‘contemporary dance’ is. There is no stone unturned in the denunciation of stiffening hierarchies, today as in the past, when dance was subjugated by a set of pre-established codes. As Leonardo Serrano (2010, p. 98) summarizes well: “The basis of the show seems to be to question dance, specifically, in its learning processes. To this end, the group recreates a series of dance stereotypes that have an immense weight in their technical skills.”

The show’s lasting career may be an indicator of the demand for reflection on the new canons instituted by contemporary dance. Pointing out, through gags and jokes, the various possible definitions of this field, the show has been updated over the nearly 20 years in which it has been presented, as the themes emerge and urge on the agendas of discussion, in the media, in institutional research groups, in academic productions and, of course, in the poetics of performers and choreographers. Being a field in constant interrelation with the literature of social sciences, philosophy and cultural studies, contemporary dance has been reworked as a concept in recent decades, incorporating aspects and unfolding its condition of thinking in progress, reverberated both in works and in academic articles⁵. If *Tombé* has had a long duration, it could not avoid incorporating, in each new staging, the pulsating themes of the time (and the clichés derived from them, such as fads and trivializations). That is why *Tombé* (Image 5) results in a dynamic show, as it flows between novelty and canon:

According to Jorge Alencar: ‘The show undergoes diverse scenic dynamics and formats. It is a sort of ‘stand up dance comedy.’ Every year, we have to update the show with the words that are in vogue. We talk about ‘contemporary man’ and topics that are debated in different milieus (Goltara, 2013).

The show combines theater and dance and is organized in a ‘performative lecture’ format, as defined by the group. ‘A choreolecture that reproduces discourses, movements and absurdities of art and life’ and is not bashful about laughing at itself (Vieira, 2013).

TOMBÉ is a kind of stand up dance comedy, a choreographic sitcom, a collective therapy session that plays mirror games between fiction and reality, laughter and despair, artist and audience. In a fictional (and hyperreal!) dance company, the scene is built between different corporeal vocabularies, hairy theories, Facebook outbursts, quotes from choreographies by different authors... *TOMBÉ* choreographs movements, discourses and absurdities of art and life. And laughs at itself (Tombé, n/d)⁶.



Image 5 – *Tombé* (2001). From left to right: Jorge Alencar, Rubia Romani, Eduardo Gomes and Fábio Osório Monteiro. Source: Release photo.

I did not know life was all about this

The *choreolecture* is already underway when the audience enters the room. Dancers warm up on stage, while sound technician and producer Fábio Osório Monteiro walk around the room, welcoming the audience. Everyone wears mock ‘rehearsal clothes’: baggy t-shirts, baggy pants. Osório presents the show with the same *extremely free freedom* of the early days: “I am part of the ‘core group collective company creative environment pro-

ducer Dimenti of contemporary dances' (sic) [...]. I operate the sound for the dance people to dance (sic)." In the first versions, this was the role of Osório, actually one of the founding performers of Dimenti. Now, as one of Dimenti's executive producers, Osório also explains his role as administrator: he explains the 'objectives' of the 'project' ("democratize, decentralize, internalize" public resources for dance, Jorge Alencar, the director, tells him), through the distribution of "research grants, scholarships, aids, and contributions." At this moment, the producer-environment of creation and the product-spectacle are presented as a single set. Without the audience noticing it, it begins to be involved in a process of self-reflection on ways to perform dance in Brazil, to popularize repertoires, to consolidate companies and encourage the training of personnel.

The show begins with the public demonstration of the intimate rituals of warm-up, concentration, positioning of the dancers; however, at this moment, these rituals are desacralized by humor, used as the basis of an iconoclastic thought *about, in and through* dance. Hence, the audience will perceive that the choreography is purposely rough, that the scene is diluted between stage and backstage, between presentation and rehearsal, between cast meeting and lecture — therefore, the concentration of the dancers, the previous warm-up and the *mise en place* would be unnecessary. The backstage ritual performed in full view of the audience (heads together in a circle, gestures of energy exchange, hugs between the cast) results in something as a wink for the initiates in the audience — dance professionals, toward whom the show is undoubtedly geared; but it also begins to open up to the uninitiated, a slice of the creative processes that they guess, but were never able to partake. The first laughs begin. It begins to become clear that the propensity for satire will be like a password for the following experience, as if the cast said: "feel free to laugh at us, people who dance, because we will laugh at ourselves."

With their backs to the audience, dancers look at themselves in the mirror (those sold at street vendors), as if they were still in the dressing room, and perhaps allow the audience to see themselves reflected. They introduce themselves with their own name and surname, defining themselves as artists, dancers, actors, 'performers in transition.' Jorge Alencar is the last to arrive; he introduces himself and is presented by others under various ep-

ithets: artistic director, choreographer, dancer, actor, curator, academic, international artist, Body without Organs. The figure of this ‘dictator’ director (a mistake of one of the dancers) questions the primacy of authorship and hierarchy in dance companies. Interestingly, in older versions, the cast introduced themselves with first names but no last names. André Masseno notes in an article about the show (Viana, 2008) the extent to which this reinforced the idea of shared authorship: when the choreographer introduces himself without a surname, he can be anyone. And, if he can be anyone, he does not necessarily hold a qualification for this function (Viana, 2008). Regarding this subtle difference between the first version and the last one, one could speculate that: such change in the introduction of the cast — from ‘no name, therefore collective’ to ‘with full name, therefore hyperindividual’ — would not touch the the same point that hypernaturalism touches, which, in certain plays, focuses on self-documentary and auto-fictional conflicts, as a possible way of identifying everyone with the whole, that is, each one with the collective? In other words: whether it suggests that authorship is collective, or whether it suggests that it is hyper-individualized, is not the play somehow claiming that even authorship can be reinvented?

Finally, the pseudo-lecture begins. “Come to our company” is a repeated motto, providing the spectator with a horizon of expectations of what a contemporary dance company can hold: research on languages, professional training, inclusion policies, transversality of themes, affinity with new trends, critical thinking. It turns out that all this is presented, within the *Dimentian* spirit, in an auto-ironic and not always condescending way. Humor is used to outline languages, poetics and concepts that have been trending in recent decades: satirical mentions of Contact-Improvisation, Somatic Education, popular and urban dances, performance art, urban interventions, clown aesthetics, modern dance, ballet (an object of desacralization of the group since the beginning, apropos); and, of course, contemporary dance itself. A moment in which a problem arises: how to talk about contemporary dance, this difficult definition that escapes everyone? After a brief hesitation, each performer gives “their” solution: one proposes to remain still, another to be naked, another to obtain a doctoral degree in Semiotics, another to cut himself, pierce his skin, eat a live chicken on stage.

Osório, the technician-producer, proposes to write an open call for proposals⁷.

At this point, it can already be seen that a demolition is underway. By sarcastically criticizing the trends of the last decades of poetics in dance, in addition to the *modus operandi* of most companies, Dimenti manages to empathize both with the audience that knows the *métier* and with those who have never experienced the daily routine of classrooms with bars and mirrors (although there is, of course, greater communication with the first group). That is because the staging assumes a critique that seems to be less directed at the 'trends' themselves, and more at the trivialization (read mediatization) of these, generally received as the latest novelty and soon after assumed as poetic injunctions. Dimenti's scathing criticism seems to say that, in order to be considered a contemporary dance company, the collective that intends to do so needs to embrace these trends, undeniably necessary to live up to the expectations of contemporaneity. In other words: if contemporary dance is conceived as challenging and disruptive, it always runs the risk of becoming imposing and normative, hardened on its own foundations.

The iconoclasm that sets the tone in *Tombé* is not an inconsequential youthful quality, suggests the neuroscientist Gregory Berns (2009), according to whom iconoclastic attitudes confront the perceptual system by creating new forms, forcing it to discard usual categories. Being iconoclastic, says the author, presents the opportunity to destabilize known patterns of thought; to resist, through inventiveness, the fear of failure; and also to create contact networks capable of positively impacting opinion formation. All these alternatives seem to be confirmed throughout Dimenti's trajectory, which did not prevent it from realizing that there could be some discomfort on the part of the audience in being questioned all the time about their own ways of doing things. Perhaps that is why a moment was included in the show in which the cast itself questions the excess of 'criticism of everything and everyone,' which makes this version a hyperbolic and archetypal representation of the director's position, embodied in the show by Jorge Alencar, a self-centered, vain, sarcastic *dictator*.

It so happens that in *Tombé* we have the paradoxical situation of a critique of the founding principles of the group itself. The formation of a

thinking class in dance, for example, with the ironical reference to the *conceptual* choreographers (*Ahmed, Alejandro. Moura, Michele. Abramovic, Marina*) and the mention of a doctoral degree in in Semiotics, the research work of the star choreographer that has *coherence* and *cohesion* (key requirements in the production of critical scientific thinking)⁸, although they sound like criticism, they refer to the personal research of the members of Dimenti. Ellen Mello, Neto Machado and Jorge Alencar have published a number of scientific articles in national and international journals, including master's dissertations. Although they mock post-dramatic theater; the — shall we say — obligation to quote Espinosa, Deleuze and Guatarri; the eternal RDs (relationship discussions) of the scenic collectives, the group does not fail, in its daily routine, to look into these themes seriously. *Tombé*, which is intended to be a reflection in the mirror, casts a strange eye at the usual behavior of this and any company, suggesting a 'not taking itself so seriously' that affords space to reinvention. Accordingly, it evokes the *Bergsonian* laughter, which is provoked by an unusual subversion of the usual event. *Tombé* explains the ridiculousness of someone who, in the eyes of the public, slips not on a banana peel (as in Bergson's example), but on a *pas de bourré*.

In a very emblematic short story from the book *Primeiras histórias*, called precisely *O espelho* [The mirror], Guimarães Rosa (2008) represents the complex relation between subject/image in the mirror; the subject of the story, when given the opportunity to look at his reflection in multiple mirrors, ends up discovering multiple layers of perception. As is typical in Rosa's work, the short story has been the subject of several psychoanalytic, perceptual and linguistic interpretations, which are beyond the scope of this work. Here, what emerges as interesting is the fact that this multiple, unusual, and therefore surprising reflection, given by several simultaneous angles, shakes the two-dimensional and stable self-image constructed by the beholder, usually reflected in smooth and placid mirrors — such as the waters of the lake where Narcissus looks at himself. It is possible that Narcissus only falls in love with his image because it is reflected in a smooth mirror; in it his beauty emerges whole, without oscillations, undisturbed by discontinuities. If it were a concave or convex mirror, of those that in amusement parks make people laugh because of the deformities caused by the optical il-

lusion, Narcissus might not fall in love, due to the impossibility of identification. Well then. *Tombé* dares where few shows usually dare: by shunning the usual, the known, it deliberately provokes laughter, confident in its power of subversion. Subversive, laughter alters patterns of perception and releases potencies of behavior.

Tombé is mainly an exercise in laughing at oneself. This is an invitation not only for us, who are on stage, but also for the audience. Whether it is the dance audience, the theater audience, or the audience from any other field, from anywhere else. Even though *Tombé* is based on reflections associated with the field of the arts, it goes beyond, and we have had great testimonials from people who are not artists or art students, who perceive themselves there and are able to laugh at themselves. A little while ago we had a testimonial from a member of the audience, in a debate, in which he said 'what you do is a play of mirrors. Because as you create these mirrors for the audience, we are all the time reflecting what you are mirroring in us, with us' (SescBrasil, 2013)⁹.

The subversive comicality

What could explain the fact that *Tombé* remained in season for almost 20 years? A spectacle that is difficult to define, even for the second culture sections of the newspapers, *Tombé* reinforces Dimenti's original characteristic of confusing audiences, curators and journalists, who find it difficult to classify the group's works as theater, dance, performance or event. Even so, the show was able to travel through Brazil and be selected for dozens of performing arts festivals (as, by the way, several other works by the company), including the most traditional dance festivals, and not just contemporary dance. One can argue about the empathy of the comic, the effectiveness of satire in the longevity of the show. After all, these are always sure-fire resources in communicating with the audience. However, one must trust that the spectacle produces more than laughter; that, after the first few minutes, the audience begins to intuit that they are being invited to dismantle — or at least put in a new perspective — some personal beliefs. The fact that *Tombé* has, throughout its career, incorporated the fads and subjects that became the agenda of the moment does not only reflect a desire for updating; it reveals that, deep within an aesthetic game, there was a conscious ideological component, or rather, self-conscious component, willing to discuss the constitution of normative identities and performative identities —

precisely through comicality. Incidentally, the always underrated comicality; never seen as a trigger for reflection. “Just as the dancing body is separated from the thinking body, this perspective also seems to suggest that comicality and knowledge are antonyms, but fortunately it is not exactly like that” (Sampaio, 2007a, p. 1).

In his Master’s research, Jorge Alencar sought to investigate comicality in *Chuí* (2004), the first show of the group that they called *dance for children*. In his text, Alencar addresses the unmistakably political component of comicality, seeking what this “comicality in dance as a means of performative subversion of identity” would be (Sampaio, 2007b, p. 11). That is because, in *Chuí*, freely inspired by the ballet *Swan lake*, dance conventions, notably of ballet, are again questioned as to their hegemonic notion of grace and lightness. Associated with the childhood ideal — or rather, imposed as an ideal for childhood — as a feminine and graceful activity, aseptic and asexual like children’s dolls, “[...] ballet and the discourse on it end up creating patterns of normality within the fantasy of origin and identity” (Sampaio, 2007b, p. 14).

Trying to maintain a supposed essence of dance and childhood is part of the discursive maneuver present in the conception of body in the Barbie cartoon. Together — ballet and Barbie — embody the refrain of thinness, whiteness, grace, harmony, misogyny, Manichaeism, virtuosity, among others. Barbie is at once the incarnation of the classic anorexic sylph and the prevailing aesthetic ideals celebrated by consumption. Barbie is blonde, successful, has everything a ‘real woman’ can have and is also a ballerina. This set is part of a coherent whole situated within the framework of cultural pedagogies (Sampaio, 2007b, p. 14).

In order to question this construction of identities, “*Chuí* proposes a process of performative subversion of some clichés about the body and childhood through comicality mechanisms” (Sampaio, 2007b, p. 12). With no fictional linearity (that is, not telling a *little story*), the show relied on a strong visual and sound appeal, featuring artists wearing orthopedic prostheses, in a clumsy execution of segments of *Swan Lake*, embodying birds not necessarily graceful like the swan characters from this ballet, in addition to emphasizing a bird dancer with respiratory problems, trapped in a transparent hospital cage (Image 6). Thus, Dimenti subverted the notion of sweetened, infantilized children’s theater, introducing to the children’s uni-

verse the same questioning of a supposed ideal body of dance (and childhood) that it had already proposed in *Tombé*.

Someone who says ‘art and politics are not related’ is understanding politics in a very narrow way. The politics that I connect to art has more to do with this dimension, which is to operate realities, to operate discourses, to operate ethics. And each and every aesthetic and artistic configuration will operate, will present a certain world there. And it is going to say certain things to someone. Even if I am supposedly neutral in my action, even if I am not talking about any explicitly political issue, even if I am not in a podium position in my art [...]. Any art, whether classical ballet, Shakespearean theater, Ariano Suassuna’s theater, whether doing Nelson Rodrigues, or doing a performance rolling down the stairs, this comprises a perspective and a political projection of the world [...]. There are types of politics in classical ballet, in politics, in soap operas, on YouTube, in musicals. There are ways of thinking about the body, ways of thinking about narrative construction, of thinking about hierarchies, of thinking about decentering. This constitutes politics. The scene politicizes, just as politics stages worlds, agreements, social pacts. That is the way I position myself. I respect those artists who try to dissociate themselves from any political dimension in their art, but I am the one who recognizes and gives visibility to the types of politics that I seek to formulate in what I do as an artist (Ciclo das Artes, 2020)¹⁰.



Image 6 – *Chuá* (2004). Actress Olga Lamas. Source: Photo by Tiago Lima.

(Trans)production and (con)(tempo)rary

At this point, Alencar had coined and used the expression *blurred body*, which synthesized his intention to blur technical virtuosity, on the one hand, and the borders of language, on the other hand, in an approach that gradually became more engaged, in the choice of themes and in aesthetic propositions, in emerging issues such as gender, diversity and identity.

I have called these reflections Blurred Body. This verb ‘to blur’ gets rid of the notions of identity and border as fixed references. Blurred body is, above all, a body that proposes to render imprecise those so insistent dichotomies [...] inside and outside, originality and quotation, stage and backstage, order and disorder, continuity and discontinuity, word and thing, tragic and comic (Sampaio, 2007a, p. 2).

A long trajectory has solidified this intention to intertwine theoretical fields in increasingly interdisciplinary creative productions. It would be a superficial and incomplete task to try to cover — in the space of this article — this vast production. It is almost impossible to define exactly what Dimenti’s production has been and the individual poetic production of its artists-curators, since the activities are correlated all the time. Starting in 2006, in parallel with the creation of IC – Encontro de Artes (which we will talk about below), Dimenti produced: *O Poste A Mulher e O Bambu* (2007) and *Batata!* (2008), scenic works permeated by the universe of Nelson Rodrigues; the choreographic installation *Um Dente Chamado Bico* (2010), in collaboration with Sheila Ribeiro, an artist from São Paulo; *Um corpo que causa* (2011), self-designated *choreomusical act*; the aforementioned *Editais* (2011); *Souvenir* (2012) (2012) or *uma peça feita para quintais; Tome isto ao coração* (2012), a collaboration with director Alex Cassal that marked the collective’s transition from a theatrical group to a producer; *Biblioteca de Dança* (2017); *Bola de fogo* (2017); *Strip Tempo – Stripteases Contemporâneos* (2018); *Vermelho Melodrama* (2019). In 2009, at the invitation of the *Brasil Move Berlin* festival¹¹, the choreographies *A lupa* (2005) and *A mulher gorila* (2006) by Jorge Alencar, originally created for the Ateliê de Coreógrafos Brasileiros (Salvador/BA), were recreated. In addition to scenic works, Dimenti released two CDs with original soundtracks of shows: *Dimenti Songbook* and *Poll Ball*. The children’s show *Desastro* (2012) traveled to more than 40 Brazilian cities through the Palco Giratório project of Sesc

Brasil in 2018. In addition, Dimenti produced the videodance *Sensações Contrárias* (2007) and the feature film *Pinta* (2013), both winners of several awards at audiovisual festivals; and *A Lei do Riso: Crimes Bizarros* (2018), a TV series for open TV. It also produced the video installation *Phina* (2012) and the object-book *Astroneto - Dança no Espaço* (2018).

This trajectory points to the constant transformation of the collective's modes of operation. The intention here is not to propose the word *maturation* as a supposed progressive improvement of poetic options. This would be equivalent to assuming that the first works, because they were composed with the youthful mood of challenging the *status quo* of dance, would be less mature in relation to the last ones. This article refutes that belief. Rather, it is proposed here, through a specific look at two works, to point out that aspects such as comicality, iconoclasm and nonsense, explicit in the first works, were incorporated into the discourse in a fundamental way in the last ones; sometimes discreetly, without, however, failing to follow the authorial traits of the early days. Comicality, for example, never ceased to permeate the group's works, even if it was not a central element as in *Tom-bé*. However, this aspect too has been revised in its tempting ease of stimulating stereotypes.

The ability to point out vices linked to the comicality would trigger a mechanism of subversion by submitting to ridicule the falsified power that includes the very notions of norm and normality. However, there are some serious distortions of this potential present in discourses of social criticism and subversion. The recurring regenerative potential of laughter and comicality present in studies on the subject may have a legitimate space in the subversion of bodily and social automatisms. However, it is difficult to think of a laughter that punishes those who deviate from an established norm, because otherwise its subversive exercise will slip into a quality that is more punitive and homogenizing than transforming (Sampaio, 2007b, p. 70).

What can be realized by reading Alencar's dissertation is that the proposition of a blurred body gradually expands to encompass a certain *blurred* mode of artistic existence. Researcher Leonardo Serrano suggests that, starting with *Chuá*, the group gradually detached itself from cartoon as a research element and delved into the conception of this corporeality that, defined as *blurred*, began with the strangeness of bodies not used to dancing (Serrano, 2010), as in the *Sensações Contrárias* video, *O poste a mulher...* and

A lupa. It is also noticeable the incorporation of increasingly engaged proposals for discussion, for example, of questions about gender and identity, notably in *A mulher gorila*, *Um corpo que causa* and the feature film *Pinta*; the denunciation of the marketing and folkloric use of a visual construction of Bahian persons in *Um dente chamado bico*. As if, after the first years of iconoclasm, the collective allowed itself to assume an ideological bias that was previously implicit and launched itself, without shame, to explore themes more explicitly associated with social activism.

At the same time, Dimenti also blurs its modes of production and relies on the diversification of media and platforms with new partnerships and collaborations.

It is not about mixing languages. It has to do with formulating a thought of art, of world, in which these things are not demarcated. That's the band I play in. You can call it contemporary or performance art (because of the non-location of artistic environments), but it is certainly something that is interested in sliding, in displacing, in being traversed and crossing these different environments, these different worlds (theater, dance, cinema, etc.) (SescBrasil, 2013)¹².

The desire to articulate the various aspects that interested the collective ended up resulting in the creation of its own arts festival, IC – Encontro de Artes, in 2006 (initially Festival Interação e Conectividade). The name of the event made clear its intention to enable intersections between artists, curators, researchers and the public on different poetic platforms. In its (until now) 14 years of duration, the IC has enabled scenic encounters, artistic residencies, performances, musical shows, media creation, dancing parties, literary meetings, streaming and own TV channel, choosing every year a theme that brings together guests from all over Brazil and from abroad, from different languages and trends. The production of this event, led by Ellen Mello, was analyzed in detail in a master's thesis (Cruz, 2020), making it unnecessary for this important initiative to be analyzed in this work¹³. It is only important to note that, while assuming the role of artists-curators, Dimenti members were able to refine their network of contacts, traveling around Brazil and participating in international events. In this refinement, proposals for updating Dimenti's poetic and production forms emerged, which included shamelessly embracing an aesthetics of imperfection, assuming practice-based learning, proposing the alternation of func-

tions according to the singularities, abilities and desires of each member (Cruz, 2020). All this without ever abandoning the focus on sustainability.

Dimenti has always been interested in coordinating a number of languages and references such as dance, theater, cinema, and literature. However, this year, more than that, we are looking for ways to organize ourselves as a group, as a collective [...]. Artistic thinking was born together with production and communication thinking, from the onset (SescBrasil, 2013)¹⁴.

Each volume on its desk

One of the most emblematic productions of this thinking in action is the project *Biblioteca de Dança [Dance Library]* (2017), a work in which artists occupy a city library and transform their bodies into *living books*, telling and dancing fragments of choreographies by different authors, which marked their lives, to an audience that, for three hours, freely roams the space. The conception was developed in three artistic residency contexts: Akademie Schloss Solitude (Stuttgart – Germany), #StationONE – Service for Contemporary Dance (Belgrade – Serbia) and Graner – Centro de Creación del Cuerpo y el Movimiento (Barcelona – Spain). Since its premiere, the *Biblioteca* has been presented in several locations; in 2019, it was performed in the city of Stuttgart (Germany) as part of the Das Festival project. In 2020, the work was adapted into live format by the SescAoVivo project. In 2021, the work had an online season on Sesc Avenida Paulista's YouTube and Instagram platforms and on the Spotify audiostream platform, in podcast format¹⁵. The library, conceived as a performance-lecture, proved to be a malleable multimedia material, in full compliance with the need for reinvention in pandemic times.

How is dance with one's own body documented? How to choreograph history? How to go beyond the 'official history' producing knowledge in dialogue with multiple agents? How can dance (associated with ephemerality and immateriality) employ choreography as a device for registering processes, histories, creations? How can preexisting dance shows become compositional materials for new works? [...] The dramaturgical tool of 'performance telling' is a way of collectively imagining something that – for whatever reason – cannot be present at that exact moment. In the arts, in different places in the world, there is an increasing production of shows created from archives as a movement to make creation a platform for documentation and new artistic processes [...]. At a time when it is not possi-

ble to perform in-person scenic presentations with the public due to the pandemic, activating memories of choreographies is a way to make them present¹⁶.

Based on the notion of performance telling, the library of dancing volumes, which share with the public these *choreographic storytelling*, addresses issues of registration, archive, memory, reenactment and recreation. Machado Neto (2014) or Neto Machado, one of the creators of the project, had already addressed these issues in his master's thesis, when he analyzed *Retrospectiva* (2012), by Xavier Le Roy, a work in which the choreographer reorganizes his old solos into a new composition construction, in what we could call the reincarnation of the original works – or, in Machado's words, a record as choreography (Machado Neto, 2014). From the beginning of his remarkable career, Le Roy maintained an important aspect of his work centered on the exploration of forms of spectator participation, on the critique of the spectacle as such and on the interest in how the body is represented; he proposed reconstructions of this network of meanings in several works, such as the lecture-performance *Product of Circumstances* (1999)¹⁷ and the shows *site-specific For Performance!* (2017-2018)¹⁸ and *Retrospective* (2012-2019)¹⁹, created on demand for museums. Neto Machado's constant collaboration, as a performer, with the French choreographer, currently based in Germany, may have been one of the foundations of *Biblioteca de dança*²⁰.

As in Le Roy's works, in *Biblioteca de dança* the form determines the content and the latter is determined by the former. A set of rules, or 'parameters' that must be followed by artists and audiences determine the format of this performance, originally presented in libraries. Each memory fragment consists in a 'chapter.' There are predetermined rules of the game: about the selection of stories, the quantity and duration of the chapters, the themes, some obligatory structural elements (the presence of moments 'before', 'during' and 'after' the narrated works); on the other hand, much creative freedom is allowed for each 'book' to compose its structure and type of narrative, with optional use of objects, movements, references, quotes, documents and personal information. The relation with the audience, left free to decide which 'book' they want to 'read,' is also a dynamics that will determine the performance, being, therefore, provided for in such regulatory parameters. Finally, there is the presence of a *librarian* (Image 7), that is,

one of the participating artists who take turns in the function, with the task of inviting and leading the audience, stimulating conversation, introducing the artists, managing the time of exchanges, the time of the exhibition, the appropriate volume of sound for a library.



Image 7 – *Biblioteca de dança* (2017). Actress Vania Oliveira. Source: Photo by Patrícia Almeida.

This format, which, due to the use of rules and proposal of relationship with the public, is very similar to the compositional structure of *Retro-spectiva*, differs from that mainly due to the diversity of profiles presented. Instead of focusing on a single figure, as in the case of Le Roy, the library brings together performers from diverse backgrounds such as Afro dance, somatic dance, technological poetics, street dance and other strands of contemporary dance (here considered in their chronological sense, that is, of the works produced in contemporary times), exhibiting not their authorial works, but their history. Without giving priority to any of the dance-books, the performance presents a discursive polyphony, not hierarchical, about dance forms and practices from different environments, regions and aesthetics, in a proposal of decentering the historiography of dance in Brazil. The library puts artists and the audience in communion with intimate processes of affection that make up subjectivity. In a completely different way from *Tombé*, a show from the early years, this Library also displays in the

window the formative canons of dance pedagogy, the sometimes stiffened production structures, the academic environment, the precariousness of resources. But this time, instead of being approached from the comic perspective, the discourses are filtered by the sensibility of the temporary community formed by the group that gathers around the desk, for a few minutes, as in the community rituals of yore, to listen to stories. If there is still something of nonsense, a lot of non-linearity and a lot of *blurring* between theory and practice of *Dimentian* productions, affection prevails here as a constructive structure, not only of this choreography of bodies, but of a social choreography of sharing. Dimenti, in continuous transformation, continues to invite artists and the public, society and institutions, to look in the mirror. Now, however, from other perspectives — less corrosive, it can be said — , which invite to more explicit views on alterity, diversity and their wealth. Here, perhaps Socrates would no longer be ashamed of the eyes of others.

Notes

- ¹ With CAPES/Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung/Foundation Experienced Researcher Scholarship – 2021-2022.
- ² After several formations as a theater group and cultural production company, until reaching the self-definition of a creative environment, Dimenti had several formations, including permanent members, partnerships and collaborations. As this article is written, Dimenti Produções Culturais is led by artist-curators Jorge Alencar, Fábio Osório Monteiro, Ellen Mello (founding members) and Neto Machado, and also has an artist and technical director (Larissa Lacerda); two cultural producers (Marina Martinelli and Trinidad Opelt); an accountant (Marília Pereira); a communication coordinator (Paula Berbert).
- ³ Description text of the Palco Giratório/Diário de Bordo Dimenti page on the SESC Brasil Portal of the YouTube channel. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uuPnetQobU>. Accessed on: Mar 15, 2021.
- ⁴ Theater and Dance Stimulus Award from the Cultural Foundation of the State of Bahia, BA.
- ⁵ As a brief example of the vast western production adopted in Brazil, we have, in addition to the aforementioned book by Rocha (2016), the works of

Loupe (2012), Silva (2005), Katz (2005), and Bastos (2014). In addition to several articles by researcher André Lepecki (New York University).

- ⁶ Video description on the *Tombé* page at the Vimeo platform. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/135131347/b9a2b166aa>. Accessed on: Feb 10, 2021.
- ⁷ It is worth remembering that one of the shows in Dimenti's repertoire is a solo show by Fábio Osório Monteiro entitled *Edital* [public notice/open call] (2011). The artist actually launched a public call, with resources obtained by the company through its own sponsorship, in which he invited authors to present a script that he could stage in a solo work. There was indeed competition, but in the end Monteiro chose to turn his experience as an artist and producer into a spectacle precisely dealing with open calls. He chose, therefore, to discuss in a poetic way the intertwining between the usual artistic and administrative functions in the Dimenti creation environment, reaffirming that the material production process is an inseparable part of the artistic conception.
- ⁸ Terms used in the show, according to the video version available on the Vimeo platform. See Note 5.
- ⁹ Jorge Alencar, in an interview with the SESC Brasil channel about the 2013 Palco Giratório. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uuPnetQobU>. Accessed on: Feb 10, 2021.
- ¹⁰ Jorge Alencar interview with Ciclo de Teatro – Ciclo das Artes page (YouTube). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_MxSTLTaOY. Accessed on: Feb 10, 2021.
- ¹¹ Contemporary dance festival in Berlin, Germany, sponsored by Hauptstadtkulturfonds (Fund for Culture of the Federal Capital), the extinct Ministry of Culture (MinC) and the National Arts Foundation (Funarte).
- ¹² Jorge Alencar in an interview with SESC Brasil about the 2013 Palco Giratório. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uuPnetQobU>. Accessed on: Feb 10, 2021.
- ¹³ Starting in 2013, Dimenti also assumed an association – Conexões Criativas – with which it develops diverse projects in the cultural area, including, for example, book publishing.
- ¹⁴ Jorge Alencar in an interview with SESC Brasil about the 2013 Palco Giratório. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uuPnetQobU>. Accessed on: Feb 10, 2021.

- ¹⁵ Information contained in the dossier provided by the production.
- ¹⁶ Information contained in the dossier provided by the production.
- ¹⁷ Available at: <http://www.xavierleroy.com>. Accessed on: Feb 2, 2021.
- ¹⁸ Available at: <http://www.xavierleroy.com>. Accessed on: Feb 2, 2021.
- ¹⁹ Available at: <http://www.xavierleroy.com>. Accessed on: Feb 2, 2021.
- ²⁰ Le Roy participated in IC-VII (2013), building, with local artists, a Brazilian version of *Retrospective*²⁰, produced by Dimenti. Machado and Alencar also participated, as performers, in the choreographic exhibition *Temporary Titles* (2015) by Le Roy, at the Centre Pompidou, in Paris.

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Jacyan Castilho de Oliveira is an associate professor at the Department of Expressions and Language at the School of Communication (ECO) at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Performing Arts – Theater Direction Program. Graduate Program in Dance (PPGDan/UFRJ). Graduate Program in Performing Arts Teaching (PPGEAC/UNIRIO).

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6572-2299>

E-mail: jacyancastilho@gmail.com

This original paper, translated by Roberto Francisco (Tikinet Edição Ltda.), is also published in Portuguese in this issue of the journal.

Received on April 30, 2021

Accepted on October 28, 2021

Editor-in-charge: Gilberto Icle

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