



DANCE THE LYRICS:
scenic-choreographic operations with gesture, word and humor

DANCE A LETRA:
operações cênico-coreográficas com gesto, palavra e humor

Diego Machado

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3264-2145>

 doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v9i17.8402

Dance the lyrics:

scenic-choreographic operations with gesture, word and humor

Abstract: This article offers a reflection grounded in artistic practice as research, focusing on the choreographic proposal *Dance a letra* (Dance the lyrics), which investigates the relationship between gesture, song lyrics, and humor. From the perspective of artist writings, the author systematizes creative procedures developed over a trajectory marked by the intersection of dance and humor, with an emphasis on meaning-making through the friction among musical text, gesture, and choreographic composition. Conceptual references such as Roland Barthes's Third Meaning, Hubert Godard's Pre-Movement, and the Theory of Incoherence in humor are brought into dialogue. The results of the process can be observed in the construction of a choreographic language that employs gestural literalness to generate critical and political layers of subtext. The work reinforces laughter as both strategy and discourse and reaffirms dance as a field of thought and invention.

Keywords: dance; humor; gesture; word; *dance a letra*.

Dance a letra:

operações cênico-coreográficas com gesto, palavra e humor

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta uma reflexão fundamentada na prática artística como pesquisa, tendo como objeto a proposta coreográfica *Dance a Letra*, que investiga a relação entre gesto, letra de música e humor. A partir da perspectiva dos escritos de artista, o autor sistematiza procedimentos criativos desenvolvidos ao longo de uma trajetória marcada pela interseção entre dança e humor, com ênfase na produção de sentido por meio do atrito entre texto musical, gesto e composição coreográfica. Articulam-se referências conceituais como o Terceiro Sentido de Roland Barthes, o Pré-Movimento de Hubert Godard e a Teoria da Incoerência do humor. Os resultados do processo são observados na construção de uma linguagem coreográfica que aborda a literalidade gestual para instaurar camadas de subtexto críticas e políticas. O trabalho corrobora o riso como estratégia e discurso e reafirma a dança como campo de pensamento e invenção.

Palavras-chave: dança; humor; gesto; palavra; *dance a letra*.



1 Introduction

This article is an artist's reflective account of the line of work I have been developing in recent years as a dance director, titled *Dance a Letra* (Dance the Lyrics). It is a choreographic proposal that investigates the relationships between dance and humor, with an emphasis on how gestural literalness can generate humor and critique when articulated with the lyrics of popular songs. Along this trajectory, the article also inscribes itself within the triad politics–collectivity–laughter, as it reflects on the aesthetic and formative crossings that permeate working with dance and humor.

The article was constructed from the methodological perspective of Artistic Practice as Research (PaR), in which theoretical reflection is embedded in practical experience and in the poetic elaboration of dance creation:

This is an epistemological reflection carried out from within practice (technical, artistic, and creative doing), or what we call empirical research. This reflection identifies practice as a domain of knowledge (Nelson, 2006), whose methods and thematic concerns function as the research object. [...] To navigate such knowledge, it is necessary to look at the concept of practice, as suggested by Robin Nelson (2022). The author posits that practice, in a PaR context, is related to praxis – i.e., an investigation by the “interweaving of theory within practice” (Fernandes *et al.*, 2024, p. 15-16).

Ciane Fernandes (2014) deepens the idea:

Today the arts have the means to establish their own methods and approaches, updating contexts and dismantling outdated research prejudices that use us as objects for discussing change within rigid formats that therefore offer no real conditions for realizing it. By assuming our own methods, we become subjects of our own history, and we can invert this colonizing and hegemonic logic and begin to influence other fields through means and modes that are far more flexible and coherent with a (new) contemporary reality (Fernandes, 2014, p. 78).

This text also aligns itself with the perspective of artist writings:

[...] artist writings present themselves as the systematization of the ideas that circumscribe the artistic project, guide the emergence of the work, and reveal the artist's reflective and critical position toward their own art and, by extension, toward art in general. Not exactly explanatory texts, they investigate the creative process through the work's generating elements, the procedures adopted, and the concepts that sustain it. Artist writings are a meta-artistic element, closely articulated with the work. [...] What we call artist writings is the record of a thought process anchored in creative practice. They take into account the constituent elements of the artwork and the subjectivities emerging in the act of creation. Ultimately, they bring motivations into proximity and outline parameters of the creative process (Rey, 2018, p. 2-7).

The writing presented here seeks to reveal the conceptual and reflective operations involved in choreographic creation processes, affirming artistic practice as a form of knowledge production.



It is only through the artist that new ideas about knowledge that is otherwise tacit and implicit can be acquired, and only as long as the artist-researcher remains an artist will they be able to enrich the existing research conducted by scientists (Coessens, 2014, p. 2).

The article is structured in four parts. In the first, I present the foundations of *Dance a letra*, situating it as both a procedure and a choreographic poetics. Next, I describe and analyze one of the scenes created from this line of work, focusing on the compositional and dramaturgical aspects of the relationship between gesture and laughter. In the third part, I reflect on the operations and procedures involved in working with dance and humor. Finally, I offer considerations on the political-formative character of *Dance a letra*.

2 *Dance a letra*

Since 2015, I have been developing a choreographic creation and composition procedure called *Dance a letra*, in which literal gestures are assigned to the lyrics of Brazilian songs. Before it had this name, I had already engaged with this idea on several occasions. I began this work in 2005 with *Muovere Cia de Dança*, in the production *Beterrabas caprichosas* (2005), directed and choreographed by Jussara Miranda. In that piece, the choreography of one scene was composed from the song “*Por isso eu corro demais*,” by Roberto Carlos, resulting in a humorous gestural version of the song’s lyrics, danced by Luciana Dariano. In 2007, with Grupo Gaia, directed by Alessandra Chemello and myself, we created the production *Alice (adulto)* (2008), whose final choreography, titled *Choreography for a Nonsense*, was created with literal gestures for the lyrics of the song “*Sinceramente*”, by the band Cachorro Grande. In 2009, also with Grupo Gaia, within the context of *Abobrinhas recheadas* (2009), - a work that blended pre-composed choreographies with improvisation and real-time composition – I truly embraced my interest in the relationship between dance and humor and began to outline the contours, forms, and depth of research on the theme. It’s true that before that, I had flirted with this relationship, albeit tangentially, not as a direct research theme and language. I recall the videodance *Pas de Corn*¹ (2006) I created a video choreography whose dancers were popcorn. My interest at the time was to question the standardization of dancing bodies. It’s a piece that always elicits laughter from one or two viewers because of the irony present in the satire of replacing bodies of flesh and blood with food. However, it was with *Abobrinhas recheadas* (2009) that I recognized that the dance-laughter-humor relationship has an important presence in my work context and it became part of the poetics I develop as a choreographer and director in different artistic practices and reflections.

1 See: PAS de Corn. Production by Diego Mac. [S. l: s. n], Jan. 6, 2007. One video (1:41 min). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I573mRwt_Cw. Accessed on: Nov. 26, 2025.



Abobrinhas recheadas was created from the practical exploration of the concept of post-production (Bourriaud, 2009). In the creative process and in the formal outcome, we worked with appropriation and manipulation of dance materials already made and established – materials circulating in pop culture: traces of bodily mobility already impregnated in culture. In this context, the choreography Macarena became the ultimate emblem, used as choreographic material across many scenes: from pre-composed ones to scenes structured in real time through improvisation tasks. The production ended up becoming a container of premises and materials that grew the body of my work as dance director and expanded the exploration of humor in dance: themes of media, pop culture and mass culture; procedures of reprocessing, appropriation and choreographic citation. It was there that Macarena first appeared in my work: the approach to gesture as choreographic data, the logic of the game, improvisation, interaction with the audience, and humor. Furthermore, the presence of the body and performance of the director onstage, exploring dance direction as an element of choreographic composition in real time. References in that period included: choreographer Jérôme Bel, the ready-made, Marcel Duchamp, pop art, Andy Warhol, physical comedy, Roberto Bolaños, satire, the Brazilian band Mamonas Assassinas, art and media (Machado, 2008), and Bourriaud (2009), post-production. Since the premiere in 2009, *Abobrinhas recheadas* has been unfolded into different versions and formats.

In 2013 — still following the trajectories indicated in *Abobrinhas recheadas* (2009) — I founded Macarenando Dance Concept, together with Gui Malgarizi.

This is a cultural initiative that invests in the mixture of dance, humor, and pop culture to create artistic projects. *Macarenando* built a strong presence in the cultural sector by presenting different niches and approaches to dance as a creative language. Inserted in the perspective of cultural and economic development within the creative industry, it operates through simplicity, good humor, the proposition of a sensorial experience, and the desire to change the world, mobilize people, and provoke transformations. At *Macarenando*, we strive daily to celebrate culture, art, and dance through our work — with as much vitality as we can muster — in an effort to respond to the question: What do you do with what you already have? That question was never new: it has its roots in *Abobrinhas recheadas* (2009) and in the work with reprocessing, citation and appropriation. Not by chance, the Macarena lends its name to the initiative, which insists on rescuing, valorizing and reprocessing what is around us and also what we ourselves have created and left in the world. For us, thinking about what we already have, and pointing out ways to value and reuse our achievements is indeed an ethical, poetic, political and sustainable attitude in the face of possible tragic collapses that may appear in human life in society. With eyes wide open, a joke at the tip of the tongue to the toe, an arm steady for the blow, and a head well-tuned for the spins, we move forward (Mac; Malgarizi, 2019, presentation text of Macarenando Dance Concept).

We created some versions of *Abobrinhas recheadas* (2009) with *Macarenando*. In 2013 we mounted *Abobrinhas recheadas: o jogo*. In this proposal, the entire show was made up through real-time choreographic improvisation by the dancers, based on games directed by me and by



interaction with the audience. One of these games was the traditional *Qual é a música?*² in a gestural format. The game worked as follows: Player A put on headphones that play some random song at high volume; meanwhile, another song was playing in the room; Player B's objective was to make Player A guess which song is playing in the room, using only gestures that mimic the lyrics of the song. It has always been the game most desired and most laughed at by the audience. And also by us. In our training sessions, spent hours playing *Qual é a música?* because it was funny and infinitely rich gesturally. I really enjoyed performing this procedure, as the gestural result and choreographic potential that emerged in Player B especially fascinated and attracted me. I did not quite know what it was at the time, but there was in it a mixture of bodily speed, clumsiness, blurred gestures, animation and playfulness, very interesting qualities. It also seemed to install a kind of choreographic device, a choreographic algorithm, a very effective gesture-generation mechanism.

In short, I intuited there was an artistic potential there, something to be unveiled and explored in research on the relationship among dance, body, and laughter. Driven by that intuition, in 2015 I proposed the creation of a version of *Abobrinhas recheadas* using only that procedure. But I didn't want the game onstage again as my attention was focused on the relationship between the lyrics of the song playing and the gestures that dancer B executed, less so on Player A's guessing attempts. The idea was to use the game *Qual é a música?* as a procedure for assigning literal gestures to lyrics of Brazilian songs — and from that to compose the choreography of the piece. That was how the version *Abobrinhas recheadas: Dance a letra* (2013) was born.

The choreographic project of the piece was based on the poetic investigation and scenic use of the *Dance a letra* procedure — deepening the movement research based on the search for gestural literalities to lyrics of Brazilian songs, and on choreographic-scenic composition with the gestures discovered. In that process, we encountered various possibilities for gestural generation and execution, choreographic arrangements and relations with the word and song lyrics. Gestures generated by the lyrics, superimposed on the lyrics; individual gestures; in duets; collective gestures; gestures for each verse; for each phrase/line; gestures for terms or expressions in a line; gestures for each word, etc.

The piece premiered at Porto Verão Alegre in 2015, a signature festival that took place in the city during summer (January-February), full of plays and artistic events for those who were not heading to the coast to enjoy ice cream or the sea. It was a huge public success, in terms of ticket sales and house capacity — and in the provocation of laughter. Even though we were confident and excited on our idea, we did not know how people would react to such a specific proposal of mixing dance and humor through choreographic composition of gestures for lyrics of Brazilian songs. The reception was as good as we could have hoped. We finished the performance somewhat stunned

2 *Qual é a música?* was a television program presented by Silvio Santos on the Brazilian SBT network, based on the American version Name That Tune. The program's structure was based on a game show with artists. Divided into teams, the participants performed tests based on musical knowledge and skills, such as guessing the name of the song by the melody or the performer, identifying the lyrics of a song, or singing a song without making a mistake.



actually, by the amount of laughter and audience interaction. It was the beginning of a long journey dancing the lyrics around.

3 “*Porto Alegre é Demais*”

It was a rainy late afternoon when I met Gui Malgarizi in the lobby of the Casa de Cultura Mario Quintana, in the city of Porto Alegre, state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. We sat on some random chairs and ordered coffee before heading upstairs to the rehearsal room. We were in the middle of the creation process. We did not have much time to develop the piece, since between the proposal and the decision to make it and the premiere at Porto Verão Alegre, we would have only 10 to 15 rehearsals. Anxiety was there, imposing as ever, mixed with the excitement of creating something new for us and with the fun generated by the language we were working with. Gui drank his coffee wearing a scowl, and I quickly realized something was off. He told me his day had been terrible, full of setbacks and frustrations—especially one: the internet provider had failed to show up at the scheduled time to install equipment in his apartment. In fact, as I listened, I learned Gui was furious.

That day, our goal for rehearsal was to create the choreography for the song “*Porto Alegre é demais*” (José Fogaça). It is a traditional local tune, known by almost everyone in the city, especially because a major regional supermarket chain in its prime-time TV commercials has long used it. The song exalts Porto Alegre with sweet rhyme, melody, harmony, and arrangement, in verses such as:

Porto Alegre has that easy grace,
where the girls go by with shine;
on Sunday mornings, waiting for the Grê-Nal,
I stroll through the Brique, feeling good, feeling all.
Porto Alegre turns me sentimental,
Porto Alegre hurts tell no one at all;
Porto Alegre holds me — don't think it odd
this longing is too much,
it is where I live in peace as such
(*Porto Alegre é demais*, José Fogaça/Isabela Fogaça, 2000).

Gui, worried, asked me how he was supposed to walk into rehearsal and create over a song like that in a state of fury, anger, irritation, and anxiety (Gui co-directed the piece with me, also conceiving the dramaturgy and lighting, and running the light board during performances). We still did not know exactly what direction we would take in generating gestures or composing the scene as a whole. And Gui's fury gave us a clue. I suggested we use all those feelings and emotions to our advantage—after all, we work with the body and everything that comes with it; we work with life, and the poetic result emerges from the *soma* [sum]³ of what we are, feel, imagine, and do in

3 The term *soma* [sum] here connects directly to Somatics and its relationship with dance and Artistic Practice as Research. According to Ciane Fernandes (2024), “somatic content is part of the training of dancers, actors, performers,



the world. He replied with middle finger raised: “the only gesture I feel like doing right now is this one”. After some good laughter, he added, as a true dramaturgist: “what if we subverted our own order—what if instead of looking for literal gestures we sought gestures that were antonyms to the song’s lyrics?” Brilliant. We paid for the coffee, ran upstairs, and began rehearsal.

We started differently: instead of using the lyrics as the initial trigger to generate movement, we first assembled with the cast a collection of gestures with negative, bad, immoral, or grotesque connotations – or, more precisely, gestures that do not belong to the song’s semantic field. From there, we worked on connecting and overlaying the gestures onto the lyrics. We immediately encountered the semantic accidents arising from mixing these opposing materials. It became clear how potent those “out-of-place” gestures were as triggers of humor and, in a deeper, more tension-filled layer, how those antonym gestures worked as a critical device.

We chose to perform the sequence in unison, with the four dancers standing side by side, in a group configuration evoking classical dance formations, such as the pattern seen in the famous *Pas de Quatre* from *Swan Lake*. The movement from the waist down, while the gestures were executed with the upper body, followed a very simple pendular sway: step forward, step back, repeatedly. We titled the scene *The chorus girls*, alluding to chorus lines, corps de ballet, and dance, adding another critical layer to that semantic and political-geographical context in which the music goes in one direction and the dance in another.

4 *Dance a letra*: procedure × *Dance a letra*: choreography

The creation process of the piece made one aspect of working with *Dance a Letra* abundantly clear. We were operating with two distinct types: at certain moments, *Dance a Letra* as a procedure; at others, a choreography. Let us differentiate them.

Dance a Letra as a procedure concerns the direct and most primary relation between gesture and word, in which the literal gesture functions as a kind of pre-text – an initial, concrete, and objective layer for gathering movement material. This pre-text underlines the lyrics of the song, representing their meanings in a direct and denotative way. It is almost always obvious, functioning as a gestural mimicking of words in motion.

However, this pre-text should not be confused with the choreographic text itself. For *Dance a Letra* to operate as choreography and not merely as a game or a procedure for generating gestures,

and future teachers, who will multiply integrated ways of perceiving and dealing with corporeality in/with the world and, above all, of reorganizing patterns of perception and relationship from integrated corporeality. In other words, Somatics is not just a set of techniques, methods, and approaches to be taught, practiced, and developed as integrative content, but ways of transforming our vision, perception, and interactions with/in the world. Somatics is not restricted to an object of study or programmatic content, as it encompasses the very way of being and existing in the world, and above all, perceiving and following the contrasting flows and undulating rhythms of life itself (Fernandes et al., 2024, pp. 102-103).



something more must emerge: a subtext. The choreographic text cannot be limited to illustrating the lyrics through literal gestures; it must say something more, going beyond both the song and the isolated gesture.

This subtext is a layer of meaning that is not formally, literally, or concretely present either in the gesture (pre-text) or in the lyric (musical text). It emerges from the friction, the layering, and the juxtaposition between the two. It is a third meaning, born of the encounter – often accidental – among music, word, and gesture, and of the ways in which these elements are organized in performance.

At this point, it is useful to draw a connection with Roland Barthes and his theory of meaning. In the essay *The third meaning* (1970), published in *The obvious and the obtuse* (2009), Barthes proposes a category of meaning that breaks with usual forms of signification. Analyzing film stills from *Ivan the terrible* (1944), by Sergei Eisenstein, he distinguishes three layers of reading: the informational sense, tied to direct communication; the symbolic, associated with cultural and universal meanings; and finally the obtuse, which neither communicates nor symbolizes. It disrupts the field of reading, operating outside conventional codes. Barthes defines it as a signifier without a signified – something that escapes immediate comprehension yet persists in affecting, a sensible supplement that defies logic and decoding. The metaphor of the obtuse angle clarifies this notion: just as that angle exceeds the right angle, the third meaning extends beyond the straight line of classical narrative, producing ruptures, displacements, and sequences that contradict expectations and thus open other possibilities of meaning. It is a force of disorder diverting from the obvious path and asserting itself through ambiguity.

It is precisely in this third meaning that the choreographic potential of *Dance a Letra* emerges. Humor, joke, and subversion appear as possible effects of this subtext, revealing unexpected readings of the song and the choreography. The wit and the force do not lie in the literal gesture itself, when first generated in *Dance a Letra* as procedure (in Barthes's informational sense). It does so in the way that gesture, once organized through a choreographic logic (symbolic sense) enters into an antagonistic, ironic, or critical relation with the music, producing meanings that exceed both the song and the isolated movements.

Without this subtext – this third meaning – the gestures are emptied. They become merely a sequence of literal movements, a *Dance a Letra* as procedure rather than choreography. In this reduced form, what remains is only a technique for creating movements from words. It is a useful creative exercise, but it reduces the gesture to an endpoint and does not stand out its power as a mobilizing starting point for choreographic composition.

It is true that the game-procedure is an important part of the process. Mastering the pre-text is fundamental: developing, refining, and mastering the technique allows for the creation of a multiple, consistent, expressive gestural vocabulary. In fact, more than that, it is essential for recruiting and activating everything that comes before choreographic composition and execution.



And what comes before? Everything. We do not start from zero; we start from the middle, “the middle as starting point” (2002), as proposed by Blanca Brites and Elida Tessler. Understood in this way, the *Dance a Letra* procedure functions as an exercise of memory, poetics, posture, worldview, and the physical, mechanical, and dynamic preparations of each artist involved in the process. It is not about inventorying gestures, but about opening the drawers of a collection assembled throughout an entire life, filled with ideas, actions, memories, mobilities, affections, and lines of thought. In this sense, this pre-text relates to what Hubert Godard calls pre-movement:

Pre-movement, as Godard understands it, is an attitude that precedes any movement, present in the way the subject organizes posture in response to gravity and to the space in which they are situated. This largely unconscious pre-movement is shaped by perceptual, sensory, motor, affective, cultural, and social habits, giving color and personal signature to postural organization and to any gesture that may follow. Gesture, therefore, according to Godard, has this dynamic and expressive dimension, tied to an attitude, to a posture (in both the literal and symbolic sense of the word), which is always singular and specific to each individual. “The way we stand already contains a mood, a project about the world” (Lima, 2018, p. 13).

Following this relevant exercise of pre-text (movement), As choreography demands, *Dance a letra*, go further: it is necessary to compose meanings, create tension between significations, and provoke perceptual shifts. The choreography happens precisely in what passes through and surpasses literalness, in its gaps and fissures, in its seams and connections, in the creation of symbolic layers that emerge from the encounter between letter and gesture.

A clarifying example is the choreography created for “*Porto Alegre é Demais*.” The composition is not sustained merely by the gestures assigned to the lyrics, but by how it subverts the song’s celebratory content. The humor of the scene lies in the choice and arrangement of gestures that contradict the words praising the city, producing a displacement of meaning. Humor and irony arise neither from the music nor from the isolated gestures, but from the friction between them and from the way they are mobilized, danced, and staged. Here we may invoke the Theory of Incongruity theory⁴, developed by various thinkers such as Plato, Cicero (106–43 BCE), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), Arthur Koestler (1905–1983), and Victor Raskin (1944–). Incongruity theory holds that humor arises from the collision between what is expected and what is presented –from the abrupt break of expectation, when something initially promising – dissolves suddenly and surprisingly. This sudden frustration of emotional expectation would be the engine of laughter. According to this logic, the comic is structured in the collision of contradictory ideas that, upon meeting, produce surprise, discomfort, or inversion of meaning. The impact of a joke depends both on the distance between elements and on the way they are articulated.

4 Depending on the author, it is also called the Inconsistency, Contradiction, Ambivalence, or Bisociation theory.



That is what occurs in the choreography for “*Porto Alegre é Demais*,” in which the lyrics exalt the city while the accompanying gestures are ironic, descriptive of urban and interpersonal problems, and contrary to the song’s idealization. Laughter is not simply a reaction but the consequence of a complex aesthetic construction involving antithesis, irony, and paradox. This is where the subtext appears, as something arising from the clash between exaltation and critique, literalness and deviation. In this zone of friction and field of noise between music, lyric, and gesture, *Dance a Letra* finds its power as choreography.

5 Dance and laughter

For all this to take place – the literal gesture to become a catalyst for journeys rather than an endpoint closed in on itself – it is essential to understand the importance of dance as a language in this process. Dance organizes, articulates, and transforms the relationship between gesture and word into a choreographic logic capable of generating laughter and that third meaning Roland Barthes (1970) describes. It is the choreographic logic involved in creation and composition – not merely the selected gestures or the gestural technique of execution – that turns *Dance a Letra* into choreography, and that changes everything. When we organize gestures not solely according to bodily mechanics, the isolated word, or the song itself, but according to choreographic thought, we open space for new meanings to emerge. This logic allows us to move beyond immediate laughter and reach more complex zones of expression: critique, poetics, estrangement, displacement. Otherwise, we run the constant risk of remaining confined to technique, reducing the literal gesture to mere effect, incapable of provoking any subversion. On the contrary, the initial laughter elicited by the literal gesture must be interpreted and handled as the opening of a possibility: How can dance be made with and from this? How can one move through technique and use it as a springboard to extend layers of meaning? Therefore, *Dance a Letra* demands attentiveness, choreographic thinking, gestural articulation, and compositional sensitivity to subvert, to provoke laughter, to unsettle and, above all, to compose meanings that were not given in the lyric, nor in the gesture, nor in the music, but that emerge from how these layers meet, rub against one another, and reinvent themselves in choreographic performance.

A concrete example of the importance of dance as a language in this process appears in the asyndetic character of *Dance a Letra*: a choreographic text built without cohesion. Or rather, an imagistic text—a fragmented composition that echoes the ideogrammatic logic studied by Sergei Eisenstein, in which autonomous images are juxtaposed without syntactic links and, in their encounter, produce collisions of meaning.

This is precisely the point of departure of Eisenstein’s intellectual montage: a montage that, beginning with a “primitive” form of thinking through images, is capable of articulating concepts through the sheer poetic play of metaphor and metonymy. Two images are placed together to suggest a new relationship not



present in the isolated elements; thus, through associative processes, one arrives at an abstract and “invisible” idea. [...] This eloquent example shows how an idea is born from the pure materiality of raw, particular characters: the interpenetration of two simple representations produces a generalizing image that surpasses the individual particularities of its constituents (Machado, 1997, p. 302-303).

From this perspective, *Dance a Letra* approaches asyndeton, a rhetorical figure (a matter of syntax) in which the suppression of conjunctions and connectives in a sentence is used to highlight the central idea. The deliberate omission of connective tissue between terms or ideas results in discourse marked by abrupt cuts, discontinuous rhythm, and leaps in signification. In this sense, the choreography is composed of gestures placed side by side like independent images, almost seamless, without smooth transitions, without narrative conduction. Yet the body performing this fragmentary logic is a living, cohesive, articulated body. And here lies one of the major technical challenges of *Dance a Letra*: it is impossible for the dancing body to operate a true lack of cohesion. Bodily movement is, by nature, chained: one gesture follows the next in a continuous muscular, skeletal, and cognitive sequence. The body itself – an integrated network – connects everything systematically, even when the compositional intention seeks the opposite.

For this reason, the dancer must develop tools and technical strategies capable of making this non-cohesion visible. How can one interrupt the flow of movement? How can commas, periods, and exclamation points be brought into choreography? How can gestures be divided, images separated, the residual movement that naturally links one gesture to another be avoided? Certain dance strategies are essential here: the contrast of movement qualities, for instance, heightens the difference between juxtaposed gestures. Beginning a gesture suddenly, with a staccato or explosive accent, can help erase the trace of the previous movement, avoiding what could be called gestural echo. It is a matter of finding technical ways to break fluency, to render the gesture abrupt, isolated, almost graphic.

In this process, the discipline of artistic practice becomes crucial. Making people laugh requires rigor. There is a curious, almost poetic paradox between the lightness of laughter and the density of the labor required to produce it. What appears onstage as grace, spontaneity, and ease is, in fact, the result of highly technical bodily practice, of meticulous attention to timing, space, precision, and refinement of gesture. There is, here, a discipline of humor. This discipline has nothing to do with the domestication of the body or with choreographic standardization. It is not the “docile bodies” of Michel Foucault (1975), shaped by disciplinary techniques to become useful, productive, and obedient, but bodies that are present, available, ethical, and committed to artistic practice. It is a discipline born of desire, attentiveness, and integrity of performance. A radically poetic discipline that demands constancy, dedication, and choreographic intelligence.

It is through this engagement with the language of dance that the literal gesture gains potency and humor becomes more eloquent and precise. It is through investment in corporeal research, technical training, and the choreographic composition of gestural literalness that it becomes possible to bring laughter to the stage not merely as an effect but as discourse. How can



a shoulder blade make someone laugh? How can a twist of the wrist ironize a word? How can the gaze or the posture of the torso carry critique, parody, or absurdity? In this way, *Dance a Letra*, whether as procedure or choreography, finds its expressive force in dance. It is through dance – its forms, speeds, timings, spaces, foci, movement qualities, connections, and gestural discourses – that the interplay between gesture and laughter is established. It is the logic of dance applied to the procedure that transforms *Dance a Letra* into choreography, as it surpasses the initial laughter and access other layers of reading and preventing technique from collapsing into a self-enclosed mechanical exercise of mimicry and musical illustration. When dance and literal gesture meet in critical composition, the choreographic text emerges, and with it, risk, thought, and the possibility of new meanings.

After all, dancing with humor is not necessarily about being funny. It is about having timing, precision, and awareness to know the exact moment to accent a gesture, cut a sequence, use a pause, compose a gaze, a shift, a turn, a collapse, a hesitation, all with clarity, coherence, and rhythm. Making people laugh through dance requires refined choices, detailed observation, attention to what moves both inside and outside the gesture. This is why *Dance a Letra*, when taken seriously, becomes one of the most demanding endeavors an artist can undertake. Doing *Dance a Letra* ultimately means intervening in dance itself, rewriting it through the literal gesture with technical precision, aesthetic intention, and stage presence. That is hard, very hard work. It demands discipline to provoke even a small laugh. It requires even more for that laugh to be incisive, poetic, and performative. Working with humor in dance is one of the most serious and difficult creative tasks and, not rarely, one of the most powerful. Choosing laughter as theme, procedure, and scenic path entails paying the high price of being misunderstood or labeled superficial. Yet well-crafted laughter, delivered at the right time, with the exact gesture and a surgical pause, provokes thought, corporeality and friction. Dance, in this context, becomes both means and end; technique and thought; discipline and delirium; body and language. It is within this terrain of complexity that I seek to operate *Dance a Letra* as choreography of poetic and political density. Something that is capable of laughing and making laugh, creating tension, composing, and exposing vulnerabilities with choreographic precision.

6 Final Considerations: the formative politics of humor

It is at the intersection of dance and laughter that the politics of humor appears. It unfolding on two interconnected fronts: the critical capacity of laughter and its formative potential, especially for audience development and access democratization to the performing arts.

This politics is embedded in the discipline of humor: performing a well-made foolishness demands technical rigor, critical creation, and persistency. It is not any amusing gesture but a choreography constructed with precision, intention, and awareness of its place. Foolishness here



is strategy, not escape: an elaborated gesture that infiltrates normative discourses, dismantles expectations, and opens space for thought. A well-crafted foolishness is a political act — a gesture disguised as laughter that displaces, disarms, and critiques. The scene *Porto Alegre é Demais*, for example, stages poetic infiltration: an exaltatory, institutional song is undone by gestures of displaced meaning that ironize rather than attack, revealing an orchestrated aesthetic and political operation.

The audience senses this. Common reactions after performances, such as “it’s funny, but intelligent,” “it’s funny, but there’s something more”. This “it’s funny but...” indicate a fold in the discourse: laughter at first and then another layer, perhaps more critical or political. At a scene’s end the applause and shouting are not mere aesthetic enthusiasm but an energy of sharing — almost a silent pact between stage and audience: “Yes, we also think Porto Alegre is not all that”. Laughter becomes a symptom of mutual understanding; the subtext of *Dance a Letra* completes itself in reception. Often the audience catalyzes the laughter, producing a collective effect of active listening, accomplice reading, and political affect.

Dance a Letra was also my route to a long-pursued aim: to place dance on mainstream shelves — a metaphor for popularizing dance, democratizing access, and forming audiences. I want dance where people are: consumable yet critical, experimental yet communicative. My practice negotiates this duality — reaching broad publics while pushing the language’s limits, in questioning the very formats of dance, including mass dance with which I also relate. As Adriana Calcanhotto put it, “making poetry on the radio” (Weinschelbaum, 2006): making the experimental popular without abandoning communication in a constant tension and creative crossroads. This communicative ambition has guided my work.

We presented many performances of *Abobrinhas Recheadas: Dance a Letra* and subsequent pieces (*Ensaio sobre ausência e doçura* 2016; *Dance a Letra Grupo pocket live gestos caetano* 2017; *Abobrinhas Recheadas: rei Roberto* 2018; *Qual é a música dessa cena?* 2018; *Balbúrdia* 2019). In all, laughter functioned as an entry portal, a lure that brought people to dance for the first time. Laughter served as an access tool, bridging audience and contemporary dance in a formative scenic complicity.

I speak here of audience development, but not only in the sense of dissemination or cultural mediation actions. The performance proposes a way to read gesture: laughter is deployed to open comprehension, inviting the audience to read, laugh, think, and feel. Laughter here is not cheap alienation but approachability, a code enabling broader encounters with dance without impoverishing aesthetics. On the contrary, precisely because the structure supporting humor is rigorous, its permeative power increases.

Thus, *Dance a Letra* is an artistic–pedagogical device with formative power. It trains artists, demanding attention to gesture, composition, and choreographic discourse. It also trains audiences by welcoming without simplifying. The piece has been studied and replicated in undergraduate⁵ and

5 SILVA, Anne Plein da. *Apesar de você, a poética do riso na dança: o risível cênico-coreográfico a partir da Macarenando*



graduate projects⁶, workshops⁷, and other choreographies inspired by its procedure. Over successive presentations people returned, brought others, and commented; many had never before attended a dance performance. *Dance a Letra* therefore proposes ways to expand, distribute, communicate, and live dance with the public. One of its main contributions to Porto Alegre's performing arts is combining expanded access with linguistic density: a balance between popular and experimental, laughter and discourse, technique and affect. As Renato Mendonça observed:

The engine behind Macarenando is the “Dance a letra” procedure. Originally devised as an exercise in audience interaction – inviting spectators to propose song titles for dancers to convert into choreography – “Dance a letra” has evolved into a complex game of meanings. If, at first, the gesture sought to literally translate a word or verse, over successive productions “Dance a letra” became almost “think the lyrics”. The choreographies now play with representing the same word in multiple ways, drawing on context and engaging the process itself, at times absurd, at times disarmingly romantic. It is a challenge of imagination and of the partnership forged between audience and stage. Believe that art is a friend to life. And Macarenando is one of the most delightful expressions of that friendship (Mendonça, 2018).

To make *Dance a Letra* is to play the surface in order to excavate the subsoil: to laugh at a gesture, thereby reveal a discourse, to teach how to read movement, and then subvert its code. Its strength lies in speaking to many people without relinquishing aesthetic, political, or choreographic density. *Dance a Letra* is, with no doubt, the most serious, meticulously crafted, and politically potent foolishness I have placed on stage.

Dance Concept. 2020. Monografia. (Graduação em Licenciatura em Dança) – Curso de Licenciatura em Dança, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2020. VIEIRA, Giulia Baptista. *Abobrinhas recheadas: estratégias comunicacionais para a dança, na trama midiática*. 2018. Monografia. (Graduação em Licenciatura em Dança) – Licenciatura em Dança, Curso de Licenciatura em Dança, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2018.

6 VIEIRA, Giulia Baptista. *Gestar Caetano: um estudo sobre gesto e mediatização como elementos de criação do espetáculo Dance a Letra* Grupo Pocket Live Gestos Caetano. Dissertação. (Mestrado) – PPGAC, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2023.

7 MAC, Diego. *Oficina Permanente de Criação em Dança da Macarenando*. Dance Concept. Porto Alegre: 2015-2025.



References

- BARTHES, Roland. *O óbvio e o obtuso*. Tradução de Isabel Pascoal. Lisboa: Edições 70, 2009.
- BOURRIAUD, Nicolas. *Pós-produção: como a arte reprograma o mundo contemporâneo*. Tradução de Denise Bottmann. São Paulo: Martins, 2009.
- COESSENS, K. A arte da pesquisa em artes - traçando práxis e reflexão. *ARJ – Art Research Journal: Revista de Pesquisa em Artes*, Natal, v. 1, n. 2, p. 1–20, 2014. Disponível em: <https://periodicos.ufrn.br/artresearchjournal/article/view/5423> . Acesso em: 27 maio 2025.
- FERNANDES, Ciane. Pesquisa Somático-Performativa: Sintonia, Sensibilidade, Integração. *ARJ – Art Research Journal: Revista de Pesquisa em Artes*, Natal, v. 1, n. 2, p. 76-95, 2014. Disponível em: <https://periodicos.ufrn.br/artresearchjournal/article/view/5262> . Acesso em: 27 maio 2025.
- FERNANDES, C.; PIZARRO, D.; SCIALOM, M. *Prática artística como Pesquisa, Somática e Ecoperformance*. São Paulo: Giostri, 2024.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. *Vigiar e punir: Nascimento da prisão*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2014.
- INSTITUO LING. *Catálogo do projeto Ponto de Teatro com texto do curador Renato Mendonça sobre o espetáculo Abobrinhas Recheadas: Rei Roberto*. Porto Alegre: Instituto Ling, 2018.
- LIMA, Dani. Gesto, corporeidade, ética e política: pensando conexões e diálogos. In: SIMPÓSIO INTERNACIONAL REPENSANDO MITOS CONTEMPORÂNEOS - Babel: tradições, traduções e traições, II, 2018, Campinas. Anais [...]. Campinas: UNICAMP, 2018. Disponível em: <https://www.iar.unicamp.br/publionline/simpac/www.publionline.iar.unicamp.br/index.php/simpac/article/download/1185/1185-Texte%20de%201%27article-3576-1-10-20180426.pdf> . Acesso em: 27 maio 2025.
- MAC, Diego. Oficina Permanente de Criação em Dança da Macarenando Dance Concept. Porto Alegre: 2015-2025.
- MAC, Diego; MALGARIZI, Gui. Macarenando Dance Concept comemora 05 anos de fundação com programação especial no Theatro São Pedro, *Bruna Paulin*, [S. l.], 2019. Disponível em: <https://brunapaulin.com/2019/07/18/macarenando-dance-concept-comemora-05-anos-de-fundacao-com-programacao-especial-no-theatro-sao-pedro/> . Acesso em: 26 jun. 2025.
- MACHADO, Arlindo. *Arte e Mídia*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2008.
- MACHADO, Arlindo. *Pré-cinemas-Pós-cinemas*. Campinas: Papirus, 1997.
- PORTO Alegre é demais. Intérprete: Isabela Fogaça. Compositor: José Fogaça. In: Porto Alegre É Demais! Intérprete: Vários intérpretes. Porto Alegre: Sollo Livre, 2000. 2min30.
- REY, Sandra. Os escritos de artistas como elemento meta-artístico. In: ENCONTRO NACIONAL DE PESQUISADORES EM ARTES PLÁSTICAS, 27º, 2018, São Paulo. Anais [...]. Simpósio 8: escritos de artistas, grafias da arte. São Paulo: UNESP, Instituto de Artes, 2018. p. 3230. Disponível em: <https://anpap.org.br/anais/2018/> . Acesso em: 26 nov. 2025.
- SILVA, Anne Plein da. *Apesar de você, a poética do riso na dança: o risível cênico-coreográfico a partir da Macarenando Dance Concept*. 2020. Monografia (Graduação em Licenciatura em Dança) – Licenciatura em Dança, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2020.
- TESSLER, E.; BRITES, B. (org.). *O Meio como ponto zero: metodologia de pesquisa em Artes Visuais*. v. 1. Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade, 2002.



VIEIRA, Giulia Baptista. *Abobrinhas recheadas: estratégias comunicacionais para a dança, na trama midiática*. 2018. Monografia (Graduação em Licenciatura em Dança) – Licenciatura em Dança, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2018.

VIEIRA, Giulia Baptista. *Gestar Caetano: um estudo sobre gesto e mediação como elementos de criação do espetáculo Dance a Letra Grupão Pocket Live Gestos Caetano*. Dissertação. (Mestrado) – PPGAC, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2023.

WEINSCHELBAUM, Violeta. *Estação Brasil*. São Paulo: 34, 2006.



Academic Biography

Diego Machado - Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)

Doctoral student at the Programa de Pós-graduação em Artes Cênicas na Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

E-mail: diegomac2010@gmail.com

Funding

CAPES

Ethics Committee Approval

Not applicable

Competing interests

No declared conflict of interest

Research Context

No declared research context

Copyright

Diego Machado

Copyright of the translation

Celso Rimoli and Leonardo Maciel

Contribution of authorship (CRediT)

Not applicable

License

This is a paper distributed in Open Access under the terms of the License Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.pt-br>.

**Evaluation Method**

Single-Blind Peer Review

Editors

Rita Gusmão

Mariana Azevedo

Marcelo Cordeiro

Peer Review History

Submission date: 29 May 2025

Approval date: 30 September 2025