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PORTUGUESA

DANCING THE CITY: CONTEMPORARY DANCE AS A REFLECTION  
OF AN URBAN LIFESTYLE AND OF A SOCIO-POLITICAL AGENDA

Dissertation presented to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to  
obtain a Master's Degree in Culture Studies: Performance and  
Creativity

By

Beatriz da Silva Vasconcelos Pereira

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas

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## **Abstract**

Looking at our society in this moment of conflict and tensions between opposing ideas and forces, it is important to understand how art reflects those issues and reflects about them. This work proposes to study contemporary dance as a language that goes beyond words using the body as a communication medium, which embodies and embeds its surroundings, namely the intensification of power relations, the objectification of people or the creation of physical, social and personal borders.

Centred in nowadays' social problems, the dissertation intends to look at two contemporary dance pieces – *Kreatur* by Sasha Waltz and *Cementary* by Patricia Aperi – as examples of a socio-political agenda that is translated onto stage, having the city and the urban context as background.

This research questions how dance can communicate and represent negative aspects of urban spaces. Furthermore, it investigates if dance can cause an effect of change and how a certain situation of conflict can be transformed into an art piece with a social impact. Departing from the discussion of the role of dance, choreography and body in relation to the urban space, as well as from the close examination of the two chosen artistic pieces, this dissertation wishes to analyse how contemporary dance can engage with society, not only in terms of the topic(s) it addresses, but also in how the dance is performed and how it impacts the audience. *Kreatur* and *Cementary* are seen as proposals of a different kind of reading and interpretation of contemporary times and issues, specifically in an urban context. They are understood as cultural products that translate a personal view of reality onto a stage and spark new knowledge in the audience.

## **Keywords**

Body, city, dance, representation, society

## **Resumo**

Olhando para a nossa sociedade num momento de conflitos e tensões sociais, onde circulam ideias e forças opostas, é importante tentar perceber como a arte reflete estas questões e reflete sobre elas. Este trabalho propõe estudar a dança contemporânea como uma linguagem que vai além das palavras, utilizando o corpo como meio de comunicação, que incorpora e veste o que rodeia os sujeitos, tal como a intensificação das relações de poder, a objetivação de pessoas ou a criação de fronteiras físicas, sociais e pessoais.

Centrada nos problemas sociais do agora, com esta dissertação pretende-se olhar para duas peças de dança contemporânea – *Kreatur* de Sasha Waltz e *Cementary* de Patricia Aperi – como exemplos de uma agenda sociopolítica que é traduzida para palco, tendo a cidade e o contexto urbano como pano de fundo.

Esta pesquisa questiona a forma como a dança pode comunicar e representar aspetos negativos dos espaços urbanos. Procura também investigar se a dança pode causar um efeito de mudança e como uma determinada situação de conflito pode ser transformada numa obra de arte com impacto social. Partindo da discussão do papel da dança, da coreografia e do corpo em relação ao espaço urbano e de um estudo aprofundado das duas peças artísticas escolhidas, esta dissertação propõe analisar de que forma a dança contemporânea se relaciona com a sociedade, não apenas no que diz respeito ao(s) tópico(s) abordado, mas também em como isso afeta o público. *Partindo da ideia de que a performance é feita por alguém para outra pessoa (Schechner, 2013), esta dissertação também considera a importância do espectador, partindo do pressuposto de que existem tantas interpretações quanto intérpretes. No entanto, a dissertação está mais centrada na intenção e proposta do coreógrafo. Kreatur e Cementary são vistas como uma proposta de leitura diferente dos tempos e das questões atuais, nomeadamente num contexto urbano. São entendidos como produtos culturais que traduzem para cena uma análise pessoal da realidade e geram novos conhecimentos no público.*

## **Palavras-Chave**

Corpo, cidade, dança, representação, sociedade

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Beatriz Vasconcelos Pereira

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## Introduction

Looking at our society in this moment of conflict and tension between opposing ideas and forces, it is necessary to look at certain issues humanity currently faces – as the migrant crisis, social isolation, segregation or affection crisis – and try to understand how art reflects them and reflects about them.

This work proposes to study contemporary dance as a language that goes beyond words, using the body as a communication medium, which embodies and embeds the surrounding conflicts, such as intensification of power relations, objectification of people or creation of physical, social and personal borders. This research specifically questions how dance can communicate and represent aspects of urban spaces. Centred in nowadays' social problems, this dissertation intends to look at a selection of current contemporary dance pieces as examples of a socio-political agenda translated into stage, having the city and the urban context as background. Furthermore, it investigates if art can effect change and how a certain situation of tension or conflict can be transformed into an art piece with social impact. It wishes to analyse how contemporary dance engages with society, not only in terms of the topic(s) it addresses, but also in how it impacts the audience.

Through a theoretical approach based on the intersection between culture studies and dance studies, through bibliographic revision and by reframing concepts related to cities and urban behaviour, social representation and dance issues in culture studies, this dissertation will look into a sample of contemporary dance pieces produced and presented in the last year, whose aim was to stage and represent social reality, namely issues that arise in an urban context. *Cementary* and *Kreatur* are the case studies under discussion here. Both pieces premiered in 2017 and have a dramaturgical purpose that questions contemporary societies and the relationships that individuals establish with other individuals and the urban lifestyle. In *Kreatur*, Sasha Waltz and her 14 dancers examine the phenomenon of existence against the background of a disrupted society: power and lack of power, dominance and weakness, freedom and control, community and isolation. In *Cementary*, the choreographer Patricia Apergi focuses on the urban labyrinth and the city as a place of chaos. She sees the city as a place of displacement, where the homeless wander in the middle of big blocks of cement. It is a show that expresses the detachment from an

ideal to show that the more we pursue it, the more we plunge into an empty anxiety and nothing that we know today will remain the same for the times to come.

*Kreatur* was the piece that triggered this dissertation. After seeing it live at CCB in Lisbon on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the questions of human condition, power relations and how affections and the notion of community are vanishing from modern society became a central topic in my research about dance and society. *Cementary* appeared as a perfect link to urban issues and the topic of distance and trust between people in a city, presenting a utopian, but somehow possible, vision of a future. Both performances are contemporary dance pieces concerned with today's society, where the body of each dancer has a role in the choreography. There is a sense of aesthetic in these performances which gives different layers of meaning to the pieces. More than just worrying about choreography, both choreographers and directors are also committed to the dramaturgy of the piece, scenes, clothes and music. *Kreatur* and *Cementary* are pieces in which the *corps de ballet* mirror social issues, and tell the story of our times with movement, reflecting a vision of a reality that can be common to numerous people.

The choice of such recent pieces is due to an interest in exploring the immediacy with which choreographers scan issues happening at this very moment. Given the social global conflicts already mentioned, i.e. refugee crisis, social indifference and disruption of affection within the urban environment, studying artworks that reflect the current moment seems to be the best route to understand the relations that are established between different fields and to raise awareness about what society is going through. Due to the lack of manifest interest in analysing these types of work from a transdisciplinary academic perspective, it is urgent to understand how this mirroring of life is happening and the aims and expected impacts are. However, since both pieces are from last year, and hence too recent, it will not be possible to fully grasp their impact in the audience and the power they may or may not have as agents of change. Therefore, the impact of each case study will not be studied, but only a subjective perspective will be shown. The critical analysis of both *Kreatur* and *Cementary* will be anchored in a personal perspective, by someone who is used to read and analyse performance, whose academic background is based in communication, culture and performance, and also has some practical experience in classical and contemporary dance.

Departing from the idea that performance is done by someone to someone else (Schechner, 2013; Carlson, 2004), this dissertation considers also, albeit briefly, the importance of the spectator, having in mind that there are as many interpretations as interpreters. It is the audience that recognizes and validates an event such as a performance, and there is always a link created between the artistic object and the audience. In the case of contemporary dance, choreographers use the dance piece not only to find a way of coping with the world at the moment, as Crystal Pite says in relation to *Flight Pattern*<sup>1</sup>, but also to try and create an experience that evokes a call for action and causes some emotional effect in the audience: “art is ‘the language of emotions’, in the sense in which, because of natural causal connections, a work of art produces in an audience a sense of emotional experience the artist himself originally grasped as capable of being excited in himself and others by the work he has devised” (Copelan and Cohen, 1983: 377). Following up on Laurence Louppe’s idea that all artworks are a dialogue (Louppe, 2012: 28), it is important to keep in mind that there is always a message to be delivered to someone and that this same message manifests itself in the reception form of the dance piece, which in return is in relation to the choreographer's proposal. The power of a dance might have a direct social impact on a single person or result in structural change or social manifestation<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, Nicolas Bourriaud also mentions that the levels of participation and the models of sociability proposed and represented by the art piece create an arena of exchange, not only provoked by aesthetic criteria, but also by symbolic value and finally by human relations reflected by the art object. Yet, it is important to emphasize that, since the case studies are too recent, there is no way to accurately measure the social influence of those dances.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with the choreographer Crystal Pite about her piece *Flight Pattern* (2017) for The Royal Ballet. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tSBkT9AFWA>

<sup>2</sup> In 1998, Ohad Naharin and his company, Basheva Dance Company, were invited to participate in the celebration of Israeli’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence from the British mandate. They were going to present a choreography for the music “Echad Mi Yodea”, which is an icon of Israeli culture. However, during the choreography, the dancers were supposed to take their clothes ending up dancing in their underwear. Since there was nudity, the most conservative and religious groups opposed to it and made Ohad Naharin agree that the performance would only go on stage if the dancers were fully dressed. A few hours before going on stage, Naharin resigned from his position as director of the company. Dancers and musicians followed him in a gesture of solidarity and the play did not go on stage, generating a small manifestation by the population waiting for the performance. The government finally gave in and allowed the performance to be made with the original clothes, against the will of the religious leaders. This episode, with world repercussions, is seen as a way in which art and culture transcend political power, leading to greater cultural freedom and allowing some artistic freedom.

The study of dance as a cultural practice is, in Buckland's words and in the same line of thought as Performance Studies, "an ongoing dialogue of conversants located within the same temporal and global frame" (Buckland, 2010: 337) and, therefore, neither the object under analysis nor the researcher can be displaced from a time and space. It is from this perspective that this dissertation questions the social role of contemporary dance as a mirror of current socio-political issues. It will find support in Culture Studies, as it is about society, relationships, perceptions, intending to engage with social and everyday politics through a cultural object (Grossberg, 2010). Using dance pieces as cultural objects, the aim of this work is to connect discursive embodied practices with everyday life issues and social reality in contemporary western urban cultures. This relation between urban studies and performance has been studied since the emergence of the movement of Situationists. The environment experienced in the end of the 60s, says Simon Shepherd, resulted in a call for rebellion in order to question the rules of urbanism and other social constraints. There was a need to inquire about social relations and a demand to stop the alienation issue that the population was living in Europe. Defining society as a mediated reality, highlighting the ideas of spectacle<sup>3</sup> and consumption, this international group looked at urban life as the solution to work with social capital. The city was the place of contact and for establishing contacts. According to Shepherd, these ideas were essential to promote "the dynamic of interaction as a means of unsettling fixed structures and ideas, replacing a material and discourse stability with constant negotiation and fluidity, managing not to be impressed, as it were, by dominant order, indeed impressing itself onto that order" (Shepherd, 2016: 88).

Even though studies about dance and its different connections have increased, there are not a lot of theoretical works about the relation between a social and political agenda and the urban context, despite the fact that numerous choreographers have been increasingly using dance to represent what the rest of society is dealing with. In

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<sup>3</sup> According to Guy Debord, modern societies are an immense accumulation of spectacles, concluding that everything is a representation. The reality is fragmented and so everything is a false image, a recreation and a mediated experience. The author, in *Society of Spectacle*, says that "The spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a true product of that reality. Conversely, real life is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it" (Debord, 2006: 8). He concludes that reality emerges within the spectacle, so it becomes the real. Individuals are in this sense living in an alienated state where, more than living, they are contemplating and only following the dominant images, instead of understanding their own lives and inner desires and will (Debord, 2006:16).

spite of the efforts of these new groups of academics that try to connect dance with other practices and fields of study, these notions are still not in practice.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, this dissertation intends to be a valid contribution to the field of Culture Studies as an academic investigation that reflects about contemporary dance and contemporary urban society, making use of a strong theoretical framework to shed a new light on the selected practical projects and on the conceptual processes behind them. Using the abovementioned case studies, this dissertation proposes to study theoretical concepts of social science, using a scientific and critical approach in order to relate different areas of study. Using a transdisciplinary process of analysis, this dissertation aims to produce a conceptual approach that enables the fusion between arts, culture and society.

In general terms, this work proposes to identify the connection that can be established between dance and urban life, recognizing how reality is translated into choreographic movement. My intention is (1) to analyse contemporary dance pieces as cultural objects and socio-political mirrors, (2) to look at choreography as a symbolic and embodied language that communicates something to someone and (3) to confirm that a body can be a representational vehicle and social issues can be explored through embodiment. This study goes in agreement with Jens Richard Giersdorf's dance studies definition, in which he talks about Janet Lansdale and her view of dance investigation using three main categories: making choreography (which incorporates the ability to create dances and the knowledge of underlying principles of dance production), performing (the skill to make dance happen and how it is interpreted), and appreciating (critical description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation) (Giersdorf, 2009: 33). In this introduction, the topic of this dissertation is going to be presented and its connection with the three major fields in which this thesis is integrated in - performance studies, dance studies and urban studies - explained, being highlighted the sociological side of dance.

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<sup>4</sup> Brandstetter defends that these connections between and dance and theory are difficult to be establish and very dependent of specific context and experience, being dependent from each choreographer. She says: "In the history of dance, the relationship between practice and theory is something of a *liaison dangereuse*. Indeed, in the modern West, the relationship between dance and theory is complex and defies easy characterisation. As, through, in, out of, against, before, after, or, between – these and a multitude of other local, temporal, causal or modal prepositions may be employed to denote the complex patterns of relationship between dance and theory." (Brandstetter and Klein, 2013: 12)

Concerning the new cultural paradigm of this century, where performance and performativity take on a privileged responsibility, as McKenzie and Carlson advocate, cultural objects are apprehended as ways of helping problematize the aporias of our society and rethinking some of our conflicts and tensions (Gil, 2008: 140). Culture and art also act as agents of modernization, critical reflection, cross-culture dialogue, and social identifiers of the self and the other. In this way, this dissertation uses a transdisciplinary approach, where culture studies, dance studies, performance studies, as well as sociology, are put into dialogue to understand the role of contemporary dance as a language where a social and political agenda is represented through embodied symbols, constructed movements and kinesthetic and visual codes. The body appears here as a medium that establishes a relation between art and real-life issues. As Carlson highlights, the performer's body becomes not only an object but also a product in the context of performance (Carlson, 2004: 73). The body is seen as something that can be transformed and used according to a will, having always in mind the surroundings, the context and the relation with other bodies. As Lawrence Grossberg (2010) describes, an object studied under cultural analysis must be related with the construction of the contexts of life as matrices of power and must have discursive practices intimately involved in the organisation of those relations of power. Just like Isabel Gil defends, the value of context gives power to a kind of discourse, in this case, it is dance that is in dialogue with the society, always in connection with the author's agenda: "the act of dancing or choreographing is always a situated one, historically contingent and negotiating from the embedded subjectivity of the artist the motions and emotions of the social, political, sexual, economical or religious discourses" (Gil, 2010: 93).

This work departs from the observation of a lack of critical assessment of dance and of studies that usually tend to focus only in one subject or field of study. My method of analysis will be based on and will combine different fields, methods and approaches such as dance observation, performance studies, dance studies, culture studies, philosophy, sociology and even urban studies. Lepecki's ideas about the body and choreography are essential for this study given that different knowledges are crossed according to specific dance pieces in a particular context, where – just as Lepecki defends – the audience is presented to a political reframing of the body and its social readjustment. Choreography is, in his view, a new way to codify and display

movement, a dispositive that allows the construction of a new text and a recreation of a reality:

in order to think the relation between choreography, representation, and subjectivity, one needs to understand representation not only as that which is specific to the mimetic (that is, to what is properly theatrical to theatre) but to consider it as an ontohistorical force, a power that in the West has entrapped subjectivity within a series of isomorphic equivalence. Particularly relevant for dance studies is Bel's disclosure 'imprinted not only on the art, but on the entire culture of the West (its religion, philosophies, politics)' that representation establishes between visibility and presence, presence and unity of form, unity of form and identity. (Lepecki, 2006: 46)

By stating that choreography is a representation, a new production of a specific social reality according to someone's point of view, and by bearing in mind the idea of a dancer's body as a medium, this dissertation will depart from a theoretical revision in order to inform the critical analysis of the two case studies. Despite the efforts to keep this dissertation impartial and universal, since we are talking about performance, and the objects under investigation are not closed in themselves, there is always a subjective point of view represented in the study.

## **Structure**

This dissertation will be divided into four parts, in which contemporary dance will be studied as language to represent a socio-political agenda from a choreographer in nowadays global society, especially in an urban context.

The first chapter, "1. The Art of Dance", proposes to analyse dance theories by using the concepts of movement, language and corporeal message to understand how dance can function as a representational art. The chapter departs from a summary of different visions about the concept of dance and performance in different times and periods. The poetics of contemporary dance and the singularities of this type of dance are also explored in this chapter, in order to present a clear image of dance as an art that reflects social and political aspects of its surroundings.

The following chapter, "2. The Contemporary Urban Society", resorts to Bauman's and Castells' ideas about nowadays' society. The urban society will be analysed as a place of encounters, where the right to be presented and to exist is always in relation with others. The urban space is present as a space of mediation, organization and social construction, where, in order to find solutions for the progress

of society, the values of community must be restructured and stronger bonds with other individuals must be established.

Given that the body is the medium studied in this dissertation, the next chapter, “3. The Body and the City”, aims to explore the relationship between the body and the city, bearing in mind embodiment theories and some sociological topics that are directly connected with embodied issues. It investigates the purpose of dance as representation of a socio-political reality and tries to understand how choreography can embed the social surroundings. The chapter finishes with examples of bodies dancing the city and performances happening in the city, which explain the theories previously explored.

In the fourth chapter, “4. Performing (a) Reality”, ideas of art as a mirror and the notion of dance as symbolic language take centre stage. The process of translation of reality into a body, through embodiment and choreographic creation and practice, will also be studied by means of selected pieces, used as examples of the novelty and accuracy of dance in this social representation. For this purpose, two examples of dance performances that embody issues of our times will be presented and discussed. *Kreatur* by Sasha Waltz & Guests and *Cementary* by the Aerites Dance Company are analysed in depth. With the piece *Kreatur*, special attention will be given to the relations between individuals and to the personal human condition in today’s society. Here, relations of power and human exploitation will be taken into account, as well as questions related with community and collectives. As far as *Cementary* is concerned, which entails a very specific socio-political agenda, this dissertation will look into how the choreographer and her interpreters embody the issues at hand, constructing a new urban reality where the distance between individuals is being reduced and bonds between people are being reinforced in order to achieve a collective progress. Finally, concepts such as empathy and affect will be reviewed, albeit under a personal perspective, since the real impact of the pieces is not possible to be fully measured yet, nor the voices of the choreographers could be heard.

## 1. The Art of Dance

### 1.1. From dance to performance and back

R. G. Collingwood, in the book *The Principles of Art*, argues that all art is a form of language. In art, he sees a way of artists to express what is inside their minds, as a manner to imagine and to create something from those ideas. In this way, to talk about art is to mention communication and, hence, language. As Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen explain about R. G. Collingwood:

In his view, language is any controlled and expressive bodily activity. Every kind of language, including verbal language (to which he assigns no primacy or priority), is a specialized form or offshoot of an original language of total bodily gesture. In this sense dance is the mother of all languages and all other 'languages' are merely subdivisions of this original language. (Copeland and Cohen, 1983: 367)

R. G. Collingwood also states that what is expressed through dance is impossible to be expressed by any other language. The total use of the body is the use of gesture<sup>5</sup>, the original language that everybody uses and understands generally. It is something innate and, in spite of each culture having its own code of gestures, it is something that all individuals do without thinking, using as an example the gestures we do with our hands while talking.

This dissertation must start by finding a definition of dance that corresponds to the aims and expectations of the project. However, it is already known that to find one definition for the concept "dance" is a utopian task. Hereupon, this chapter will gather leading references in this field and discuss what has been said, written, studied and done about this issue.

Dance is sometimes defined as any patterned, rhythmic movement on space and time. A broad definition of this sort, which refuses to distinguish between human and non-human motion, enables us to describe as 'dances' the movements of waves or the orbits of heavenly bodies. (Copeland and Cohen, 1983: 1)

From Copeland and Cohen's point of view, traditionally, dance can be seen as an imitation of nature, as communication or expression, and finally as an art form. Dance has been studied throughout different time periods and, subsequently, different concepts have emerged. For Jean-Georges Noverre, dance should be a faithful

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<sup>5</sup> In the study of dance, it is important to make a distinction between gesture and movement. Movement is an action, something more general, even more automatic and is transversal to non-human actions. A gesture is something more localized and fragmented. A gesture is always intentional and transmits something, thus being a human practice.

likeness of beautiful nature, related with pantomime and accurate representation of nature. Just as poetry or painting, for Noverre, dancing is a mimetic copy of nature:

Poetry, painting and dancing, Sir, are, or should be, no other than a faithful likeness of beautiful nature. [...] A ballet is a picture, or rather a series of pictures connected one with the other by the plot which provides the theme of the ballet; the stage is, as it were, the canvas on which the composer expresses his ideas; the choice of music, scenery and costumes are his colours; the composer is the painter. (Noverre, 1983:10)

For Selma Cohen, dance can, on the other hand, imitate human character as well as what people do and suffer: “Dance’s sphere of imitation is that of men’s characters as well as what they do and suffer. Within its sphere, the possibilities for expression are great” (Cohen, 1983:21). She carries on the Aristotelian notion of dance in which dance does not need to serve any imitative function: “Dance has found a movement means sufficient to portraying real diversity of character. It remains for the art to explore the full potentialities of its known resources” (ibid). For the American critic John Martin, the art of dance is the expression and transference through the medium of bodily movement of mental and emotional experiences that the individual cannot express in other ways. He sees movements as intentions, speaking of a kinesthetic transference<sup>6</sup> between dancers’ muscles and spectators’ muscles: “Movement, then, in and of itself is a medium for the transference of an aesthetic and emotional concept from the consciousness of one individual to that of another” (Martin: 1983: 23). Martin follows the Greek concept of *metakinesis*<sup>7</sup>, however, he does not question conventions and norms.

The philosopher Susan Langer sees dance as an art expression, but not an expression of the dancers themselves. She says that the gestures of the dance express feelings, but not what the dancers feel: they are a mere medium. Gestures are virtual or illusory, logically and symbolically expressive, but not self-expressions:

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<sup>6</sup> Kinesthesia is the sensation of movement or strain in muscles, tendons, and joints. This word comes from the Greek, where *kinein* means “to move” and *aisthesis* means “sensation”. Kinesthesia allows to perceive movement and sensation whilst being still and watching the other. In dance, it is usual to talk about kinesthetic transference between dancers and choreographers during the process of creation and training, but also between audience and dancers.

<sup>7</sup> Metakinesis is a term used mostly with dance and is related to dance movement with psychical overtones, which means that there is a sensation that is not physical but more abstract and related to the psyche. As Martin believed, a body always provokes something in another body as a social practice, since some gestures, expressions and intentions of movement have some specific meaning. “Kinetic effects, the stimulation of the senses or sentience, are feelings expressed directly from one body to another and amongst a group of bodies” (Martin, 1985: 55).

It is imagined feelings that governs the dance, not real emotional conditions. [...] dance gesture is not real gesture, but virtual. The bodily movement, of course, is real enough; but what makes it emotive gesture, i.e., its spontaneous origin in what Laban calls a 'feeling-thought-motion', is illusory, so the movement is 'gesture' only within the dance. It is actual movement but virtual self-expression. (Langer, 1983: 31)

Alternatively, for André Levinson, dance is neither imitation nor expression. Given that he is a formalist, he sees dance as a sign and not as a pure form. For him, the dancer's steps are not gestures imitating character or expressing emotions; instead, they are more related to narrative ballet than to expressive modern dance. For Levinson, each movement in ballet has a name, a code and a general understanding of what it is: each step is a coded metaphor. Following this idea of something created or constructed as a code by humans, comes Paul Valéry's idea of dance as a human invention to entertain, giving special attention to the aesthetic nature of dance. For this author, dance is something characteristic of humans only; it is something non-utilitarian; it is the result of an excess of energy, performed in order to feel better and to the amusement of the eyes:

[dance] is quite simply a poetry that encompasses the action of living creatures in its entirety: it isolates and develops, distinguishes and deploys the essential characteristics of this action, and makes the dancer's body into an object whose transformations and successive aspects, whose striving to attain the limits that each instant sets upon the powers of being. (Valéry: 1983: 65)

Dance only creates inner sensations of time and energy, which answer to one another and form a closed world of echoes. It is a world of self-contained resonances that connect with the aesthetic one of the spectator, who appreciates the movements. In this regard, Nelson Goodman defends that symbolization is important in the arts but that it has been neglected by traditional writers. However, he also states that symbolization varies from artwork to artwork, artist to artist and style to style. He is against the idea that imitation is the essence of representation, defending instead that denotation is the core of representation, in the sense that this is relative, like the realism that depends on cultural convention and not on natural correspondence (Copelan and Cohen, 1983).

Dance as language is a metaphor for the idea of dance as expression of the unsayable things, giving importance to the body, to the here and now engagement, but also the social system that is embedded in the body. Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg state that dance movements are seen as human manifestations. Dance is a result of the total event on stage – Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the idea of total

work of art was interpreted by Laban, Mary Wigman and even Pina Bausch, or more recently the Peeping Tom company as a call to use dance as a medium to create an expression that would totally fulfil the audience. The internal reality of the individual is connected with the socio-cultural context. The corporality of the performer is essential to all kinds of embodiment, especially to the corporalization of the narrative.

Taking all this into account, for this dissertation, contemporary dance is seen as language that allows the creation of a piece that represents a specific reality. These dance pieces are, hence, a subjective representation of a social reality, a vision of a choreographer about a specific issue, according to his/her agenda and life experience. The bodies that are moving according to choreography are a medium that expresses a message and therefore have a communicative value. Dance assumes a symbolic role, representing a specific reality.

As far as Peter Brinson's ideas that the sociology of dance emerged as a natural answer to the need of seeing art integrated as part of daily life are concerned, it is important to keep in mind that "dance can be as much a *social* response to human experience as it can be psychological or aesthetic" (Brinson, 1983: 104). Dance can have numerous manifestations and movements can appear in different social contexts. Nonetheless, this connection between dance and society has been ignored, says Peter Brinson. He believes that basic facts and elements of dance have been forgotten and thus, the study of dance has been more related with anthropology than with dance. However, times are rapidly changing and, according to Brinson, nowadays, theatres have become part of human daily life and represent a social and cultural context. That being said, only in the beginning of the 80s did dance start to be studied in relation to society. As Giersdorf explains, the first three schools to create a course in Dance Studies appeared between the 1980s and 1990s. They were a *Tanzwissenschaft* program in Leipzig, which was primarily centred in the archive and traditional dances and identity; a program at the University of Surrey, which was focused on the analysis of movement, the dramaturgical proposal and the intentions of the dance; and finally, the program at the University of California, Riverside, which concentrated on choreography:

All three programs share a focus on dance and a struggle to define themselves in relation to other disciplinary discourses and the way dance has been studied previously; their different visions for the definition of dance studies as an academic discipline make them constructive case studies for intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary concerns in dance studies. (Giersdorf, 2009: 26)

There seems to be, nevertheless, a lack of interest from the academy in connecting dance with sociology. According to Helen Thomas, as a social form, dance is expressed in a variety of codes and bodily aesthetics, being something common to everybody, albeit in different contexts:

It is a bodily activity in which many people participate at various stages of their lives, sometimes by themselves, in couples, or in groups, in a range of social settings, from street dancing to dance halls, discos and raves, to parties, dinner dances, weddings and church socials. (Thomas, 2005: 2)

Although dance is something ordinary, Thomas realized that the study of dance “as a performance art, a leisure pursuit, or as a representational form within contemporary western industrial societies has been a generally neglected area of sociological concern” (Thomas, 2005: 3). This author continues by saying that most of the studies in the 80s relate dance with identity, leisure time or music, paying no special attention to dance, choreography or movement, not seeing these aspects as sociological objects.

As Janet O’Shea explains, dance research has, since the 90s, been concerned with dance engagement with social, historical, political and economic contexts. Furthermore, dance has been seen as a product and not as an event. For some academics, as a performance art, a dance piece was something ephemeral and an event, which could not be studied since it was only relatable within a specific context. However,

The ascribed ephemerality of dance only becomes a problem when viewing dance in relation to art forms that produce material objects, such as paintings, sculptures or novels. When viewed from a social sciences standpoint, dance is no more ephemeral than other aspects of lived experience, whether those are economic, ritual or linguistic. (O’Shea, 2010: 3)

More focused on representation issues, dance studies started to see culture and politics in a different light, given that the artist’s creative agenda also gained more social, cultural and political meaning: “A significant shift for dance studies was the interpretation of dances in political terms, especially, those associated with the politics of identity, such as gender, race, class and sexuality” (O’Shea, 2010: 7). In this regard, both Theresa Jill Buckland and Jens Richard Giersdorf believed that, at this time, a new emphasis upon the subjective and the individual was being given in dance studies. Philipa Rothfield joined these theories of one-body focus, underlining the subjective dimensions of movement and its perception: “The lens of subjectivity offers a point of connection with movement practices through its felt dimension – the lived body” (Rothfield, 2010: 303). She argues that dance “is a heterogeneous,

emergent field of practice and performance which is encountered by a range of subjects in a variety of ways” (id.: 310).

Performances are actions or human behaviour. Schechner adds: “the underlying notion is that any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance” (Schechner, 2013: 2). What performance studies do, according to the author, is to understand the quality of liveness. Performance studies do not read or ask what is being enacted, but it is actually a field that tries to inquire about “behaviour”, examining the circumstances in which the artwork is created and exhibited, how it looks and what is created in reception. Schechner also highlights the importance of how embodiment, action behaviour and agency are dealt within interculturality and how cultures are always interacting, thus contesting a universal theory of performance.

In the book *Perform or Else: from Discipline to Performance*, Jon McKenzie states that performance will be to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries what discipline was to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries: a formation of power and knowledge<sup>8</sup>. Carlson agrees and discusses how the term “performance” has been used in different fields such as visual arts, literature or social sciences. It follows that the academic work on the concept and usages of the word performance have increased in proportion: “As its popularity and usage have grown, so has a complex body of writing about performance, attempting to analyse and understand just what sort of human activity it is” (Carlson, 2004: 70).

Jon McKenzie explains that culture and its transferences are the “*sine qua non* of contemporary business and politics” (McKenzie, 2001: 6). In this globalized world, with universal rights and duties, where everybody is a citizen of the world, “we can understand performance as a stratum of power/knowledge extrapolating Foucault’s well-known genealogy of discipline” (ibid.). The body and its performances are the foundation of this new era, allowing for the study of different topics and the relations between them. As McKenzie puts it: “Performance thus extends far beyond cultural production, with discourses and practices of performance extending from leisure to labor to infrastructures and beyond” (ibid.).

RoseLee Goldberg (2012), in the book *Performance Art - From futurism to the present*, explains that the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was marked by a few social changes. The increment of means of communication and transportation, especially the

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<sup>8</sup> See more at *Performance As a Formation of Power and Knowledge* (2000) by Richard Schechner in TDR/The Drama Review, Volume 44, Issue 4, Winter 2000

development of the Internet, has led to a homogenized and mediatized society, where distances and differences between cultures have been minimized. In this common world, RoseLee Goldberg argues that the paradigm of performance arts has changed, with the human body turning into a new political vanguard of affirmation, more focused on the human figure<sup>9</sup>. In this way, performance has presented itself as the ideal way to transmit ideas from very different places, not only because of it being adamantly visual – and hence translation to different languages might not be a problem –, but also because of its ephemerality, which allows to present an artwork even in countries where some can be seen as subversive. Furthermore, Goldberg claims that performance arts are also at the forefront of vanguard, taking a major advantage of technology and becoming something timeless and accessible in the way they use the body and its gestures and movements (Goldberg, 2012: 288). In the same way, Carlson is not surprised by the fact that performance has become a “highly visible – one might almost say emblematic – art form in the contemporary world”, where everybody

is highly self-conscious, reflexive, obsessed with simulations and theatricalizations in every aspect of its social awareness. With performance as a kind of critical wedge, the metaphor of theatricality has moved out of arts into almost every aspect of modern attempts to understand our condition and activities, into almost every branch of human sciences [...]. (Carlson, 2004: 74)

According to Schechner, all performances are restored behaviours, rearranged or re-shaped from ordinary life: the ritual daily life is transposed into performatic movements. “[B]ut every performance is different from every other” (Schechner, 2013: 30), since, as the author claims, all behaviours can be combined in endless variations. Mainly, it is important to emphasise that all the movements, all the actions are in direct relation with the environment where a person grows, how the surroundings are embedded in that person and also the relation with other bodies. In Susan Leigh Foster’s words: “Its habits and stances, gestures and demonstrations, every action of its various regions, areas, and parts – all these emerge out of cultural practices, verbal or not, that construct corporeal meaning” (Foster, 2010: 291). The concepts of physicality and referentiality are always present when we talk about movement.

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<sup>9</sup> This theory of the impact and relevance of the human figure goes side by side with scientific idea of the Anthropocene, which states that the planet Earth has changed and is dealing with a big transformation as a consequence of the impact of humans since the beginning of the 60s with the burning of fossil fuels.

This fixation with body and its commitment with the context result in a new arrangement in dance studies. The field of dance studies is usually seen as dance history<sup>10</sup>, however, researchers and academics in this area see dance “as a cultural as well as an aesthetic practice” (Dills and Albright, 2001: xiv), combining their discourses with a “variety of disciplines, including anthropology, ethnography, the study of art and architecture, literary and cultural studies, feminist theory, and performance studies” (ibid.). “Dancing is a way of knowing the world. History helps us recognize that fact”, state Dills and Albright in their dance history reader (ibid.). Taking a look at dance practices, it is possible to understand the connection between bodies, social practices and also specific cultural beliefs, the authors argue. Dance studies allow researchers to “examine a particular dance as a microcosm of political structure, seeing the spatial arrangement of couples on the floor as a reflection of social hierarchy” (Dills and Albright, 2001: xvii), and to perceive “aspects of the movement style as embodying a particular cultural trait or attitude toward space, rhythm, the natural world, religious devotion, or emotional experience” (ibid.), or even to see “dance as a rich and interesting expressive form through which to view cultural perceptions about the human body” (ibid.). Dance studies, in the same line of thought as culture studies, is a subject with thin borders, which allows a new way of reading dance. In this dissertation, dance is going to be seen as a cultural artifact with a socializing function.

## **1.2. Dance and representation**

Stuart Hall, in his book *Representation – Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, argues that representation is a process of producing meaning, according to a specific code and cultural context<sup>11</sup>. To represent is, according to the

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<sup>10</sup> And dance history is not something general, but always something dependent of the ones creating the techniques, choreographing, exposing the body to certain issues, contexts and times. António Ribeiro and António Sasportes, when tried to write the history of Portuguese dance they made cleared that these trajectory that they draw was based on Works and authors, something that they state that is more common in dance than in other dance. Dance is always related with the bodies in stage and the bodies that create that choreography, and for that reason is dance history is always personal and very delicate to find a general line common to all the academia (Ribeiro e Sasportes,1991:7).

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Halls makes reference to three different approaches to explain how representation can work through language: the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist or constructivist approach. In his way of defining representation, it is always a process that happens in a context with an expanded temporal and spatial continuum. It is a practice, an action, an operation and, consequently, we can say

author, to see something and to create value in a specific way: the words that are said, the stories that are told, the images that are produced and the emotions that are associated with and about a thing, an object, an event or a person. The creation of systems of representation is related to the construction of codes and symbols, which wraps meaning and signification in an intentional process. To represent is to create a new image against an original, regarding a specific cultural framework.

The concept of representation is always connected with the notions of language, semiotic and code. Hall says that representation functions as a dialogue where different codes, meanings and knowledge circulate in order to create a process of exchange, of translation that facilitates communication (Hall, 1997: 10-11). To represent means to describe, to depict, to symbolize or even to substitute. In this dissertation, representation is seen as a way to illustrate something in conformity with a specific context. Just as Hall talks about painting, music or photography as ways to represent something, for the purpose of this dissertation, also contemporary dance is perceived as a way to reflect, to mirror, to create a way of seeing something.

The idea of representation as an operation that allows the creation of something new, was already defended by Aristotle. In *Poetics*, the Greek philosopher makes an analysis of the structure of Tragedy and says that the poet imitates real life actions. However, he is occasionally an author of mirrors as well, since sometimes he represents what could happen, depending on a position of likelihood to the real context (Aristotle, 2010: 115-116). For Aristotle to represent is not only to narrate something that happened, but also to add or to modify something that could happen. To represent is to create *fabulas*, to produce something new, to adapt a reality<sup>12</sup>.

In contemporary dance each choreographer has a code, a language of movement, and a choreographic process and device related to both the culture and the society they are part of and their personal ideas and background. In Philippe Noisette's opinion, contemporary dance is related to each choreographer's subjectivity, creating different kinds of movement: "Little by little, reality began to intervene as some choreographers drew inspiration from their personal lives and

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that representation is performative.

<sup>12</sup> According to Richard Schechner, performance can function in seven different ways. Performance may exist to entertain, to create beauty, to mark or change identity, to make or foster community, to heal, to teach or persuade and to deal with the sacred and the demonic. (Schechner, 2013:46) All of these functions do not follow any hierarchical order and can work alone or together. What is important to highlight is how these various functions are somehow related to the previous notion of representation. Each dance piece is, thence, a performance and a representation.

backgrounds. The emergence of contemporary dance also favoured an elegant encounter between various schools of art” (Noisette, 2011: 38). Numerous techniques and styles of contemporary dance appeared worldwide, having similar features but with unique particularities concerning the aesthetic of movement. Contemporary dance, due to its liberty and apparent lack of norms or rules, allows the exploration of movements without expectations or pre-defined gestures. This dance is seen as a personal expression, related to one’s experience, culture, social context and biology. Being so corporeal and contextual, each dancer and choreographer has his or her self-singularity in motion. In regard to this, John Martin concludes that “[b]ecause of this close relationship between movement and personal experience, temperament, mental and emotional equipment, it is manifestly impossible for every one to be taught to do the same type of movement” (Martin, 1983: 24).

These particularities of movement are dependent on each person’s experience, as the body reacts to the world and the context. Susan Leigh Foster believes that each body is different and performs in different and unique ways:

Each body’s movement evidenced a certain force, tension, weight, shape, tempo and phrasing. Each manifested a distinct physical structure, some attributes of which were reiterated in other bodies. All a body’s characteristic ways of moving resonated with aesthetic and political values. The intensity of those resonances are what permit genres of bodies to coalesce. (Foster, 2010: 293)

Foster wishes to highlight the importance of the surroundings and life experience in the movement. Each body has its singularities, created by the inscription of external factors, such as social experience, education or aesthetics in the way a person moves<sup>13</sup>. The body behaviour must also always be analyzed in the context of the Other, establishing a dialogue between the different bodies.

Embodiment is a practical process needed to give a tangible form to ideas. It is a transformation of concepts into something visible. In dance, dancers fuse the ideas, the movements and also everything around them, creating a multi-layered, tangible event, as Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg put it. However,

The embodiment of movement by performers is a more complex process than the word suggests. It is more than getting movement into the performers’ bodies, more than their physical muscle, bone, and skin. Embodiment of movement involves the whole person, a person conscious of being a living body, living that experience, giving intention to the movement material. It involves perceiving oneself in the space and hearing one’s sound, with kinaesthetic awareness of

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<sup>13</sup> The dancer’s body is never a neutral container or a pure form, but, as Foucault believed, a body is always integrated in a system of meanings, constructed in relation to a social and cultural context. (See Synne K. Behrmdt, 2010: 189)

creating and controlling the movement. (Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, 2002: 7)

About this kinaesthetic awareness, Laurence Louppe, in *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, argues that dance is the poetic of the body that intensifies the relation between being a performer but also an element of the audience. It is always about being in dialogue with the other, creating a double presence of performer as dance-spectator – and also a corporeal encounter – which actualises itself in an intensified dialogue, that is even more able to awaken aesthesias because it takes place as an encounter in a specific time and space (Louppe, 2012: 29).

Furthermore, it is in this context of embodiment, in which dancers embed their own surroundings, that there is a need to correlate dance with society. A performance is always something embedded and embedding in society and in specific cultural conditions. In the words of Richard Schechner:

Something ‘is’ a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage, and tradition say it is. Rituals, play and games, and the roles of everyday life are performances because convention, context, usage, and tradition say so. One cannot determine what ‘is’ a performance without referring to specific cultural circumstances. There is nothing inherent in an action in itself that makes it a performance or disqualifies it from being a performance. (Schechner, 2013: 38)<sup>14</sup>

It is culture and context that determine and conventionalize what is and what is not performance, and it can vary from culture to culture, from historical period to historical period, from place to place. In this way, dance – just like other kinds of art – is an element of human action always in relation with social structures<sup>15</sup>.

Looking at dance as a text engaged with its surroundings “would allow the field to build upon its areas of strength in its attention to power and representation, while further differentiating these considerations in response to the conditions of a changing world” (O’Shea, 2010: 15). It is possible to say that the process of choreographic creation is an act of translation but not a practice of equal re-presentation or of

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Schechner says that anything can be seen and studied as performance if the focus is on “what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as action, interactions, and relationships” (Schechner, 2013: 30).

<sup>15</sup> Just as Peter Brinson explains, according to Marx’s vision, dance is part of the superstructure of society as an element of art and culture. “As an element of human movement in its widest sense, however, dance becomes linked also with the economic base because of the essential role of human movement in the productive process” (Brinson, 1983: 66). In this way, the author highlights the importance of the correlation between arts, culture and society and the impact they have in the ordinary individual that absorbs influences from all these areas.

transference, “[r]ather, it is a process of transformation of experience, a deconstruction of images and certainty, a separation and de-connecting of sound, image, movement and emotion” (Miltz, 2008:12)<sup>16</sup>.

In the process of creation of a dance piece, a specific reality is being transformed and translated into movements, which are going to transpose a certain reality and express a plot based on the experience of the author. Dance, as an art form, has the ability to “harness and activate critical and compositional elements crucial to the fusion of politics and aesthetics” (Lepecki, 2012: 15), in the context of contemporary art scene and sensibility. As André Lepecki states, choreography implies a body that is answering to a discipline, dictated by the society, and, as other art forms, is going to originate a socio-political impact:

A crucial element in the formation of dance as an artform, choreography as a technology of scoring does have inevitable political reverberations across contemporary art practices, since choreography, once enacted, displays disciplined bodies operating in a regime of obedience for the sake of bringing an art piece into the world. (ibid.)<sup>17</sup>

Synne K. Behrndt enumerates some choreographers such as Alain Platel, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Wim Vandekeybus or Vera Mantero as examples of creators whose work “is an engagement with complex multidisciplinary narrative structures thematic, emotional and conceptual explorations, as well as an often explicit interest in politics and content” (Behrndt, 2010: 188). In his article on dance, dramaturgy and dramaturgical thinking, he states that contemporary dance pieces have focused on practice and reflection of politics and social context, becoming a complex artwork that also questions dance and its meaning. This relation between dance, society and its mimetic perspective is, according to Mark Franko, “justifiable and necessary to speak of dance as political in circumstances that are conjunctural, that is, in circumstances where forms of movement and socio-political life take shape simultaneously if apparently independently” (Franko, 2006: 4). Dance frequently manages to become visible in moments of socio-political change. Whilst Mark Franko sees dance as text, he also relates the aesthetic of dance with the political content: “I would like to

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<sup>16</sup> “Conglomerates: Dance Dramaturgy of the Body” is a paper presented at the conference International Research Workshop – Dramaturgy as Applied Knowledge, 27-29 May 2008 in Tel Aviv University and is available at [www.tau.ac.il/~dramatur/docs/CONGLOMERATES.doc](http://www.tau.ac.il/~dramatur/docs/CONGLOMERATES.doc)

<sup>17</sup> Cvejic adds: “choreography suggests an insistence on the authorial position of the choreographer whereby the choreographer distinguishes her work from a traditional notion of craftsmanship in composing bodily movement” (Cvejic, 2014: 7).

suggest that the representation of political reality itself is what allows us to understand aesthetics precisely as historical insight” (id.: 14). He continues:

Dance, when conscious of its own politics, stands in the most unmediated or immediate relation to itself. The very awareness of the political history carried by the body enables us to think the relation between dance and the political choreographically, and therefore within the logic of movement and its performance. (ibid)

The movement in dance is always in close relation to the context, working as a copy or a translation of its surroundings: “A formal performance event is supposed to hold a mirror up to life, its ‘double’” (Martin, 2004: 47). However, spectators are not only watching a dance, but also always under a process of consciousness about themselves and the other,

for a given performance, however, is not simply viewing some other experience, but using the occasion of the event to look at itself. [...] As means of reflection, both performance and theory operate to produce certain self-understandings, or concepts of identity based upon a situation of seeing some other. (ibid)

Already the Greek philosophers have written about dance and this relation with society and the reflection of an agenda. “[D]ance has served the ornamental purpose of addressing social, economic and cultural change, the cycle and the turning point” (Gil, 2012: 198). Isabel Capeloa Gil mentions Xenophon’s idea of dance as something that “endows with beauty the surrounding environment and the place where the dance occurs” (ibid). Dance is seen as a place where the socio-political order and individual freedom meet, creating an ideal image of a society, says the author. The dancers’ bodies present themselves as a performative metaphor: body and dancer are means “of using dance as a counter-hegemonic mode of storytelling and worldmaking<sup>18</sup>” (Gil, 2012: 199). Dance is able to create, according to this vision, a turning point in society. However, it is not clear how dance can create these new ways of seeing the world in a specific perspective. Klein and Noeth say that this characteristic of

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18 “The idea underlying Goodman’s concept of “worldmaking” is that ‘world’ is not given, but a process of creation: ‘world’ is thus, according to the basic epistemological premise, made when actions and language brings forth meanings. Worldmaking is therefore always social, cultural, religious, framed, historically in flux and reliant on scientific and philosophical discourses and experience, it does not only relate to one ‘world’ and cannot be comprehended in totality: different ways of worldmaking provoke different, interlocking worlds” (Klein and Noeth, 2011: 8). Nelson Goodman argued that it is impossible to understand the world entirely because new versions and explanations about it are always appearing. These world representations appear in different forms, styles and symbolic systems, being always dependent on someone. All these versions are true and subjective but no world is more real than the other. Different products that create new worlds are always different from the rest. Through this idea of worldmaking, the real world is always being appropriated, decomposed, reordered, reformulated and redone. For further information, see Goodman, *Ways of World Making* (1978).

worldmaking of dance is not related to the creation of new pieces, but to these pieces being presented as a world vision and as a focus on performative “processes that organize the – possibly dance specific – creation of (social) meaning” (Klein and Noeth, 2011: 9). Dance reveals its effectivity in representing the existing structures in a new perspective that travels around the poles of perception, imagination, action and cognition in different people: “dance creates ‘world’ as a medium bound to the body and whether and how these processes and strategies differ from those of other arts and sciences” (Klein and Noeth, 2011: 9-10).

As a communicational element, dance is a textual device with narrative characteristics that allows choreographers to express their own mental representation of their own agenda: “Stories can be told about dance just as much dances can tell stories” (Martin, 2004: 48). Martin says that this process of expression and representation happens in relation with the social conjuncture in which author, performers and audience are inserted: “In either case, the agency of telling, what moves the tale itself, is palpably on display in dance performance. The capacity to move an idea in a particular direction through the acquired prowess of bodies in action, is what is meant by social kinesthetic” (ibid). The story that the choreographers are trying to tell will use these social perception to captivate. The viewer feels the movement, understands what the other is doing and transposes what is being seen to their own world and reality. There is a kind of appropriation of this reality by the audience.

The choreographer tells this narrative through the creation of choreography. Choreography is “not only a discipline or technology of the body, not only a mode of composition, not only a register, or archive—but an apparatus”<sup>19</sup> (Lepecki, 2007: 120). Inserted in a social, cultural, political and personal space, choreography is a

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<sup>19</sup> According to Foucault, “the apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements” (Foucault, 1980: 194). These elements that Foucault is mentioning are a heterogeneous ensemble of what is said and unsaid that exists in society that somehow creates control, such as, discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions. He continues by saying that “there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely” (Foucault, 1980: 195) in the manner in which these elements are combined and that can change the context and the meanings of the situations. That is why “[t]he apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function” (ibid). To conclude, Michel Foucault makes clear that the apparatus is always inscribed in a performance of power, of presenting it “but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge” (Foucault, 1980: 196).

mechanism “that simultaneously distributes and organizes dance’s relationship to perception and signification” (ibid). Choreography is always an apparatus, or a *dispositif* as Foucault states, so far as it exercises control and power over the dancers’ bodies, designs how the movements should be, but also what is being told, implementing a certain form of authority. Choreography is a system of command that the dancers follow, but it also controls the direction of the spectators’ eyes, which are forced to focus on certain things on a stage. Choreography is a way to dictate movement; it is a language with a personal, intentional and conscious code of a particular choreographer. Ric Allsopp and Andre Lepecki mention Deleuze and Guattari to explain how language works as an order to which people must obey:

In this case, we see how rich their notion of language is for a general theory of command and obeisance, of disciplining and control, which are precisely the forces that have found, produced, and reproduced the practice and concept of choreography as a system of command. (Allsopp and Lepecki, 2008: 2)

As far as Agamben is concerned, the apparatus has, for him, a major strategic utility: “a kind of a formation, so to speak, that a given historical moment has as its major function the response to an urgency” (Agamben, 2009: 2). According to Agamben’s ideas, choreography works as a device, which produces subjectivities, meaning that it functions as a device of control. The apparatus is precisely this: a set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, and supported by, certain types of knowledge” (ibid). Choreography and dance are, thus, possible social motors and influencers of social change, since:

movement and words exchange affects and powers, thus producing specific resonances that invent a theoretical-perceptive body apt to explore and restore to view those dancing subjects that had been otherwise eliminated, or made obscure, by the choreo-theoretical- perceptive apparatus. (Lepecki, 2007: 121)

Contemporary dance, as has been demonstrated, enables the representation of a reality, transferring a subjective vision and a particular world’s representation into an ensemble of movements, which are called choreography. This choreography is an apparatus that not only symbolizes something, but can also create some kind of social mobilization<sup>20</sup> in the ones seeing the dance.

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<sup>20</sup> Mobilization is seen here as a will of doing, a call for action that reverberates in the audience, creating an alert for an issue, a concept, and a theory. It is not a call for a public demonstration, but a call for thinking.

### 1.3. The social life of dance

Nowadays, the choreographic artwork cannot be seen as a simple object. According to Laurence Louppe, “[i]t must be considered, on the other hand, a reading of the world itself, a deliberate structure of information, an instrument of enlightenment on contemporary consciousness” (Louppe, 2012: 35 – my translation)<sup>21</sup>. Contemporary dance is committed to the social dimension and works in relation to the environment around the creators: “Sometimes it is even a weapon of combat against injustice or stereotypes, a manifestation of a conscience that opposes to them and that is engaged in a protest, if not in a denunciation” (Louppe, 2012: 35 – my translation).

When one looks at dance history, it is easy to see that dance and society are connected since the beginning. Taking the example of classical ballet<sup>22</sup>, it’s practice “extends back to the court of Louis XIV where it developed as part of the glorification of monarchy. If we could deconstruct the steps themselves, we would no doubt unravel centuries of socially as well as artistically significant pillaging and transformation” (Sayers, 1997: 131). Jennifer Homans sees in ballet an aristocratic praxis and a political event, which is always linked to the destiny of courts and states (Homans, 2012: 25). The ballet dance, as is known nowadays, only appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with *La Syphilde*, in 1832, with Marie Taglioni using for the first time point shoes. In reality, however, the beginning of ballet can be traced to the 17<sup>th</sup> century with Louis XIV of France. Towards the end of his reign, the dance career was taken more seriously, as technique and exigency increased and ballet came to be known as an art to be presented on the Opera’s stage. Lesley-Anne Sayers explains that each step and ritual in ballet has a memory and narrative related to a historical and social past of nobility: “we might expect to find encoded memory, evidence of mutations, mergers, influences absorbed and transformed, changing ideals and evolution of form [...] rather than a perception of ballet as an evolving art form, the

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<sup>21</sup> The version of Laurence Louppe’s book that was used in this investigation was the Portuguese version (*Poética da Dança Contemporânea*, 2012). Due to constraints related to the management of the dissertation, it was not possible to obtain in due time the official English translation of the whole book. Therefore, unless indicated otherwise, I provide my own translation of Louppe’s words.

<sup>22</sup> It is important to refer to classical ballet because the technical base of contemporary dance is this ancient dance. Contemporary dance appeared from modern dance, at the end of the 60s in a specific socio-political context, being influenced by different traditional dances from other cultures, and becoming a melting pot of different dances and techniques. However, the foundations and principles of contemporary come from classical ballet.

idea that it represents certain ‘absolutes’ is perhaps more dominant” (Sayers, 1997: 131).

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vaslav Nijinsky changed the way ballet was seen. In 1912, he presented *The Afternoon of a Faun (L’Après-midi d’un Faune)*, a piece that Jennifer Homans characterizes as being about introversion, egocentrism and physical instinct. In her opinion, more than something sensual, it is a sexual dance piece that represents desire without shame (Homans, 2012: 348). One year later, it was time for *The Rite of Spring (Le Sacre du Printemps)*, the piece that truly changed the dance paradigm. This piece was the first and is, still, one of the biggest scandals in dance history. It was the first time that the position of the feet and the technique of the dancer were turned inward, the eroticism was evident and the pagan thematic was explored. Nijinsky was, in this sense, the one creating a change that motivated and inspired numerous dancers and choreographers later. From this point on, dance and its relationship with social and political issues became intrinsic and the relationship with fantasy and fairy tales was broken. Dance starts to represent reality more, working almost as a documentation of the times in which it was created and the different agendas of the choreographers.

In 1932, Kurt Joss created *The Green Table*, a performance that appeared between two wars in a period marked by the rise of Nazism. This expressionist ballet had a political dimension, which depicted the futility of peace negotiations. In 1936, the modern choreographer Martha Graham refused to act in the Olympic Games in Germany, showing her opposition to the Nazi government’s anti-Semitic policy. This is a worldly known political manifestation of dance, against not only a country but also against an ideology. In the same year, Graham premiered *Chronicle*, a piece divided into three main sections that represented the social and political atmosphere of that time in the United States of America<sup>23</sup>. Besides Graham, there were other dance pieces that proved to be important for the contemporary dance field and

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<sup>23</sup> *Chronicle* is divided into: *Spectre-1914*, a solo that makes reference to the blood of the war; *Steps in the Street*, where 12 women synchronically create an emotional appeal to the strength of a group that moves as a whole; and finally, *Prelude to Action*, where, dressed in white, Martha Graham calls for change. Although Martha Graham insisted that her work could never be seen as political, the truth is that the majority of her works address social and political issues. She was a dancer worried about American identity and culture, and created numerous pieces based on those ideologies, as *Appalachian Spring*, for instance. According to Helen Thomas, “dance is reflective upon the social world” (Thomas, 2005: 25). Dance is not only a way to speak about the social background, but also a way to speak to it: “It follows from this that if the dance itself can provide a point of reference for interpretations of culture, it is appropriate that a sociological inquiry be extended to an examination of dance works” (ibid).

constitute examples of social reflection. In 1959, *Kinjiki* by Tatsumi Hijikata was a show inspired by surrealism and critical of modern society arising after war, which caused a big impression on the public. Maurice Béjart created in 1961 the first work beyond genres, *Boléro*, where the main role was assigned to a male dancer.

For Betina Miltz, the relation between the arts, culture and society is at the core of the contemporary: “When I try to define the word ‘contemporary’ for me it means that artists try to reflect in their work personal and social, political and private experiences, trying to find a not yet known form for what they are discovering and what is moving them in both senses of the word” (Miltz, 2008: 3-4). As Agamben sees it, “[c]ontemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s time, which adheres to it and, at the same time keeps a distance from it” (Agamben, 2009: 41). To be contemporary, to both of these authors, is to be in connection with a context, but to be able to create some kind of disconnection and anachronism that allows the individuals to put themselves in an observer’s position, letting themselves create a distance between different times and time experiences. Agamben also states that to be contemporary is to have courage and to take risks. That is why contemporary dance is seen as uncharted territory, a field that questions, explores the unknown, takes risks and is under constant transformation in an on-going stimulation of doing more, better and different.

The need to use art to deal with the world originates a break with the forms, structures and techniques of traditional and classical dances. Contemporary dance is an art which has grown without having a strong academic background, but in harmony with the world’s different cultural influences. Always navigating around performance art, classical dance and influences from different cultures around the world – as Butoh from Japan or Kathak from India –, in recent years,

there is a growing need to form theory out of the no-man’s-land. This might be one of the reasons why choreographers increasingly seek the exchange with theorists – they may be dramaturgs, they may also be architects, sociologists, philosophers or more recently media artists. (Miltz, 2008: 2-3)

Contemporary dance broke the dance paradigm by proposing to create a connection between what was being presented on a stage and the reality seen every day on the streets<sup>24</sup>. It is in this sense that Helen Thomas argues that “dance mirrors its own

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<sup>24</sup>As Jens Richard Giersdorf claims, the use of “[o]ther disciplinary discourses, such as anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology, were contributing to an understanding of dance’s place and function in a social context” (Giersdorf, 2009: 34).

social environment, and that it comes out of the life and the circumstances of its immediate time and space” (Thomas, 2005: 86). Contemporary dance comes from this model where art is a mode of reflection and a way of speaking of/with the contemporary experience, and, according to the author it “should be functional for the society” (ibid). The 60s were particularly relevant in this regard. It was the time when contemporary dance affirmed itself as a socio-political portrait: Yvonne Rainer created pieces against the Vietnam war; Bill T. Jones danced about AIDS, but also the condition of African-Americans; and Pina Bausch in *Palermo Palermo* staged the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Through the concept of “social choreography” by Andrew Hewitt (2012), it is possible to talk about the relation between modern society and its structures. Hewitt joins dance history and critical theory to show how ideology is something that is embodied and practiced by a conscious society. It is between the aesthetic, the rules and the order that choreography appears as political:

[...] I use the term social choreography to denote a tradition of thinking about social order that derives its ideal from the aesthetic realm and seeks to instil that order directly at the level of the body. In its most explicit form, this tradition has observed the dynamic choreographic configurations produced in dance and sought to apply those forms to the broader social and political sphere. Accordingly, such social choreographies ascribe a fundamental role to the aesthetic in its formulation of the political. (Hewitt, 2012: 149)

According to his theory, the aesthetic is always ideological and, therefore, it has some kind of politics associated with it. Just as Gabriele Klein explains about linking the concept of political to specific practices, aesthetics is not just art theory or a form of perception but it is something inscribed in the political as well “because these practices with their norms, rules and habits already determine sensual perception by socially positioning people, allocating social and political spaces for them to maneuver in and thus framing social perception” (Klein, 2011: 24). Dance is political because it produces a kinesthetic vision of the world. It is contextualized according to a network of connections and symbols, developed in a specific community, in relation to a collective identity:

Dance can be a medium for training corporeal perception. But – as Randy Martin (cf. Martin 1998) has shown: Dance is much more. Dance is a key area of the political and by questioning central categories, such as rhythm, force, space, time, energy, dynamics and flow, it sheds light on the kinetic foundations of modern society. (Klein, 2011: 26)

Contemporary dance is, more than a new technique or the most recent trend in dance,

a manner of reflecting about society through movement, using choreography as an instrument to reach an audience.

Contemporary dance discovers choreography as the polarizing performative and physical force that organizes the whole distribution of the sensible and of the political at the level of the play between incorporation and excorporation, between command and demand, between moving and writing, as those central elements for all performance composition. (Allisopp and Lepecki, 2008: 4)

In conclusion, for this dissertation, dance is understood as a representational system which has the ability to communicate, to transmit information to an audience. The choreographer is the emitter who uses the dancers' bodies as a medium and the dance or the movements as the message. This message is a reflection of a particular reality, having always an intrinsic connection with the socio-political agenda of the author, being constructed through a dispositive of power: the choreography. Since the beginning of times, dance has been related to ideology, social order and politics. Having that in mind, contemporary dance is seen as an art form that has a political background and aims to create an impact on the audience. Each choreographer, each performance and even each member of an audience has a different interpretation and vision about this dance ideology. As Laurence Louppe defends, contemporary dance is about values, thoughts and judgments: "In fact, contemporary dance has never exhibited a true homogeneous artistic program dedicated to questions of form. On the other hand, this poetics always supported values, and it is in this aspect that other areas of thought and judgment emerge" (Louppe, 2012: 41- my translation).

## 2. The Contemporary Urban Society

In the all-connected world we currently live in, contemporary society is facing numerous social issues that are somehow endemic worldwide. Globalization and the development of technology created a world of transferences and changes seemingly without limits or barriers. In a European context, the dilution of physical borders – with the reduction of bureaucracy - and free circulation of people, information and data, as well as the technological development, have all created a net of questions that have a direct impact on people's lives. Terrorism, wars, displacement, exhaustion of natural resources, pollution or financial crisis are some of the world's problems that societies are facing nowadays. These issues have a direct effect in the social life of local individuals, insofar as fear and insecurity are controlling their actions. As Bauman explains in his still very relevant book *Liquid Times – Living in the Age of Uncertainty*:

Social life changes when people live behind walls, hire guards, drive armoured vehicles, carry mace and handguns, and take martial arts classes. The problem is that these activities reaffirm and help produce the sense of disorder that our actions are aimed at preventing. (Bauman, 2007: 9)

This sense of disorder and chaos makes society live under a veil of fear and insecurity. Particularly since 9/11, the constant idea of being in danger and under threat has been transforming our society, which is increasingly obsessed with tragedy and disaster. Humanity is falling in a hole, where it realizes its own finitude, whilst confirming that the world is going to continue without human presence. Kevin Rozario sees our era as a culture of calamity, where disaster and tragedy are becoming more and more captivating. The author says that it does not seem possible to avoid being confronted with some kind of catastrophic event:

[...] we can't turn on our televisions without encountering dramatic images of destruction: a hurricane battering a southern resort, a sea of fire engulfing a national forest; a great river breaking through its levees and rolling over the surroundings countryside; a tower of glass and steel bursting into flames and crumbling to the city streets below. (Rozario, 2007: 1- 2)

In today's society there is an underlying will and even necessity to look at disaster, like a general addiction or a fascination by the drowning of the other<sup>25</sup>. Media have

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<sup>25</sup> According to Blumberg in the book *Shipwreck with Spectator*, this need of looking at a catastrophe actually does not happen due to the pleasure of seeing order suffer. In fact, he mentions Voltaire's ideas about curiosity as something that is intrinsic to all animals, and that it reinforces the space dichotomy of safe place and dangerous place. Also, the one that is watching *in loco* or even later in the

reorganized the way people look at disaster ending up normalizing the chaos. Nowadays, it is possible to say that society is facing normalization of the grotesque and of appreciation of human catastrophes.

Having in mind Bauman's description of our era, that times are racing and everything is in constant change, not forgetting the mutation of affective connections between humans, more layers are being added to the dark side of globalization:

[...] the new individualism, the fading of human bonds and the wilting of solidarity are engraved on one side of a coin, whose other side shows the misty contours of 'negative globalization'. In its present, purely negative form, globalization is a parasitic and predatory process, feeding on the potency sucked out of the bodies of nation-states and their subjects. (Bauman, 2007: 24)

For the purpose of this work, I would like to focus specifically on the urban space. To talk about cities and urban areas is to talk about "high density of population, interaction and communication" (Bauman, 2007: 71). Cities have become deposits of the negative sides of globalization – homeless people, gentrification, gated communities, crime and violence, individuality and selfishness –, which are made more visible given the different kinds of people and transferences concentrated in that space:

Today, they [the cities] also happen to be the places where socially conceived and incubated insecurities are confronted in a highly condensed and so particularly tangible form. It is also in the places called 'urban' that the high density of human interaction has coincided with the tendency of fear born of insecurity to seek and find outlets and objects on which to unload itself – though this tendency has not always been the distinctive characteristic of these place. (Bauman, 2007: 71)

In the urban environment, individuals are increasingly more self-centred and the other and the different is always a threat to the self, in the sense that the unknown always provokes some kind of insecurity. These social problems are a result of uninformed contact with the stranger, since there is no more desire to find a solution for human affection, but only a will to consume and to survive (the idea of the stronger and/or the richer that is the best and the only one that, out of a sense of privilege, deserves to survive). Alain Badiou, in a conference in 2016<sup>26</sup>, said: "A human subject is a beggar, a consumer, an owner, or nothing at all. That is the

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News is putting him or herself in an illusionary safety position when visualizing him or herself reflected in that episode.

<sup>26</sup> The conference "Reflections on the Recent Election" is available for consultation at: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2940-alain-badiou-reflections-on-the-recent-election>

strict definition today of what is a human being. So that is the general vision, the general problem, and the general law of the contemporary world” (Badiou, 2016). According to this viewpoint, individuals are not seen anymore as agents of change and capable of transforming the society, or, at least, they have lost their belief in community power. Nowadays, the individual is seen as a subject under the control of neo-capitalist ideals. Badiou continues by stating that the political decisions that have been taken, especially after Trump’s nomination, are having an impact on people’s lives, namely “effects of disorientation, total absence of orientation or direction of life, no strategic vision of the future of humanity, and in that sort of situation a big part of the people search in obscurity on the side of false novelties, irrational visions, and return to dead traditions, and so on” (Badiou, 2016). In the last years, we are witnessing worldwide the rise of populism and extreme right-wing parties. The democratic crisis that the world is facing right now is caused by disinformation, by the lack of notion of history, by the lack of memory and will to change the moment of fear and insecurity that people are living in. The population in the city is being dominated by suspicion, fear and scepticism. More and more, political decisions are affecting particularly individuals in the city and their reactions affect the urban lifestyle. More than ever, it is important to provide alternatives, to work with the true idea of polis, of civic values and social transformation.

## **2.1. The city: a shared space in current times**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to some postmodern authors, is marked by a change in the concepts of space and time within the city<sup>27</sup>. Manuel Castells talks about the contemporary city as a “space of flows”, where global economy is conducted through electronic, computerized and mediated networks of communications, but also as a “space of places”<sup>28</sup>, where the ordinary life with neighbourhoods and local businesses

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<sup>27</sup> This is no longer associated with Plato’s idea of the city as a mirror of the cosmos or Aristotle’s vision of the city as exclusively a politic centre. Nowadays, the concept of city is closer to Marx and Engels’ idea of the city as a centre or concentration of a bigger population, of production tools, capital, needs and pleasures.

<sup>28</sup> Space is a more abstract term than place. Space is, according to Augé (1995) and de Certeau (2008) a frequented place and an intersection of human bodies. Space is not very specific and something more vague and related to experience. A place is something physical. It is relational, historical and concerned with identity, hence something anthropological and concrete. Lawrence Buell defends that place, in opposition to space, implies meaning and value that is distinct for each individual. For him, place is “a configuration of highly flexible subjective, social and material dimensions, not reducible to any of

happens, and relationships between family and friends take place. Cities are, in the information age, seen as a “socio-spatial system of cultural communications” (Castells, 2011: 573). In the same way, Appadurai states that the world in which we live “does involve a general break with all sorts of pasts” (Appadurai, 2002: 173), bringing numerous transformations into the structures and behaviours of people in an urban context. For this author, “[g]lobalization has shrunk the distance between elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers, broken many links between labor and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments” (Appadurai, 2002: 178). Returning to Manuel Castells, he says that the biggest transformations of globalization are the increase of urbanization and metropolitan regionalism, a breakdown of patriarchal family, an increase of multi-ethnic urban communities and more social segregation. These social changes are affecting the spatial relations in the city, resulting in more social policies being adopted by the municipalities. Since society is facing new challenges, the urban environment and the relations happening in that confined space are being changed too.

It is also within this context that Lefebvre conceives the city as an entity, as an organism and as a phenomenon, which is nothing more than the result of human evolution and history: “The city always had relations with society as a whole, with its constituting elements (countryside and agriculture, offensive and defensive force, political power, States, etc.), and with its history. It changes when society as a whole changes” (Lefebvre, 2000: 100). Apart from being constituents of the same thing and not separable, Lefebvre believes that there is a distinction between the city as “a present and immediate reality, a practico-material and architectural fact” (id.: 103) and the urban as “a social reality made up of relations which are to be conceived of, constructed or reconstructed by thought” (ibid.). From his perspective, the evolution and the development of society needs to happen in the urban environment and the urban society must question and function as the motor of evolution, something that goes hand in hand with the Greek ideal of the polis as the centre of knowledge and power. As Richard T. Le Gates and Frederic Stout say in their *City Reader*, the Greek polis can be seen as the city state, the place to be political and described as “a reincarnation, in urban context, of the face-to-face human relationships that

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these” (Buell, 2001: 60) but always a junction of different elements, that are combined under a personal phenomenon of affection.

characterized the pre-urban community of the neolithic village” (Le Gates and Stout, 2011: 16). Cities are, according to the authors, another word for civilization and, despite all the differences between all the cities in the world, “the basic urban functions of citadel (mainly associated with government and the ruling order), marketplace (where the economic functions of production and exchange take place), and community (the place of homes, families, and the local culture of neighborhoods) continue to define cities and urban life” (ibid.) The aim of studying cities is to understand the relationships and the connections that are established in these places of encounter, dialogue and communication, but also of conflict and negotiation. More than to study the morphology or the functions of cities, what seems important to highlight is the dependence of individuals and the relationships they establish in this built environment<sup>29</sup>, because all environments are characterized by the spatial organization that is grounded in the “relationships among people (or, if non-human environments are considered, among animals), between people (or other animals) and inanimate components of the environment, and among these inanimate components themselves – the ‘hardware’ of settlements, buildings and the like” (Rapoport, 2007: 465). A city should always be a construction of a society, of a structure of relations between all the creatures, entities and objects that are part of it. The relations between people and their bodies and the cities, as a built environment, determine the morphology of the space. It is a built environment that is limited by a specific culture and by the social experience that determines the structure of that space. As Lewis Mumford explains, a city is a collection of social groups like family, friends and neighbours and it is where, in a limited area, relations of different levels are created:

The essential physical means of a city’s existence are the fixed site, the durable shelter, the permanent facilities for assembly, inter-change, and storage; the essential social means are the social division of labor, which serves not merely the economic life but the cultural processes. The city in its complete sense, then, is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity. (Mumford, 2011: 93)

In this theater of social action and relations, the environment is dependent on the

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<sup>29</sup> The notion of built environment is employed here to refer to a complex human system. It corresponds to a cluster of things that are constructed and modified by man and that may be viewed as both an opposition to the natural world or as a second nature to man. A built environment encompasses, on a larger scale, whole cities and, on a smaller scale, buildings, roads, canals, parks and gardens, etc. A built environment is a human-made environment that provides the setting for human activity and the space to construct a community. For further information, see Amos Rapoport, “Spatial Organization and the Built Environment” (2007).

inhabitants of the place, on their creations, ideas, livings and sharing: “built environments become not only more variable but also increasingly culture-specific” (Rapoport, 2007: 471).

According to Manuel Castells, there are three axes around which the transformation of cities in the information age can be organized: function, meaning and form.

Regarding the first axis, the function of cities, there is an opposition between the global and the local: “cities, as communication systems, are supposed to link up the local and the global, but this is exactly where the problems start since these are two conflicting logics that tear cities from the inside when they try to respond to both, simultaneously” (Castells, 2011: 575). In this globalized world, policies tend to be more local, given that it seems the only way to take an action and to create a difference. Bauman (2009) says that the actions or non-actions of a single person can have an effect in the community to which that person belongs, while when dealing with non-local or supra-local questions, apparently there is no alternative, and everything must be solved by politicians. More global questions end up gaining a political dimension and, apart from the impact they might have locally or in a micro-perspective<sup>30</sup>, all the decisions are taken by the heads of the political hierarchy (Bauman, 2009: 31). Looking at the global crisis of terrorism, it is possible to understand the conjuncture of fear that reigns in many cities (and which has echoes in plenty of other cities not directly affected by this problem). Populations are in constant fear of sudden attacks that happen in unexpected places and circumstances. First with al-Qaeda and now with ISIS, the enemy has lost a face and globally, people are trying to stop something that is faceless. The attacks happen in a discontinued or isolated fashion in very specific places and with precise targets, against the local community, but their intention is to destroy something bigger, which is the western culture and lifestyle. This global problem has, in practice, a local impact and the measures to stop

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<sup>30</sup> Melvin M. Webber says that in past societies the space was the limit and the structure to define policies. However, with the spreading of relations, communication and different fluxes, local and municipal social systems also transcend the physical limits. In this way, numerous problems that happen in a specific community might have to be analyzed and solutions must be found in a macro perspective: “Neither crime-in-streets, poverty, unemployment, broken families, race riots, drug addiction, mental illness, juvenile delinquency, nor any of the commonly noted ‘social pathologies’ marking the contemporary city can find its cause or its cure there. We cannot hope to invent local treatments for conditions whose origins are not local in character, nor can we expect territorially defined governments to deal effectively with problems whose causes are unrelated to territory or geography” (Webber, 2011: 950).

it have been implemented, in many ways separately: “The residents of cities and their elected representatives have been confronted with a task they can by no stretch of imagination fulfill: the task of finding local solutions to global contradictions” (Bauman, 2003: 19).

Coming back to Castells’s axes, in terms of meaning, cities are always working with the opposition between individuality and communality. Individuality makes reference to the individual, the interests, the projects and the representations that each person has in accordance with his or her own embodied life experience. The communality to which Castells makes reference is to the shared ideas of identity, belonging, values and beliefs. He concludes that “society, of course, exists only in-between, in the inter-face between individuals and identities mediated by institutions, at the source of the constitution of civil society” (Castells, 2011: 576). However, the author realizes that the tension and the distance between individuals and the community is rising: in cities, it is becoming evident that people are finding it difficult to bring together personality and cultural references and traditions. There, not only is the number of individuals sharing the same space bigger, but also communes are more dispersed in the metropolitan area, which results in “the split between personality and commonality bring[ing] extraordinary stress upon the social systems of cities as communicative and institutionalizing devices” (ibid).

It is within the paradoxically situation between the self and the Other that modern cities have been organized. It is in this encounter of cultures, differences and people that cities have appeared: “Cities have always been known as the meeting places of different people. As Aristotle noted: ‘A city is composed of different kinds of men; similar people cannot bring a city into existence’” (Madanipour, 2011: 190). Following Fran Tonkiss’s thoughts about modern cities, their distinction is “not only by the size and concentration of their populations, but by the patterns of differentiation. Cities, that is, produce and reproduce difference in ways which are marked in space” (Tonkiss, 2010: 32). The plans and the urban design of the city are already constructing borders between people, limiting spaces and creating barriers. It separates not only different communities, but also different zones according to the function it might have for the city (residence, services, market, law, etc.). Tonkiss continues by stating that both economic and social changes transform urban spaces: “The remarking of contemporary inner cities operates in terms of their physical form, their economic function, their social make-up, but also reshape urban identities”

(Tonkiss, 2010: 80).

More than ever, just as Bauman notices, contemporary cities are characterized by the presence of gated communities. Walls have been created and entire communities appear isolated from the rest of the city – São Paulo, for instance, is one of the cities where this phenomenon is common. Gated communities, according to Bauman, started to appear as a solution that offered security and distance from a reality that people did not want to see or to be related to. Fear and insecurity end up creating bunkers and isolated spaces, with high walls and closed condominiums, with private security and tele-surveillance services that separate and maintain oneself away from the rest of society, and especially from the stranger<sup>31</sup>. Nowadays we are dealing with protective laws and rules which ultimately mine international relationships. The international policies adopted by President Trump are an example of the ideals of proudly being alone in this all-connected world. One of his first campaign promises was to construct a wall along the border with Mexico to create a physical separation, as a racist and misogynist attitude. Also, the economic sanctions that the USA have been imposing on other countries such as China, Russia or Canada are transforming America into a gated community, increasingly separated from the rest of the world.

The stranger is, according to Bauman, the only thing in common in all the cities around the world since the beginning of their history. The author refers to this figure as mysterious and incomprehensible, as someone that mingles and hides in the streets of the city creating insecurity in the whole mass that is seen as uniform. The city is the place where the stranger<sup>32</sup> exists and is in constant contact with others:

Being a permanent component of city life, the ubiquitous presence of strangers within sight and reach adds measure of perpetual uncertainty to all city dwellers' life pursuits; that presence, impossible to avoid for more than a brief moment, is a

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<sup>31</sup> Ali Madanipour says that in today's society we are facing three types of discrimination: economic, political and cultural. The three are always related to space, since exclusion has always a spatial dimension, i.e. individuals are somehow expelled from a space. With the globalization process, we are witnessing a reshaping of the city, which is a cause and a consequence, says the author, of the restructuring of the social dimension, which is going to create more segregation on all levels: "Space has, therefore, a major role in the integration or segregation of urban society. It is a manifestation of social relationships while affecting and shaping the geometries of these relationships. This leads us to the argument that social exclusion cannot be studied without also looking at spatial segregation and exclusion. Social cohesion or exclusion, therefore, are indeed socio-spatial phenomena. [...] It is the absence of social integration which causes social exclusion, as individuals do not find the possibility and channels of participating in the mainstream society" (Madanipour, 2011: 191).

<sup>32</sup> In Zygmunt Bauman's words: "The stranger is, by definition, an agent moved by intentions that one can at best guess but would never know for sure. The stranger is the unknown variable in all equations calculated when decisions about what to do and how to behave are made [...]" (Bauman, 2003: 28).

never drying source of anxiety and of the usually dormant, yet time and again erupting, aggressiveness. (Bauman, 2003: 27)

The relationship with the stranger is essentially of distrust and uncertainty. The different and what does not resemble the normal causes fear and distress, especially in a post-9/11 era when apparently people try to escape from the unknown and want to avoid it at all costs. The result of this non-interaction with the other is to ignore. In a big city, people act as if they are alone, generally not talking or looking to the other with whom they are sharing the elevator, the bus stop or the metro<sup>33</sup>. There is a sense of solitude in this attitude of being with others based on detachment in the sense that, as Tonkiss argues, “it is not possible, nor is it necessary, to engage with everyone you come across. [...] My way of accommodating a stranger’s presence in shared space is usually to ignore them” (Tonkiss, 2010: 116). Simmel has a concept that makes sense in nowadays’ societies that is the idea of *blasé*, which is a posture characterized by a blank reaction to over-stimulation. Individuals pretend not to see and not listen to the city, they adapt and adjust themselves to being indifferent and try to defend themselves from the number of stimuli that a city is always sending (Tonkiss, 2010: 117). A *blasé* attitude is easier to have in today’s society since there are multiple devices that allow one to close oneself off inside a bubble.

Allowing myself a small digression, in August of 1974, a group of visual artists decided to take over a street in Lisbon with an installation that surprised everyone. Right in the middle of the city, in Rua do Carmo, the group painted circles on the floor with yellow and pink colours. Right after the end of the dictatorship, there was a need to create, to express, to use the public space and to claim it as something that belongs to everybody. The city is, in this sense, a space of creation. While producing this installation, there were rumours that nobody really knew how to deal with the situation. The police could not say if that action constituted an infraction or if it was a licit action, since the street is actually something that has no owner, a space everyone has the right to use. The installation took place without any problems and without any one questioning the act or its impact. It was absorbed as something normal or ignored

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<sup>33</sup> Given that we are talking about urban experience in post-modernity, it is also important to mention the concept of non-places by Marc Augé (1995), a space of passage where individuals yield their identity and become something lost in space and time. They exist as individuals, but do not create any kind of relation or connection with others or the outside. It is a space without any social value and with no room for recognition. The author uses as an example of these non-places airports, hotels, supermarkets and public transportation, since individuals never establish themselves there, being in those places for only a few moments, in passage.

by those who were living their daily lives without even noticing that an installation was happening in the middle of the street.

According to Georg Simmel, in modern cities, individuals are reduced to a sand grain in comparison to an enormous organization of things and powers that withdraws all of their capacity for progress, spirituality and values. Individuals become deprived of some levels of their human value, remaining almost in an objective condition. In this city, Simmel sees the citizens as “cold and heartless”, as atomized beings. Alone, without looking to the other individuals and reducing interactions to the minimum, the distance and the apathy between people increase:

Relations of indifference in the city in this way can be seen as part of a general ‘dulling of the senses’ which serves to abridge the terms of social contact, to mark and maintain the psychological boundaries between individuals. If this represents some kind of social loss, it is a necessary one. (Tonkiss, 2010: 117)

Cities are now composed by tons of information and stimuli that affect all humans. Faced with such a high multisensory stimulation, the subject ends up being enchanted with so much information and entering into an entropic situation from which they have to move away, thus closing themselves off. This seems to be the only solution to defy the possibility of ending up dormant in the society.

It is this indifference that conducts to the feeling of individualism that Bauman considers a trait of the liquid modernity, in which a society does not have a specific form and is characterized by different fluxes of transferences in all levels: economic, political, social, etc. Mobility, lightness and speed are the three concepts that Bauman uses to define this new society where individuals are seen as centred in their own solitude, which is reflected in the relationships between individuals, individuals and space, and individuals and time: “To put in a nutshell, ‘individualization’ consists of transforming human ‘identity’ from a ‘given’ into a ‘task and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance” (Bauman, 2000: 31).

With this idea of returning the power and the responsibility of their own acts to individuals, society is transforming egocentrism and indifference in relation to the unknown into a drive to move, to construct and to transform society. This will of agency, of owning the self and of being proactive is the alternative to the passivity and numbness that has taken over subjects in the modern society. From uncertainty comes a motivation to take action, a desire to be free from impotence: “A gap is

growing between individuality as fate and individuality as the practical and realistic capacity for self-assertion” (Bauman, 2000: 34). It is in the recognition of the potential of the individual that individuals realise their ability to control the social settings in which they are inserted. However, first, individuals must become citizens and take on the consequences of their actions, whether positive or not, as an independent self with autonomy and rationality:

The individual *de jure* cannot turn into the individual *de facto* without first becoming the *citizen*. There are no autonomous individuals without an autonomous society, and the autonomy of society requires deliberate and perpetually deliberated self-constitution, something that may be only shared accomplishment of its members. (Bauman, 2000: 40)

In this sense, there must be a will to take a step into the public sphere and to take action. “*The personal is the political*”, the motto from the feminist manifestation of the 60s and 70s is still the motto that individuals must have in mind in order to take ownership of the public space and thus to be able to change the relations established therein. Individuals have now the possibility to have the authority and the autonomy to find their own value and identity, to return to a state of giving value to their own actions. To give the power of agency to individuals is to give them autonomy to define not only themselves, but also the society in which they live:

Everything, so to speak, is now down to the individual. It is up to the individual to find out what she or he is capable of doing, to stretch that capacity to the utmost, and to pick the ends to which that capacity could be applied best – that is, to the greatest conceivable satisfaction. (Bauman, 2000: 62)

In these new city dynamics, individuals are taking the role of agents that can cause an effect. Individuals can, in this way, assume a role as agents of change and create a small assemblage of transformations, whose social impact has a probability of undertaking a significant role in their specific communitarian sphere.

Finally, to conclude Manuel Castells’s idea about dichotomies, namely in relation to the form, “cities are structured, and destructured simultaneously by the competing logic of the space of flows and the space of places” (Castells, 2011: 576). Despite the transference of these flows and places to the virtual area and to the world wide web, cities will never disappear.

But they are transformed by the interface between electronic communication and physical interaction, by the combination of networks and places... The informational city is built around this double system of communication. Our cities are made up, at the same time, of flows and places, and of their relationships. (ibid)

The urban experience and space are facing, in today's society, new challenges in the way people interact in and within it. There is a need to globally engage people in the local environment: "The capacity of local community to provide an alternative to the social fragmentation brought about by global capitalism cannot rest on social institutions alone. Important as these are in empowering local communities, the future of community will have to rest on the cultivation of what might be called a new language" (Delanty, 2005: 69). Again, to empower individuals and to allow them to be a force of change, to act locally and to create an impact locally, might be a way to counter the negative globalization and to rebound the social affectivity. Now, equipped with agency, citizens are released from the dormancy, that was closing them inside a bubble. The will to change and to take the risk, to communicate with the other and to do something for the community, contributes to the reconstruction of connectivity between individuals.

Connectivity, mediation, re-organization and articulation are the new concepts to explore in these cities of information, as is going to be discussed in the next subchapter.

## **2.2. The urban space as mediation, organization and social construction**

Departing from Freud's ideas that humanity already accepts its limits and already knows that it is not possible to dominate nature in its entirety, Bauman states that humans accept their mortal fate and the fact that time never stops, even though it is by bearing that in mind that Man always tries to attenuate some sufferings to the detriment of others and never stops trying to improve himself and his surroundings (using technology to adapt the natural world) (Bauman, 2009:14). Cities are the example of this necessity to control the natural, to adapt the environment to personal needs. Amos Rapoport says that the environment always involves relationships among people, between people and other components that are present in that space (Rapoport: 2007: 465). The organization of the space always depends on interaction and on mutual influences of communication: "Patterns of communication and interaction are affected by clustering in space, by means of social networks, acquaintanceship, neighbouring, travel and visiting the organization of meaning influences not only space and time but also communication" (Rapoport, 2007: 466). The organization of space is always a cultural act: "the human use and organization of

space as expressed in cultural landscapes and built environments” (Rapoport, 2007: 467). According to the 2018 UN report<sup>34</sup>, nowadays 55% of world population lives in cities – expecting to increase to 68% in the end of 2050. Such a gap between lifestyles creates transformations in all levels of society, such as economy (with a decrease of people working in agriculture and a rise in terms of people aiming to work in services), social-policy (with the increase of the urban population, with more mixtures of people, cultures and ways of life, the greater the strangeness of the unknown and the problems of exclusion, gentrification, and scarcity in terms of jobs and resources), or ecology (with a spread of pollution levels).

In the last century, urbanization was the biggest mark of change. Since then, “[t]here has been a massive reorganization of the world’s population, of its political and its institutional structures and of the very ecology of the earth” (Harvey, 2011: 232). To talk about cities is to talk about relations, and not only of its spatial extension with walls and buildings. The relations that are established in a city and that turn the city into an entity are the object of study<sup>35</sup>. The flows and the places that constitute the arrangement of the city are in constant interaction with the individuals that use those spaces. It is a human characteristic to transform an activity of occupation of a space, that is, to inhabit a place, into an “articulated form of meaning, values and functions of a social, political, economical and cultural nature” (Unità di Crisi, 2014). More than just to occupy, humans make use of the space according to their values, meanings and symbols. Lefebvre concludes that the city is always a kind of mediation: “Containing the near order, it supports it; it maintains relations of

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<sup>34</sup> According to projections about urbanization, “the gradual shift in residence of the human population from rural to urban areas, combined with the overall growth of the world’s population could add another 2.5 billion people to urban areas by 2050” (2018). This growth of urban population is going to create bigger problems with housing, transportation, energy systems and other infrastructures, such as with employment, education and health care. There is an urgency for policies that improve the connections between the urban and the rural, by strengthening the links in economic, social and political rules, so as not to saturate urban areas and restore a sustainable balance with the more rural areas. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>

<sup>35</sup> Urbanism is a social theory that allows studying the city as an entity with multiple perspectives, all of them centred in the people and the relationships they establish between themselves, the space, the time and the structures that constitute a city. “Urbanism as a characteristic mode of life may be approached empirically from three interrelated perspectives: (1) as a physical structure comprising a population base, a technology, and an ecological order; (2) as a system of social organization involving a characteristic social structure, a series of social institutions, and a typical pattern of social relationships; and (3) as a set of attitudes and ideas, and a constellation of personalities engaging in typical forms of collective behavior and subject to characteristic mechanisms of social control” (Wirth, 2011: 101).

production and property; it is the place of their reproduction. Contained in the far order, it supports it; it incarnates it; it inscribes it, prescribes it, writes it” (Lefebvre, 2000: 101). Therefore, the city is a place of production, of reflection of its own users and creators. It is a place where individuals can interact to produce progress, which reflects and is a reflection of their actions:

[...] if there is production of the city, and social relations in the city, it is a production and reproduction of human beings by human beings, rather than a production of objects. The city has a history; it is the work of a history, that is, of clearly defined people and groups who accomplish the *oeuvre*, in historical conditions. (ibid)

The city and its individuals are always products and producers of each other, being reflections of each other. As Buell highlights, the “single person’s experience is mediated by the group” (Buell, 2001: 70) and, so, places are not simply shaped by a person, but are always culturally influenced. Cities are products of a work of a collective, in constant process of modification, expansion and reinterpretation: “The city can be read as a volume of codes and immutable norms, irrevocable and univocally interpretable, or as an immense book, resulting from collective writing that never ceases to reread, modify, expand and reinterpret itself (Unità di Crisi, 2014)”.

Generally speaking, the city is seen as a place constructed by humans to facilitate their life, since it concentrates all the needs in the same area. A city, from Fran Tonkiss’s point of view, is not only an urban fixed space, but also a place of social processes, a “site of social encounter and social division, as a field of politics and power, as a symbolic and material landscape, as an embodied space, as a realm of everyday experience” (Tonkiss, 2010: 1). However, the information age has changed this vision of a city as a geographical space limited to a confined physical area. Just as Melvin M. Webber explains, the limits between what is urban and what is not is vanishing, in the sense that “urbanites no longer reside exclusively in metropolitan settlements, nor do ruralites live exclusively in the hinterlands” (Webber, 2011: 951). Technology, communication, transportation and economy allow a group, actually a person, to be in touch with different communities from different cities, countries and even continents. Geography and space is becoming something virtual and can be extended without borders. According to Melvin M. Webber, social organization is no longer the same as spatial organization. Currently, cities are more important because of the information that is concentrated there:

The way such men use the city reveals its essential character most clearly for to

them the city is essentially a massive communications switchboard through which human interaction takes place. Indeed cities exist only because spatial agglomeration permits reduced cost of interaction. (Webber, 2011: 951)

Technological improvements in transportation and communication have changed the notion of distance and facilitated all transferences<sup>36</sup>: “Our compact, physical city layouts directly mirror the more primitive technologies in use at the time these were built. In a similar way, the locational pattern of cities upon the continent reflects the technologies available at the time the settlements grew” (Webber, 2011: 952). As argued by Webber, nowadays, the city is just a convenient setting for people to live in, but the urban design does not fit the present era of technology and information. Even though the majority of the population has been working in a net of relations without borders, it is still in the city that one can have access to all services, information and places in order to have an easier and more comfortable life.

Tonkiss says that the urban space is socially produced and reproduced, and population is always worried about spatial arrangements and social action conditioning each other (Tonkiss, 2010: 150). The notion of space and its limits is defined by the social interaction, i.e. people define the space:

Spatial boundaries are formed and reproduced by social action, and also impress themselves on ways of thinking. Modes of both separating and connecting spaces (borders, boundaries, paths, bridges) give objective form to a subjective understanding of space. And then serve to conduct the subject in space. (Tonkiss, 2010: 31)

In this sense, space, beyond geographical coordinates, is always a social space and depends on each person’s perspective and of each person’s particular way of living the city in his or her ordinary life: “People’s experience of the city is not only or always determined by larger social or economic structures, but also fashioned by their individual perceptions, mental maps and spatial practices” (Tonkiss, 2010: 113). As different as their experience might be, each social agent will have ‘spatial stories’ to tell about their urban itineraries<sup>37</sup>. Each person has a different way to see his or her

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<sup>36</sup> With globalization and the acceleration of reality, when time and space are being shrunk by the technological advances and cultural changes, society is facing a new ecology: the grey ecology, the pollution of the self-created world according to Paul Virilio. This grey ecology has a direct impact in Humanity more than in nature, constituting not a physical pollution but a mental and abstract one, that changes perceptions and proportions of Man’s limits (Virilio, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Mark Turner in *The Way We Imagine* (2007) talks about the relation between ideas and the real world, in which the spatial reality, its representation and even the way we perceive it define how cognitive information is created and recorded in the human mind. Living beings move in the world by means of their bodies, which are the central aspect of everything. It is the body that defines the spatial, temporal and energetic qualities of the objects; the body is always the human reference to the space and, hence, to the city.

city according to his or her experience.

With the growth of urbanism, a few problems have started to dominate the social agenda, such as marginalization, disempowerment, alienation, pollution and degradation. As David Harvey puts it: “It might be said that this is nothing new and that, in the nineteenth century, conditions were even worse. In the past, however, urbanization and the consequences of urbanization were taken rather more seriously than they are today” (Harvey, 2011: 232). A new urbanism<sup>38</sup> implies a new way of dealing with the surroundings and the people that move there. This new era of information still has to adapt its urban and social structures to these global challenges with local effects. City planning and administration have to take into account new social conflicts and problems that are arising or worsening at this moment like poverty, gentrification, segregation, public transportation and communication failure, pollution and changes in ecosystems: “A new civilization, and not simply a new technological paradigm, requires a new culture<sup>39</sup>. This culture in the making is being fought over by various sets of interests and cultural projects” (Castells, 2011: 579). Castells sees environmentalism as “the code word for this cultural battle” (ibid), and, following the same line as Felix Guattari, subjectivity, environment and sociality must be re-examined and new relations must be created<sup>40</sup>. The environment cannot be separated from culture; nor the social and the individual can be analyzed separately. In this way, individuals must look at these new experiences and conviviality and reclaim their subjectivity and their collective role, having in mind all the social,

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<sup>38</sup> New urbanism is a concept created in the 80s in the USA, inspired by the patterns used before the rise and prominence of the automobile in the urban planning of the cities, with the objective of rescuing the quality of life and improving the relationship between man and the city in a long-term sustainable development. The idea is to find a bond between the urban constructions and the social, environmental and economic plans, in order to guarantee better conditions of life.

<sup>39</sup> With new culture, Castells refers to a new vision about environmentalism, in which there is a different ecological view of the social organization, and there is a preoccupation with the impact of action not only in a local logic, but also in a macro perspective. Questions of time and space have also been changing with the new technological setup, causing a need for new structures and new mindsets about these two measures, which have shrunk with the progress of our society.

<sup>40</sup> Guattari sees in the relationship between subjectivity and exteriority of individuals (social, animal, vegetable or cosmic) a need for a commitment and a need to create a relation within the others. In this ethico-political articulation, having in mind the ecological crisis, human actions should acquire a political, social and cultural dimension that allows reshaping and producing new material and immaterial assets. He talks about a new ecosophy that moves away from the old forms of “political, religious and associative commitment” (Guattari, 2008: 44), where individuals provided with agency know their role in society and are always conscious of their actions and the repercussions in the environment: “Individuals must become both more united and increasingly different” (Guattari, 2008: 45).

political and environmental dimensions of their lives. More than to mediate or to re-organize, cities must be conscious of their role in integration:

So, the new culture of urban integration is not the culture of assimilation into the values of a single dominant culture, but the culture of communication between an irreversibly diverse local society connected/disconnected to global flows of wealth, power, and information. (Castells, 2011: 582)

In this society, the flux of people, ideas, cultures, information and products is impossible to stop circulation, to create obstacles to the mixing with the other or to block the difference. Multiculturalism and homogenization of cultures are now a part of every modern city. Only through the contact and the creation of bonds is it possible to recreate a community empowered and strong enough to accept what is different and to allow the integration and assimilation of the strange.

### **2.3. Relearning the value of community**

Robert D. Putnam, in the book *Bowling Alone* mentions often the concept of social capital as the theory that says that social networks have value. Social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups. Social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them are the social capital that each individual might “produce”:

In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue’. The difference is that ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (Putnam, 2000: 19)

Putnam uses Michael Taylor’s ideas about reciprocity to explain that each individual acts according to a system of short-term altruism and long-term self-interest, since the help one offers now will possibly result in help being offered in the future (Putnam, 2000: 134-135). People are always playing with these chain favours during their lifetime, creating bonds and feelings of belonging to a community or group. Social capital bonds us to others similar to us, from the same sphere of action.

As Delanty affirms, since the mid-1980s cities are seen with a different look with the global flows, the divisions between city sections, creation of ghettos or gated communities:

The restructuring of capitalism by global markets, information technology and neoliberal policies marked the end of industrialization and the coming of a new age of deindustrialization. The consequences for the city and urban communities

were enormous. The city lost its connection with community. (Delanty, 2005: 56- 57)

In the era of information, the idea of community and of helping the other, living in an environment of mutual support is being forgotten:

The life of community is the vanishing counterpoint to urban life, and the longing for community carries an implied critique of the city. As a social form that is always receding from view, continually at a point of crisis, community might be seen as much as the stuff of political fantasy or sociological romance as a matter of social actuality. (Tonkiss, 2010: 9)

To create networks of connection between individuals is the only way to go back to the idea of community, as a group or collective in which individuals help each other to achieve progress through sharing and discussion, and to, together, create social structures and institutions that mobilize a bigger group: “community is still an important source of articulating less shared values or place than moral experiences. In order to build up self-esteem, self-respect and autonomous human beings, community needs to be more discursively mobilized” (Delanty, 2005: 70). Delanty defends the idea of a community built under the power of communication and the construction of relations based on the information shared. He continues valuing the influence of the local in order to empower each individual: “Local communities must be able to give voice to personal identities, rather than being seen as a cultural expression of collectivities or spatial categories to be organized into recipients of state services” (ibid). In this sense, in a society atomized by consumption and work, the author sees an increase of informal networks outside family and work, where people try to establish connections outside their daily habits (Delanty, 2005: 144). In today’s society, the relations and the connections between people are often something more virtual and based in the communication and the affective relations with others.

The communicative ties and cultural structures in the contemporary societies of the global age – as opposed to in industrial and traditional societies – have opened up numerous possibilities for belonging based on religion, nationalism, ethnicity, lifestyle and gender. It is in this world of plurality rather than of closure that the new kinds of community are emerging. (Delanty, 2005: 187)

A new idea of community was born based on communications and new kinds of belonging. The bond is not as strong as in industrial or traditional societies, but at the same time these relationships are also more unstable, fluid and open, since individuals are more independent and self-centred.

Bauman says that humans are different from animals because they have compassion. Because of that, humanity also created conditions of survival for the

disabled and disadvantaged. The author makes an appeal: “The contemporary concern is all there: to bring this compassion and solicitude to the planetary sphere. I know that previous generations have faced this task, but you will have to continue on this path, whether or not to start with your home, your city - and now” (Bauman, 2009: 90 – my translation)<sup>41</sup>. Bauman appeals to a rebounding and to an exploration of other connections, not restricted to a specific group of people that is similar to the self. To open links to different relations and individuals, to accept the difference and to approach the stranger, to trust difference is the solution to create new links and new communities that come closer to the individuals, that present other realities and experiences.

Delanty states that in this fragmented society, there has been a worldwide search for community and for establishing contact with others and, in the same way, “cultural developments and global forms of communication have facilitated the construction of community” (Delanty, 2005: 193). Breaking the ideals of patriarchy, constructing equality between the sexes, market liberation, more openness and exchange of cultures and mentalities, and especially the revolution in terms of technology and means of communication allow new forms of socialization and the constitution of different relations: “Family, consumption, the state and education the individual is both more free and at the same time more reliant on alternative social bonds” (ibid).

To act as a group and work together collectively seems to be the solution to the problems of contemporary urban life. The problems exposed previously, apparently seem to be dissolved when individuals start finding their path in the middle of the crowd and influencing each other<sup>42</sup>: “Community activism can simply be a way of containing discontent but it can also be a very important moment in more general mobilization. In this context, we have to think about the construction of community not as an end in itself but as a moment in a process”

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<sup>41</sup> In the absence of an English version, I have consulted the Portuguese translation of Bauman’s book *Confiança e Medo na Cidade* (2009) and used here my own translations.

<sup>42</sup> Delanty sees in friendship a solution to this problem, more than in family and work relationships. He gives special emphasis to being part of a group where relations and friendship, trust and mutual support take place: “Given the growing importance of networks more generally in contemporary society, it is not at all implausible that friendship may be playing a similar role. Friendship may thus be seen as a flexible and deterritorial kind of community that can be mobilized easily depending on circumstances, and can exist on ‘thick’ as well as ‘thin’ levels, for friendship comes in many forms” (Delanty, 2005: 144).

(Harvey, 2011: 235). This process of recreating the social links between different individuals is a solution to make the individuals to rise again from the homogenization and atomization that the modern urban life has created:

Individuals must become both more united and increasingly different. [...] By means of these transversal tools (clefs), subjectivity is able to install itself simultaneously in the realms of the environment, in the major social and institutional assemblages, and symmetrically, in the landscapes and fantasies of the most intimate spheres of the individual. (Guattari, 2008: 45)

David Harvey says that this new process of transformations still has a lot of time to be implemented. He considers that “community mobilization and the transformation of militant particularism have a vital role to play, enabling us to find the universal concerns that exist within a realm of difference” (Harvey, 2011: 237). A dialectic relation must be put into practice to coordinate unity and difference, universal and particular value, to connect cultures, values and modes of living. The relationship between individuals inside a city must be re-evaluated in order for people to learn how to appreciate urban life without being swallowed by the crowd and shrunk to a pointless piece. Individuals must understand not only their own value in the community, but also to highlight the relationships with others and the impact that a group may cause in the human ecosystem.

### 3. The Body and the Society

#### 3.1. Bodies and their connection with society

Humans have bodies. With the Cartesian thought and other similar theories, thinkers have been centred in mind and soul issues forgetting that the body is the medium that is connected with the world: “Our society tends to distrust the body and consider it apart from the mind that creates vocal and written discourse” (Hanna, 2001: 40). In recent years, however, new theories of embodiment and embodied cognition have come to change these ideas (Rohrer, 2006) and to understand the connection between mind and body and how they work together in perceiving the world.

The body is now an object in diverse areas of academia, being studied for different purposes. As Simon J. Williams and Gillian A. Bendelow point out in their book *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues*, “indeed, recent years have witnessed a veritable explosion of interest in the body within social theory, from Foucault’s discursive body to Elias’s civilised body, and from the reflexive body of late modernity to the post-structuralist celebration of the body (‘without organs’) as the nomadic site of desire” (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 1). Under these new social theories, the body has come to the forefront not only in the analysis of biological and physical aspects, but also in more abstract and ontological theories: “Seen in this new corporeal light, the body is not only deeply embedded in the core problems of sociology itself, from the bodily basis of social order to the embodiment of social action, but is fast becoming a ‘core’ problem in its own right” (ibid). More than ever, the body has become a very complex concept that brings up numerous questions from different areas.

According to the post-structuralist thought, bodies are being reconfigured as fluid, multiple, fragmented and dispersed. Williams and Bendelow defend that, with social and technological development, the body is what may become, and, hence, the body is always under construction and adaptation. The social and the cultural have always a direct impact on the way we move and the way we move has an impact on space. The body is seen as the medium between the self and the world, what

Descartes called *res extensa*<sup>43</sup>. However, the relation between self and the Other is a double bind relation, given that there is a mutual influence. The body in space is creating waves of influence; whilst the space and everything that is there (people, objects, values, concepts) have a direct impact on the body: “the experiential worlds with which we interact are more than simply physical; we are born into social and cultural milieus which transcend our individual bodies in time” (Rohrer, 2006: 5). Tim Rohrer uses the example of tools to explain how they came to men, “shaped [not only] by social-cultural forces”, but also by the way the body uses them and, therefore, are always under a “long process of cultural refinement” (ibid).

The corporeal experience in the world is dictated by the society, which mediates and adapts the body to the social norms. There is a reinforcement of corporeal meaning through social experimentation and peer pressure. According to Douglas, the body, how it can be used and how it can be presented in particular contexts, is something cultural:

The social body constrains the way in which the physical body is perceived, and the physical experience of the body, which itself is always mediated and modified through the social categories with which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the other. The forms it adopts in movement and repose express social pressures in manifold ways. (quoted in Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 26-27)

The society defines borders and limits to the way a body can move and act in it according to a social and cultural context. It is in this sense that it is possible to say that the body is a mirror of the social order and the vehicle that allows social performance. It is through the body that codes are expressed and that social representations are projected: “human bodies themselves are transformed into a location for the expression of civilised codes of behaviour, thereby providing the basis for the social differentiation of individuals according to ‘bodily worth’. Manners, in other words, become key embodied markers of social value and self-identity”

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<sup>43</sup> *Res extensa* is the body, the physical part of the subject that exists in parallel to the *res cogita* (the thought). *Res extensa* is the continuation of the individual cogito, what moves and interacts with the environment. According to the Cartesian ideals, the cogito was the most important and central part of humans, while the body was just an extension of that, functioning as a medium, a dispositive to act in a world, something mechanical and automatic.

(Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 40). The body allows the notion of self, the limits from the others, the individualization and consciousness as a single entity<sup>44</sup>.

The body is a communication medium that shows and acts according to cultural norms, social rules and ethical limits. If, on one site, we have street dance battles in every corner of the city, in other societies, we still have women being arrested for posting videos dancing on social media<sup>45</sup>. All social relations and the way the body moves in space are based on social control and posture; and the biologic somatic sensorial motor system<sup>46</sup> is not enough to evaluate the relations a body establishes in society:

Somatic attention is characterized by Csordas (1993: 138) as those ‘culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others’. There are two salient features of somatic attention: first, we attend with or through the body, and second, such a body’s mode of attention is culturally, socially and inter-subjectively informed. In other words: ‘... neither attending to nor attending with the body can be taken for granted but must be formulated as culturally constituted somatic modes of attention. (Rothfield, 2010: 311)

If the body is a medium to communicate, it is possible to say that movement is the language to transmit the information. Body language is something innate to everybody, which is difficult to control, having sometimes a crucial function in allowing and facilitating the understanding of the other, as already mentioned in chapter one: “Movement is our mother tongue and primordial thought. [...] Recent research underscores the power of nonverbal communication, showing that it is sometimes even more compelling than verbal communication” (Hanna, 2001: 40). The value of movement and its relationship with dance and choreography is going to be explored in the next section as embodied expression:

Alongside performance art and other praxical modes of embodied expression such as dance, art provides a powerful ‘visual narrative’ of the embodied

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<sup>44</sup> Just as Elias, Bordieu or Goffman have defended, the body is a carrier of symbolic value and of its relationship to the performing self. These authors see the body in a passive view, as a container of bias: an entity that collects all the social, biological, cultural influences. See more in “Bodily ‘order’”, chapter 4 of *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues* (Williams and Bendelow, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Maedeh Hojabri is an Iranian girl, only in her early 20s, who got arrested for posting her dance videos on her Instagram. A worldwide campaign was released on social media to support her.

<sup>46</sup> The fact that everybody has a body is not enough to understand the relations between humans and society. Biologically speaking, humans are all the same, however, culture determines how the body and the way it is used changes the perception and evaluation made by others. The way a body moves in a society is impossible to be analysed exclusively with the sensations of the body and must be understood according to a context and seen as a medium between self and all the rest. The body is the frontier; it is the dispositive that allows subjects to move in the world, to be physical, in a context.

biographies of artists themselves, expressing fundamental features of the human condition. In doing so, the boundaries between art and social theory, reproduction and resistance, are (temporarily) destabilised, if not (permanently) effaced. (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 8)

Just as Rothfield defends, the world has a direct impact on what is being produced as representational: “Postmodern, post-structural and post-colonial forms of discourse dispute the notion that the immediate is prior to and analytically separable from the influence of the external world, suggesting instead that the sphere of subjectivity is constituted through discursive and representational practices” (Rothfield, 2010: 309). Embodiment is, hence, not only to embed the environment in the body, but also how a body can appropriate concepts, stories and world issues and transform them into movement, into something bodily animated:

Embodying is a practical process not necessarily compatible with verbal language. Embodying is a process which gives tangible form to ideas. It is also a process by which the ideas dormant in practice emerge. In dance, it fuses the ideas with the movement and with the performer of the movement. Indeed, embodying dance work fuses all the participants in the event in a multi-layered tangible process. (Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, 2002: 7)

It is important to highlight the relevance of embodiment in dance, because, contrarily to other artworks, the object that carries a message is the body of a living being that is presented to an audience. A person is an instrument that is used to transmit a message that is constrained in choreography:

In dance the body is employed as the instrument, and movement as the medium. Consequently, a dancer has two goals to keep in view. First, he must train the mind to use the body and to reflect its conditions, for the primary concern of dance is the feeling tones of physical origin. Second, he must train the body to be responsive to the expressive mind. Whatever thought and feeling tones are to be expressed must be felt through the body. Therefore the importance of feelings and emotions, and their power to motivate muscle activity, cannot be overlooked. (H'Doubler, 1968: 70)

However, while dancing, dancers are not presenting their own feelings and emotions. But there is a process of embodied cognition where the body is used to think and to process a kind of knowledge that is dictated by the author of the ensemble of movements. Dancers must have the capacity to express something that does not belong to them, but it is also true that the way they move entails a layer of individual experience and embodiment that gives certain particularities to the movement.

### 3.2. Choreography and the expression of the society

“Art, as we have seen, is central to an embodied sociology” (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 205). The way embodied praxes such as performance arts and visual narratives express bodily and visually what society is facing is a manner of balancing all the textual ways<sup>47</sup> of social representation that exist today. More and more, narratives and stories are apprehended by means of sight and other sensitive stimuli:

Not only does art, in its manifold forms, reflect and reinforce dominant beliefs and ideologies within the broader body/politics it also constitutes a key site of (embodied) ‘resistance’ to prevailing nodes of discourse with their ‘normalising’ assumptions. In these and many other respects, boundaries between art and social theory, science and morality, begin to blur if not collapse, thereby opening up new spaces and possibilities of ‘becoming’ (other). (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 205)

In this sense, art and its connection with socio-political issues have increased. The body that moves is always a social body, that is, influenced by the context. The Other and that which is different are a bigger input to this connection. Embodiment is always related to locating the body in the world, which means, in a context full of influences. Everything humans do has direct repercussions on them, as embodied beings which are under the impact of the environment: space and experiences determine the individual. The place is always embedded by the subject and is always “manifest only through its impact – emotional as well as physical – or particular bodies, families, places, and that it is only by contemplating that impact that pattern hegemony can be questioned, even if not controlled” (Buell, 2001: 56). Everybody is place-based and influenced by this connection to a space that is always a social and cultural definition of the individual. Body and place are always under a relation of belonging and membership (ibid). It is under this bond with spatiality, with the space where the body is moving, that a dance piece must be studied, whilst having all the references of space, stage, scene into account, since the body is always creating connections with other elements: “Therefore, the body’s relation to its spatiality, the relation of spatiality (both personal and cultural) to motility, the relevance of the elements of *mise-en-scène* to the way in which the body is constituted in and via the

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<sup>47</sup> There are a lot of news, texts, books, online posts. Everything becomes abstract and the body is forgotten. In this virtual world, flesh and bones are left behind and individuals tend to create distance from the other bodies, since they are not used anymore to the human touch and morphology.

stage space, are also relevant to our inquiry as the earlier references to tanztheater<sup>48</sup> testify” (Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, 2002: 11).

In dance, since the body is the vehicle of expression, questions of embodiment are even more critical. According to Laban’s ideals of modern dance<sup>49</sup>, the relation between movement and social context is not limited only to mimetic descriptions but it is actually also due to symbolic forces and the values of the social group in which the person moving is integrated. The values and the personal experience of the dancer are embedded in the body moving as well.

Margaret N. H’Doubler talks about the dancer as the author of a piece, and not only as the interpreter. She highlights the need of the individual to reduce him or herself and to become a neutral instrument:

The source of all art is the individual personality. The dancer when creating, is forced to face the content of his own personality and make selections from it. He experiences an awakening and refining of the excellencies of his nature which may ultimately affect everyday living. He seeks to identify himself with the ideal meaning of his experiences, and in this attempt to do so he is led to the exercise of critical judgment and discrimination. (H’Doubler, 1968: 167)

The personal experience of a painter also determines the way he or she paints, of course, but the final art is something independent from the subject. In dance, however, the dancer is a central axis of the produced piece and the body has a higher relevance:

The movement is enriched, then, from the inner journey that transposes for a moment into the visible. Can one speak of something ‘before the gesture’? No, because at this extreme point of a poetic presentation, the question of anteriority or of posteriority is no longer posed by a linear understanding, which risks to dry up the sensory richness of experience, but the displacement with the dancer in the meanderings of the said gears. (Louppe, 2012: 132 – my translation)

The body is always a social body under a community influence. But it is also dependent on the space and moment. Despite being choreography, each movement that is created and completed depends on the moment. Each movement is different because the dancers’ bodies are always in a constant change and adaptation, adding

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<sup>48</sup> *Tanztheater* appeared in Germany in the late 60s as literally dance theatre. Modern dance was already seen as a mode of social engagement, but with *tanztheater* daily life issues and movements were taken to stage. Pina Bausch was the pioneer of this style of dance, giving a theatrical potential to dance, by using the body in a dialogue between performance and theatre, accepting the impact of cultural structures and social experience in the bodies.

<sup>49</sup> Rudolf Laban is considered one of the pioneers of modern dance in Europe, having created what is known as the expressionist dance (*ausdruckstanz*), where body and physicality were used to express personal experience and feelings. Also, Laban saw in dance a way to connect Man with the Cosmo and to restore the natural bonds of community. For further information, see Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, *Dance and the Performative: A Choreological Perspective ~ Laban and Beyond* (2002).

different layers to the movement. Each dancer has a different way of moving and that difference depends on the inner influences that the dancer has already embodied. To dance is to create a choreography in a body and to show it in a specific time and space, creating an ephemeral event that can be reproduced later. This movement has a narrative, a life experience, a social conduct and cultural bonds associated with it, being always different from a body to another. As Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg claim: “Embodying material in dance is about presenting something (unutterable) through a tangible person-based medium to be appreciated and also living something (unutterable) as experience” (Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, 2002: 11). Dance has multiple layers that cannot be explained by words. A body moving is not simply what can be seen but also all the issues that a body has embodied, that are part of the dancer and that influence the movement. Besides that, all choreographies have a concept and a narrative that are transposed to the movement that may or may not be obvious to the audience. The body does not need words to express something. Just as Pina Bausch would said: dance always starts when words stop<sup>50</sup>.

The subjective and the personal agenda must always be kept in mind while appreciating a dance, but the layers of subjectivity do not interfere with the meaning of a dance, only with the way a movement is done. No two bodies have the same physical expression nor two people look the same way: “The knowledge from experience and the knowledge from observation are distinct but essentially inter-related and ultimately interdependent. Articulation of this inter-relationship is essentially choreological in that it requires this multilevel of complexity for its knowing” (ibid). To embody something is to put a body in a world, in a spatial context affected by the lived experience of a person. Dancers are always conscious of their corporeality and particularity of movement, as well as how their physicality influences the choreography, the technique and the attitude while dancing. Corporeality is a concept that sees a body as something personal, social, emotional, biological and psychological. It is an agent of movement according to a context,

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<sup>50</sup> Fabio Cypriano describes Bausch’s creation as a way to express life through feelings repressed and hidden, but sincere. He quotes the choreographer to say that some things can be said with words while others only with movements, given that, sometimes, it is impossible to speak. People are lost and cannot react. Dance is the language found so that people understand their presence. It is a way to transform feelings into something visible to others. Bausch says that, for her, dance is about life and to have a language about life. Only after that is it possible for dance to become art (Cypriano, 2005: 27-28).

always creating something in relation to the space. The internal reality of the individual is connected with the socio-cultural context. The corporeality of the performer is essential to all kinds of embodiment, especially to the corporealisation of the narrative and the personal interpretation of movement, since multiple personal layers are affecting the performance, adding complexity to the body moving and the meaning of it.

Dance pieces, as performance art, not only describe certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others, but also make reference to the context in which that performance happens: “the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field” (Diamond, 2002: 66). Movement provides information not only about the narrative being performed but also about the subjects who are performing, the one who created the choreography and all the context around that movement. Desmond says that it serves as a marker for the production of gender, racial ethnicity, class and national identities (Desmond, 1993: 36).

Desmond sees in dance the advantage of appropriating and reworking embodied practices: “Such practices and the discourse that surrounds them reveal the important part bodily discourse plays in the continuing social construction and negotiation of race, gender, class, and nationality, and their hierarchical arrangements (Desmond, 1993: 39). The body of the dancer is used in order to question, and is always a catalyst for the relations between the self and the other. The body is used as a frame, as a moving example; it personifies all the issues and questions and is the materialization of all the practices. Desmond believes that movement is a primary text and, for that reason, it should be seen as an important object for culture studies: “Dance, as a discourse of the body, may in fact be especially vulnerable to interpretations in terms of essentialized identities associated with biological difference” (Desmond, 1993: 42). Also, these questions of expression, representation and transference of social issues are more and more patent in contemporary dance. The importance of what makes us move, and not how to move, is always present in a dance piece. It is, nevertheless, important to highlight that, here, representation does not mean reproducing an authentic copy of a reality, but creating new images, new visions of a certain issue: “The aim is not to represent but to present, to regard the events on stage as fragments of actual reality which become tangible through the act of repetition” (Preston-Dunlop

and Sanchez-Colberg, 2002: 28). Once again, subjectivity and personal embodiment have an effect on the piece.

The body is always a social body, since it is always under the influence of social rules and feedback from others. This happens because the body of the other person is always a possible me. It is, therefore, important to have in mind that besides being something subjective that is directly related to the choreographer and to the dancer, there is always some kind of universal vision in movement that needs to be taken into account, especially when there is an attempt to associate dance with social theories and phenomena:

To work with some sociologic terms in relation to dance, it is important that the reality transported to the art piece be referent to a big social group or community, in order to that event be recognized by all. The dance piece must, in this way, represent something more general and common to all. A sociology of dance therefore needs to study and understand situations which create and need dance. These situations are usually born out of collective experience underlining again that dance is a social fact. (Brinson, 1983: 62)

Dance is part of human culture and part of the history of human communication (id. 63). Dance is always a social phenomenon that represents, shows or is part of a collective social action that is more or less common to a community in a context. Dance is an element of a social reality; it is an element of reflection, of expression, that has a meaning to a group, being politically and socially important to analyse.

### **3.3. Bodies dancing (in) the city**

In the late 1960s, artists started to create performances and installations in alternative spaces in the streets of New York. Trisha Brown is a good example of an artist that took her work to the streets, choreographing for the buildings' walls and rooftops. The street was not only an inspiration, it was the stage that these artists were using to showcase what they were doing. The city was the apparatus where individuals would not only live, create a relationship with and establish a community, but also where they would perform and what they would use as part of their art. Art and city were not two different things, but were dependent on one another. Art was happening in the middle of the city, and the city was inspiring artists to create new pieces. The urban environment was instigating the art world to produce new artistic objects, in a melting pot of influences. As Lydia Yee explains in the catalogue of the exhibition "Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark. Pioneers of the

Downtown Scene – New York 1970’s”, in the Barbican Art Gallery, in Soho, an industrial area, artists started to find big and cheap spaces to work and live: “politicised by the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights, feminist and student movements and distrustful of existing institutions, they actively began to shape their own community, opening galleries and performance spaces in the same rough-and-ready industrial spaces in which they lived” (Yee, 2011: 13). Art became politics and part of daily life. The city was an arena of exchange and artists, along with their art pieces, were seen as agents of change, and art and performance were mixed with a dynamic social scene:

Dance and other performances were presented alongside art works or within installations or environments; art works were at times the impetus for performances; sculptures or installations saved as sets; and visual artists would be recruited for some of the larger dance performances. Carmen Beuchat, Trisha Brown, Carol Goodden, Deborah Hay, Barbara Lloyd (Dilley), Grand Union and Natural History were among those who performed at 112 Greene Street. (Yee, 2011: 18)

Forty years later, performance art and dance have achieved a different status and are not usually seen in the streets<sup>51</sup>, finding their space in museums and theatres. However, this connection with daily life and a particular socio-political agenda is not lost:

In permeating our actions, neoliberal conditioning shows how it has already captured subjectivity. Having captured subjectivity, it permeates the making of art and the making of discourses about art. The conditioning becomes our shared nervous system. Including art’s and theory’s nervous systems. Through them, we sense and make sense, we en flesh. Bodies fibrillating with and against the rhythms of our era. (Lepecki, 2016: 3)

The bodies moving have in them the stories of our time. More than any other art, with dance and performance, the flesh gives another meaning to the art piece because the body, the subject, is political and the medium is a living being with a story of life, an opinion and numerous connections with other people, objects, narratives that make that individual unique. Artists are seen as figures of creation. Just as Bojana Kunst or Randy Martin have said, Lepecki mentions the value of the dancers as instruments of production that can produce some work in empty rooms, using their bodies: “As both producers and objects of their own labor, dancers reveal dance as a system where

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<sup>51</sup> The social act of dancing no longer takes place in the street, but in specific places as theatres, galleries, museums, studios, etc. However, and particularly with urban dances such as hip-hop or breakdance, it is possible to see battles and rehearsals in the streets. Also, when walking around a contemporary city it is possible to see some dancers working as street artists. Despite these examples, the contemporary dance that is being studied in this dissertation is not seen in the streets since it requires specific conditions in terms of space. See more in Helen Tomas’s book *Dance in the City* (1997).

creativity and corporeality fuse in and as work. This offers dance an opportunity for an urgent and embodied critique of neoliberal idealization of, and demand for, conformed and profitable creative labor” (Lepecki, 2016: 17). The dancer is at the same time the object and the producer of knowledge. His or her body always adds new layers of meaning through his or her personal particularities of motion.

Contemporary dance is currently marked by an integration of daily movements within the choreographic ones. Daily acts as running, jumping, sitting or squatting, that are seen as natural and fundamental forms linked to life and the social, are integrated into stage movement as a way of questioning the gestures that are already embodied in the dancers’ bodies:

From very early on in the history of contemporary dance, these movements began to be questioned so that their real dynamics were apprehended, since modernity in dance often consists of questioning what appears to be offered by the body or inscribed in it. (Loupe, 2012: 122 – my translation).

Pina Bausch is known for being one of the masters that do not fear not dancing. Putting in scene objects from daily life like chairs (*Café Müller*, 1978), bathtubs (*Mazurca Fogo*, 1998) or beach towels (*Agua*, 2001), and even assuming ordinary gestures as choreography, Bausch changed the vision about these movements that stopped being interpreted as an imitation to be seen as representation, as reflection, as a critical observation and part of a choreography. Pina Bausch’s work is also clearly marked by cities and the people that circulate in them. She has fourteen pieces dedicated to different cities, which are a result of an artistic residence done during at least three months with her dancers. Something that is universal to all the pieces is that in these representations of each place, Bausch tried to translate the atmosphere, the life, the experience of living, the narratives, the stories, the locals into movement. More than trying to transfer the city, she translated her perception to create imaginary cartographies and poetic constructions of these places.

The bodies of the dancers present (just like the cities being represented) something like a map of signs and references, which are personal, fragmented and multiple. The cartography of the city becomes similar to the cartography of a body, collecting elements, signs, objects and phenomena to document them. An archive is created inside a body that is a result of a becoming, of a process of documentation, of absorbing the outside. Dancers have in them a map of experiences that are called to the surface in each movement that is dance: “The city’s plasticity allows and invites interactions of many kinds which can open up possibilities for a shifting kaleidoscope

of identities. It is perhaps not surprising that this ‘soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare’ (Raban, 1974. qtd in Harvey, 1898: 5), which fires the imagination, has become a favoured setting for recent dance texts” (Briginshaw, 1997: 36). The urban environment and experience triggers the dancers and allows new narratives in the same movement.

The city and individuals grow in the same way, always being connected and influencing each other: there is an edge that allows both identities to merge with each other. As Briginshaw says: “bodies and cities can ‘inscribe’ each other” (ibid). Pina Bausch’s work and the relationship between bodies and urban landscape reaches its limit when body and space have this intertextual relation. She juxtaposes performers, choreography and environment, questioning the natural relations assumed between bodies and space and the relationships between objects, signs and their signification: “in this way the mutual definition of cities and subjects and the fact that they are constructed and not ‘natural’, are foregrounded self-reflexively in the performance and filming” (Briginshaw, 1997: 38). Bodies and cities are both human constructions in constant mutation and in relation with other people, objects and places. Bodies and cities results from an individual becoming and from a collective experience. The city can be read by the body (the person) and the body is porous to the city life. Both entities gather interactive conditions that allow to be, always and continuously, under a process of construction. Fabiana Dultra Britto and Paola Berenstein Jacques introduce the concept of “corpografia urbana” (urban corpography), which means a cartography with the body, a bodygraphy: a kind of cartography that is made by a body and in the body. The authors say that it is the urban memory inscribed unto the body, it is the register of its experience in the city, a kind of urban spelling, from the city itself, that sets up the body of the one that is experiencing the city (Britto and Jacques, 2008: 79). They talk about an inscription of the urban memory in the body of the one experimenting. Hence, body and city are defining each other mutually and involuntarily. The city is not only the scenario where people move but also it becomes something that is lived and living. It functions not only as a background but it is also what is felt by the body moving, being at the same time the urban body that is experimented and that which inscribes itself in the body of the person (Britto and Jacques, 2008: 83). Bodies and cities can be seen as a living organism that is always interacting with the environment, and always under stress to present a quick answer under a pressuring situation. People see themselves reflected in the space and the

space reflected in them. Not only does the person embody the environment, but the contrary also happens, with the person being absorbed by the environment.

*Na Cidade (In the City)*, by Olga Roriz, is a performance created in 2012 that starts with a fog that does not allow the audience to understand what is happening on stage. This cloud of dust, of dirt, from pollution creates a screen that covers the identity of those on stage. It works as a metaphor for the anonymity that the modern urban society provides to individuals, whose identity is lost in the middle of the crowd. In *Na Cidade*, Olga Roriz is not trying to tell a story, but is transposing different episodes seen in any city in our society and to show how the bodies are transformed by the urban environment. The dark side of the cities is highlighted in this show: the pollution and the homeless that live in the middle of the garbage, the prostitutes in the streets, the consumerism and the greed, and self-seeking, i.e. the way people use and manipulate the other to further one's own interest and for material gain.

In this choreography made for four performers, the solitude and the isolation provoked by the contemporary society are embodied by the dancers. People are annulled by the city and assume different personalities and multiple selves in the same body. In this suffocating society, where each person gets more distant from the other, Roriz puts on stage four people that, apart from sharing a space, never actually interact with each other. They play roles and do not need the rest of the dancers to do their performance. Resembling what happens in the city, this is an individualistic piece where people get lonelier and increasingly more anonymous. The stage, similar to the urban labyrinth and reminiscent of Augé's theories, becomes a place of passage where everybody acts as a small island, alone in their space, using the others just to satisfy their needs.

*Na Cidade* is an example of a dance performance where the bodies are dancing the city and embedding a universal vision of some issues that characterize a city nowadays. Any of these episodes can be seen when looking through windows. The bodies are showing the daily life in a controlled space and time, repeating movements and adapting moments and typical events into a performance, allowing an easy and universal identification by the ones watching the show. This performance makes a comparison between the body that is limited to the space of the stage, with a defined choreography and rules that dictate the limits of the improvisation of the dancers. Besides the will to transform the stage into something neutral and without any

affection, the reality is that the black box is always a socially constructed space where socially influenced bodies move according to a personal view and the experience of the one creating the choreography. This relation is the same that happens in the urban space, which appears to be independent of the subject but is actually his or her own creation. The subject constructs this space, which in turn somehow ends up blocking and determining the actions of the subject. The performativity<sup>52</sup> of the body is in parallel to the performativity of the city, and they are both always dependent on the context and on the corporealisation of a reality. It is in the study of bodies, people, space, environment and city in dialogue that our contemporaneity can be understood. It is in this relation between the citizen body and the urban body that the life in the city can be studied, knowing the relation of bodies, structures, environments and situations (Britto and Jacques, 2008: 85).

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<sup>52</sup> Performativity is a concept that departs from the idea of agency and social determinism. Mieke Bal (2002) talks about it as a category, a constant standard that determines the utterance as an act. Performativity can be seen, as Parker and Sedgwick studied (1995), as efficiency and also as a relation between cause and effects of an action in the world. For J.L. Austin (1975), a 'performative utterance' is a speech act that creates events or relations in the world; it is a locution that, besides saying something, actually defines a state, an alteration of things in the society, thus having an impact. Performativity is always something related to agency and the power to decide, having in mind their value. The concept of performativity was also developed by Judith Butler (1993) and gender definition as a social construction that is depended on a continuous process of performative acts that impose a gender to the individual. Derrida (1988) was also important to define this concept, also giving more focus on the social conventions and speakers' intention, based on repetition and routinization of an act, similar to a ritual. Here, to talk about the performativity of the body and the performativity of the city is to talk about development and the mutual relations that these two entities create in parallel, implying mutual consequences. The way the city transforms and the way the body adapts in synchronism to it.

## 4. Performing (a) Reality

### 4.1. The novelty of dance representing the surroundings

Looking at the topics addressed by dance performances during the past year, it is easy to notice that choreographers are creating choreographies inspired by events that they see by looking outside the window. This desire to portray their surroundings shows some socio-political awareness turned into action through the translation of their vision of the world into movement. André Lepecki also sees in the dancers, in their bodies, a social dimension and a critical position. While moving, they resonate with the world that surrounds them and bring to the stage not only choreography but also a way of being in the world:

What it means to be a dancer in today's world: to insist on the social function of the theatre as a gathering place; and to acknowledge that a dancer's labor is inseparable from the conditions of the world, and therefore, to acknowledge the affective charge of each performance cannot but resonate with, and be informed by, such conditions only the fiction of representation could turn into something 'external'. (Lepecki, 2016: 2)

The refugee crisis is, without a doubt, a pressing issue in/for most societies. Migration, displacement and flight are some of the words we hear the most at the present time. Daily news narrate stories of boats in the Mediterranean, of groups of people forced to return to a country they do not know anymore and that they do not consider theirs due to all the armed conflicts, social crises and the underlying climate of terror. In the host country, the refugees see the doors being closed, dreams fading away and new problems of racism, xenophobia, exclusion and even physical violence arising. When invited to create a new piece for the Royal Ballet in 2017, the acclaimed Canadian choreographer Crystal Pite, as a storyteller that she is, saw an opportunity to talk about the story of our times. The refugee crisis and how people deal with it, the kind of relations that are established between people, the communities that are created under these conditions function as motives for this choreographer to produce an empathetic portrait of these people, who found themselves between their homeland and a promise of a future that never came. This ongoing story allowed Pite to explore, through movement, the grief and the sadness, the emptiness, the loss and the hope that seem to never cease. *Flight Pattern* is a 30-minute piece created for the 36 members of the corps de ballet, based on Henryk Gorecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*. Crystal Pite is already known for working with tough issues and

thematics, like in *Betroffenheit*<sup>53</sup>, where the choreographer works with the personal story of her dramaturge, Jonathon Young, who lost his daughter and his cousins in a fire. *Flight Pattern* resembles an odyssey transposed to choreographic movement. An endless path where bodies are abandoned at the mercy of time and of a place that do not belong to them, being dependent on international policies that are governed exclusively by economic and commercial interests, forgetting values, rights and human relations. This contemporary ballet is a way for Crystal Pite to cope with the world right now<sup>54</sup>, her answer to the humanitarian crisis. It is also a manner to register, to archive her vision and her personal relation to the urgent topic. Her choreographical proposal is not an attempt to influence the public to take action but a translation of an episode of today's society. It is clear that each person can have his or her own interpretation of a dance piece: "If two dancers are on stage, the audience will create all sorts of narratives to account for their movements. Even the most abstract of dances may be viewed as symbolic of human existence, rather than as the autonomous, 'pure dance' a choreographer may intend" (Hanna, 2001: 42). It is impossible to control what people are going to read but it is possible to write some guidelines to orientate the audience's thoughts. In the movements, in the scenes created on stage, it is possible to identify images that are present every day in the news, like the mom that holds a baby in her arms, someone being held next to a high wall that impedes their progression, a big mass of people moving together to cross a borderline, etc. However, besides the evident representation of these emblematic situations, the message and the power of a choreography can never be dictated by the authors of the piece. They know that the impact that a dance piece may or may not have is something open and personal, as is explained by Laurence Louppe:

The perception of a body in motion unleashes possibilities of the imaginary, inner lines of thought proper to each one, which would be very impertinent to control or even guide. The success of contemporary dance is proven by the intensity of the dialogue between the body of the observer and the body of the dancer and demonstrates that between both flows continuously a common background of anxieties and desires. (Louppe, 2012: 20 – my translation)

An artwork is not only a result of an internal feeling, but always something

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<sup>53</sup> *Betroffenheit* is a piece about ghosts, trauma and the grief of loss, topics that are often explored by the choreographer in her works. This piece is so intense that it affects the members of the public, who can relate with these feelings of loss, obsession, madness and depression.

<sup>54</sup> According to Pite's declarations on this interview  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tSBkT9AFWA>

connected to the outside: “the work of even the most highly creative artists grow out of the habits of thought and feeling integral to the society to which they belong and the language and art forms which both shape and enshrine that thought and feeling” (Redfern, 2010: 36). Nothing is isolated from the social. As shown in the previous chapter, the relation between dance and society is intrinsic, especially in today’s society, where information circulates freely and is easily accessible. In our times, there is a bigger awareness about what is happening and, therefore, there is always an intention of representing and engaging with the moment: “The performance, as a moment or series of moments of real, non-parenthetical social time, is de facto engaged with the social” (Wilson, 2012: 116). To frame a performance in accordance to a social value, affects and emphasises what the participants and the public feel and apprehend from the piece. “The growing interest in the role of the affect in social changes offers a new frame of analysis that emphasises the resolutely hybrid nature of these performances – ‘feeling’ and ‘doing’ may in fact interact in complex ways” (Wilson, 2012: 116-117). This connectivity between reality and performances becomes more personal, says James Wilson, and the personal political engagement might be explored more:

The political potential of the new time signatures of process-performances is as unpredictable and as varied as the affective responses that these performances are capable of facilitating. But as performance-processes invite publics in, deeper and lengthier affective journeys are possible on the parts of participants and publics, and these engagements have the potential of encouraging deep, and real, social change. (Wilson, 2012: 118)

Dance, just like any other kind of art, can be the catalyst of change and an agent of empowerment, or at least a way to make someone relate to an issue and find a way to improve it.

2017 was a special year in which choreographers explored dance as a translation of society, transposing onto stage questions happening at this very moment. These transpositions of reality into movement were so immediate, so accurate in their timing, that they looked almost like predictions of the future. Not only was choreography used as a way to deal with the negative side of humanity, but it was also employed to talk about emergent social issues. Justin Peck, the 30-year-old choreographer from the New York City Ballet, debuted *The Times Are Racing*, a piece that transposes onto the stage the urban life of the *millennials*. Using everyday clothes with words of order on the back – such as “unite”, “react”, “change” or

“defy”, which work as a political statements against Trump’s election – and sneakers, the dancers execute a mix of ballet, modern and tap dance to create a narrative that is a transposition of daily moves into choreography. Nevertheless, a dance piece is never only the choreography or the movements, rather, everything that is staged has a relevant function in the creation of the piece. In the words of Anca Giurchescu: “In the process of communication dance does not function in isolation but incorporates non-choreographic components such as pantomime, expressive or codified gestures, facial expressions, music, verbal utterances, texts/poetry, props, costumes, staging, proxemics and social rules” (Giurchescu, 2012: 111). It is not only the choreography and the moves that give meaning to the dance, but all the contexts, sets, dramaturgy and other components that, together, allow a message to be expressed, claims the author: “Consequently, dance movements are not always of primary importance and may, in certain contexts, function only to support and reinforce other expressive elements that are the principal carriers of meaning” (ibid). That is why, when analysing *Times Are Racing*, the sneakers or the words that appear on the dancers’ clothes have to be mentioned, since they bring another layer of interpretation to the piece. This approximation to reality (that is on stage using elements of daily life) breaks the separation between what is real and what is fake. The audience is being shown common objects and people that are similar to those they bump into daily in the streets. Another element worth mentioning is music. The soundtrack in this piece condenses in the same sphere of meanings a more political side because of the choice of music: Peck chose to use the last four tracks of Dan Deacon’s album *America*, from 2012, an album generated by the frustration the musician was feeling about his country. The album was a sincere political statement from the author, and was used to illustrate the political situation of the time and how he was feeling about it<sup>55</sup>.

*Times Are Racing* is assumedly a political statement. Peck, in an interview with *The New York Times*, said that the election of President Trump marked a turning point in his creation:

It changed. It’s a less optimistic piece than it could have been. But it’s also going back to the music. It’s such a cathartic piece, and I think the choreography and

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<sup>55</sup> “The inspiration for the music was my love of cross-country travel, seeing the landscapes of the United States, going from east to west and back again over the course of seasons. The lyrics are inspired by my frustration, fear and anger towards the country and world I live in and am a part of. As I came closer to finishing the album these themes began to show themselves more frequently and greater clarity. There seemed no better world to encapsulate both inspirations than the simple beauty found in the word America.” Retrieved from: <https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2013/concerts-april-2013> (accessed in December 2018)

the arc of the whole ballet has that feeling of exhaustion and running in a way that doesn't need to be spelled out too much. I feel people are going to be able to interpret it in whatever way they want to. (Kourlas, 2017)

However, Peck also makes clear that even though the piece constitutes his vision and his interpretation of today's society, what is visible on the set and in the choreography, the actual meaning and the message of the piece, is left to the audience to interpret and understand. *The Times Are Racing* is a piece that captures the American landscape and what is visible when someone looks out the window. Anxiety, raw energy, solidarity, love, friendship, isolation are portrayed on stage by the dancers. They are patent in the dynamics of the movement as well as in the structure of the choreography and in the narrative created. The movements are explosive and resemble the actions and social dynamics of a younger population.

Justin Peck, despite creating classical pieces, has a contemporary vision and a special capacity to translate daily narratives onto the stage. What is presented is not a fairy tale, but something usually seen in the streets. He was one of the first (if not the first) to choreograph same-sex romantic duets. This can be seen by some as not having great importance, yet, in ballet, the role of men and women are still restricted to the ancient order where men are the strong base and women, perceived as fragile, on their point shoes, are turned and lifted by the partner. In Peck's neo-contemporary ballet, these roles are underrated and, as in real life, the couples and the relationships can be composed by anyone<sup>56</sup>. This choreographer subverts balletical ideals and norms, breaking the walls and the barriers of tradition, allowing a more liquid structure that is characteristic of today's society. The classical style is being adapted to the contemporary times, where the norms are becoming more fluid and malleable, and is breaking with the expected, whilst offering something more innovative and risky at the technical level, but closer to the reality of the streets and everyday life.

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<sup>56</sup> This idea of representation of the society is something normally attributed to contemporary dance, leaving to ballet all the social dogmas, traditions and ideals that are more retrograde or already in disuse these days: "one of the revolutions attributed to contemporary dance arises from the many forms it takes on stage. Everything - or almost - is permitted when it comes to length of performance, costumes, and sets. Everything seems to be invented – or reinvented – in real time" (Noisette, 2011: 14). However, choreographers are trying to implement a change and make it clear that ballet does not have to be only about fairy tales but that, similarly to other dances, can focus on the body and how to represent something. Even the stereotypes around the perfect body and the perfect technique are changing: "Gone are the days of uniformity, and even though certain contemporary choreographers reflexively choose the same physical type of dancer, performances can be executed by the large and small, the fat and thin, black and white, Africans and Asians, very young and very old stars and unknowns, professionals and beginners" (ibid).

Nowadays, the need to be connected with the social is becoming more evident, even in the classical pieces. The English National Ballet is the perfect example of a classical company that is always trying to be connected with current social issues, inviting choreographers that go beyond the barriers of classical ballet. In 2017, an invitation was made to Akram Khan to direct and choreograph a new version of a classical piece: *Giselle*. Akram Khan is one of the most acclaimed contemporary choreographers of the moment. Combining *kathak*, the traditional Indian dance, with the techniques of contemporary dance, Khan is the author of a particular movement and of a particular aesthetics. *Giselle*, one of the best-known classical pieces in the history of dance, tells the story of fairy tales, love, betrayal and forgiveness. Akram Khan was given the challenge of transforming this classical ballet into a contemporary and up-to-date piece with a connection to today's society. In Akram Khan's new narrative, *Giselle* comes from a community of migrant garment factory workers that, after losing their jobs, are imprisoned in this factory only to entertain their masters or landlords. *Giselle* falls in love with Albrecht, one of the landlords and when she realises that he is promised to another person, she dies of grief – the romanticism of the play could not be totally withdrawn. The second part of the classical ballet is dedicated to the dance of *the willis* - the spirits of betrayed women, maintained by Khan. Nevertheless, these women are now ghosts of factory workers who seek revenge for the wrongs done to them during their lives. What is important to highlight in this 21<sup>st</sup> century *Giselle* is the connection that Khan tried to establish with society by transforming the dramaturgy of the piece. For that purpose, he addresses questions of power and the idea of the richest taking advantage of the poorest, and, thus, the weakest. Migration and unemployment are social questions also explored in this revisited ballet through the lenses of globalization and inequality of wealth, power and labour.

Dramaturgy in dance has entered a new era, in which critical discourse is absorbed into the creative process, thus producing a relationship between the sensible creation and a discourse: “choreographers, as well as dancers, have taken ownership of the discourse and have sought to reconfigure traditional processes of production and to engage directly with the politics and dramaturgy of their own art firm” (Behrndt, 2010: 188). Dance dramaturgy may change the process of creation, since the movement may not be the starting point to create something anymore, but the text is actually what makes the production of the piece. In the case of Akram Khan,

everything is a collaborative process and movements, texts, sets, lights or clothes are discussed as a team<sup>57</sup>. By engaging with other methods of creation, the practices and processes of choreographers and dancers end up becoming more exposed, and the role of the dramaturge becomes, in the end, to coordinate and to assure that the piece is following the concept, the idea, the episode that was originally thought:

[...] the often very collaborative and fluid nature of contemporary dance and devising processes, where dancers as well as other collaborators are equally responsible for developing the dramaturgy, requires a dramaturgical presence that is able to facilitate dramaturgical thinking amongst everyone in the process. (Behrndt, 2010: 192)

The dramaturge balances and guarantees the cohesiveness of the concept and the story and allows the creation of a unified piece.

Just as the catalogue of the piece mentions, “Akram Khan’s *Giselle* is a work of rituals and cycles, suffused with the memory of movement, the violence of inequality, and the resilience, capability and desires of the human body” (2018). The mythical part is maintained, as well as the romantic and fatalist narrative, using the socio-political context of our society. As Tamaa Rojo explains about Khan’s piece, for the choreographer, it was important to explore what is happening in the world and to create a piece with which the audience could relate: “It’s always very important when art is able to represent what the rest of society is dealing with and maybe struggling to cope with”<sup>58</sup>.

Akram Khan or Justin Peck are crossover choreographers who, like Mats Ek, William Forysthe, Matthew Bourne or Maguy Marin, use ballet with other techniques of dance and associate different topics from the contemporary society to a classical piece. For instance, in a version by Mats Ek, *Giselle* ends up in an asylum, in Marin’s version of *Coppelia*, the live doll lives in a ghetto, and Bourne’s prince from *Swan Lake* celebrates his coming out in leather, flanked by male swans. Ballet is, therefore, trying to revolutionise itself, trying to become more like a mirror of society, or at least trying to come closer to what contemporary dance does: “one of the revolutions attributed to contemporary dance arises from the many forms it takes on stage. Everything – or almost – is permitted when it comes to length of performance,

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<sup>57</sup> The creation process of Akram Khan’s team and how they work together was explored in the talk about his last solo *XENOS* available at: <https://youtu.be/-fddhNDIZag>

<sup>58</sup> Statement by Tamara Rojo, the director of the company The English National Ballet, in the social media campaign created for the promotion of the piece: <https://youtu.be/Amlg-vPC9xU>

costumes, and sets. Everything seems to be invented – or reinvented – in real time” (Noisette, 2011: 36).

It is not just social and political issues that are being transposed onto stage. Works that engage with environmental questions and try to make the audience think about their acts and their impact on the planet are also a tendency rising in the western context. For example, in 2015, Vera Mantero created a piece for the thematic of Guattari’s *Three Ecologies* that Teatro Maria Matos in Lisbon was working on. *O Limpo e o Sujo (The Clean and the Dirty)* is a dance piece focused on the transition taking place within each person regarding the ecological state of the world and the simple changes that a person may impose personally on their daily routine to find a balance between human action and environment, so that we can act more fairly and build a more sustainable world. The choreographer has been working on choreographies and performances that are connected with today’s society and with a certain possible future where a sustainable society may appear, where humans can construct a healthy and sustainable relationship between the way people organize their lives and the way ecological resources are managed. Her aim was admittedly to make the audience think about their lifestyle.

In *O Limpo e o Sujo*, the three performers repeat the same movements numerous times, always trying to remove their layers of dirt. This dirt is not only something physical, that can be seen, but also something connected to the soul and the inner self that does not seem right. Mantero wanted to reflect about what we, humans, use on a daily basis and what is the impact of this consumption on the environment and, hence, on people’s lives. In *O Limpo e o Sujo*, the audience is introduced to the two ecologies: the green ecology and its relationship with nature and the grey ecology and its connections to human civilization. On a naked stage, under a false sky of electric tangles, three dancers appear in colourful and spangled shirts: Volmir Cordeiro, Elizabete Francisca and Vera Mantero shake off the dust from their shirts and strip themselves of all visual, auditory, mental and corporeal filth. They twist, they turn inside out, and they try to expel their guts. They make faces of disgust, displeasure, fear and astonishment. At the same time, they present themselves with a terrifying calm and tranquillity. It is a choreography that seeks a certain cleanness for a better balance with the environment, it is about an inner change that needs to happen inside each person, a struggle and an individual experience, shared first by the three interpreters (during the process of creation of the piece, the three dancers had to find

their own movements to expel the dirtiness), and then transformed into a choreography that repeats itself during 80 minutes. Once again, the audience is faced with a performance that is a reflection of today's society and tries to explore a relation between society, subject and environment. The relation between humans and the environment is now, more than ever, an urgent topic to debate and to analyse. The world's population is exhausting the Earth's natural resources with exponential habits of consumption. As already mentioned in chapter 1, "The Art of Dance", the anthropocene is the name given by scientists to the new geological era marked by human intervention. It is something that is felt in the way humans are exhausting Earth and its resources, causing changes in the different ecosystems and living species around the globe. As Mirzoeff claims in the text "Visualizing the Anthropocene", there is a need for humans "to recognize how deeply embedded in our very sensorium and modern ways of seeing the Anthropocene-aesthetic-capitalist complex of modern visibility has become" (Mirzoeff, 2014: 213). It is only after understanding how everything is connected in a nonlinear form, like in a grid with patterns, that material, social, human and non-human interaction can not only be countered but actually changed, allowing not both to stop what has been done and to solve what was causing it. What Vera Mantero does with *O Limpo e o Sujo* is to make visible this side of human destruction of environment through its consumption habits, and to provide an image of disgust about an issue that is somehow already part of our society but ignored or neglected. It seems that there is an effect of anaesthesia that prevents people from seeing the consequences of their actions.

We may resort here once again to Andrew Hewitt's concept of social choreography since there is a disposition of the choreographer to explore some social issues using an aesthetic form. In this piece, the body is used to think "about social order that derives its ideal from the aesthetic realm and seeks to instil that order directly at the level of the body in its most explicit form" (Hewitt, 2012: 149). The dance is thus a means to explore social and political spheres "ascrib[ing] a fundamental role to the aesthetic in its formulation of the political" (ibid). It is the aesthetic that gives space to social possibilities to be performed and to generate some critical thinking:

[...] dance has served as the aesthetic medium that most consistently sought to understand art as something immanently political: that is, as something that derives its political significance from its own status as praxis, rather than from its

adherence to a logically prior political ideology located elsewhere, outside art. In short, we are not talking metaphorically. When we talk of an ‘aesthetic ideology’ we talk not of an ideology of the aesthetic but refer instead to the intrinsic aesthetic component of any ideology that seeks to structure itself in narrative form. Thus, the aesthetic component of ideology is the utopian lure that ideology to operate in a hegemonic rather than a simply coercive fashion. (Hewitt, 2012: 151)

It is important, though, to highlight the relevance of the context and how a dance piece must be seen. The meaning and the reading of a performance always depend on who is watching and on a specific social framework: “dance does not exist outside the society in which it is created and performed, but stands in a relational tension to the social context. Consequently, other systems of relevance that exist outside the dance, but which are important to the interpretation of the movement, are also indicated” (Thomas, 2005: 159). However, apart from being constructed in a specific time, dance, just like any other art form, entails the possibility of becoming something universal and timeless. After 9/11, the United States of America occupied the Iraq in 2003, claiming the existence of weapons of mass destruction. The war against terrorism started by George W. Bush, the American President at the time, was contested worldwide since it would end up generating more violence. In 2006, Paul Taylor debuted *Banquets of Vultures*, a contemporary piece that worked as a statement against war, against the international policy of the United States of America and, more specifically against President Bush. As Roslyn Sulcas states in *The New York Times*’s critique of the show: “death wears a crisp black suit” (Sulcas, 2016). That is to say the man in a suit, the political bureaucrat, the tyrant is the one taking lives, destroying societies, creating war. In a black suit with a red tie, a male dancer is the central character of this show in which a lord of war is controlling and commanding the other interpreters, who are wearing soldier clothes, in a dark and mysterious stage. Initially, Paul Taylor would say that the piece is a universal opinion about war, yet, he ended up admitting on an interview that everything started with Bush’s way of walking and with the transposition of that movement onto stage (Kaufman, 2006). *Banquets of Vultures* is a cold, ugly and dark portrait of a man who created war and destruction. Notwithstanding, it is also a piece that can be dissociated from its original meaning and become a universal piece against international politics and war between countries. Just like *Green Table* from Kurt Joss from the 1930s, which has become a choreography that represents a critique against peace negotiation and how it is made – neglecting people and only looking at politics and bureaucracies

that are connected with war –, *Banquets of Vultures* is a piece that makes a statement against war.

A dance piece is, as already said in the first chapter of this dissertation, a representation of a personal idea, it is a vision, it is also a presentation of a new event, since it implies the creation of something new and new value is added to the situation that is being mirrored on stage. The choreography can be based on a subjective idea that generically represents an episode, according to a specific individual in a specific context. One could say that choreography is not exactly a mirror<sup>59</sup> of an actual event or an exact copy, but an adaptation of that event into a dance piece, using an amount of non-choreographical elements to facilitate that adaptation, and always bearing in mind the importance of the context of the one creating that piece. As Helen Thomas explains about Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring* and how the performance evokes certain images and traditions of a specific time and place: "The dance evokes a remembrance of weddings as we have known them in our time and place, and of how we might imagine a wedding to have been in the American frontier, with its small communities, pioneering spirit, non-conformist religion, expansive space and the harshness of life involved" (Thomas, 2005: 160). There is a recreation of a social episode on stage.

The relation between dance, performance and society is something usual and common since forever in dance, as it has been shown in this dissertation. However, nowadays,

it is a situation conditioned by a new kind of rationality, a new mode of reasoning, not necessarily the most amenable to those who happen to believe in thinking (thinking as art, thinking as thought, thinking as living), to those who trust the necessary opaqueness and complexity of life, those who believe in the vital importance of not having profit and self-profit as the only goal for life and its arts. (Lepecki, 2016: 2)

Lepecki says that in this era of rationality and neoliberalism everyone, everywhere and at any time is being conditioned (ibid) and the bodies are permeable to neoliberalism and subjectivity. Dance and performance, more than any other artform, are exposed to this political and critical posture, given that the bodies moving, the medium, are already social and contextual.

In the next subchapters *Kreatur* (2017) by Sasha Waltz and *Cementary* (2017) by Patricia Aperi will be analysed under this idea that bodies, choreographies and

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<sup>59</sup> It seems important to highlight that a mirror creates an inverted of image reality. It is a copy, but a copy that is an inversion of everything that is presented.

dance pieces can echo the stories of the present time, function as a reflection of society and also cope with social issues. The choice of these two pieces, derives from the interest in analysing pieces that are exploring present-day issues, and what one sees and feels. It seems urgent to study contemporary dance pieces that explore movement according to a social context and a specific political agenda that is a reflection of a European situation. While Sasha Waltz addresses issues being faced by a rich and developed country, Germany; Patricia Apergi focuses on a poor society in crisis and with no major growth prospects in the near future, Greece. These two experiences and their purposes are different, but they are still centred in the same global issues. This is, in fact, another reason, for the choice of these pieces that premiered last year. Both were seen live and both dance pieces seem to appear in a continuum of works created by these choreographers that have previously used similar hot topics to create art that is unequivocally social and political. In *Kreatur*, Waltz explores the phenomenon of existence against the background of a disrupted society, highlighting aspects that are related to humanity and the characteristics and behaviour of humans. Individuality, relations of power, dominance, freedom, community or isolation are transposed not only into the movement and the dramaturgy created around that performance, but are also the inspiration for the outfits, lightning design, music set or scenes. In *Cementary*, on the other hand, the urban life and the city network is more visible and what is under analysis is something more defined and precise. Patricia Apergi presents the dynamics of a post-apocalyptic society, where displacement and detachment are visible in anxious individuals that avoid each other and any relationships inside a community. In both pieces, it is possible to understand the relations between subjects and the intentions that are always associated within human condition. It is the human side that appears to be important to highlight in the present-day society, since individuality and lack of affection are taking space in the global community of which everyone is a part of.

Once again, we are introduced to two contemporary dance pieces whose focus is directed towards “the processes that creat[e] the world(s) in which we live, our ‘being-in-time’ – between affiliation and detachment, presence and absence, immediacy and mediation, particularity and the demand for universality, temporality and contingency” (Klein and Noeth, 2011: 8). Because they are so recent, it is important to try and find some distance to analyse these pieces and to understand what the power is, or better said, the intentions of transposing these pieces to a stage

are, while the times are racing. As Bojana Cvejic states, it is important to talk about current problems in order to try to provoke some reaction in the audience and allow people to relate to the issue presented:

In particular, choreographing problems involves composing these ruptures between movement, the body, and time in performance such that they engender a shock upon sensibility, one that renders many aspects of these choreographic performances hard to identify, recognize or accommodate, within the horizon of expectations of contemporary dance. (Cvejic, 2014: 2)

Even though I saw several pieces during 2017 and 2018, I ended up selecting *Kreatur* and *Cementary* due to their role as producers of culture and knowledge. These two contemporary pieces were particularly important to develop the connection between body and city, dance and reality, narrative and theory. The two choreographers created pieces that illustrate the social context in which we are inserted nowadays and show different dimensions of our times. Not only the content of the performance works as a reflection of our current era, but also the style and form of the choreography (along with them being different) are good examples of the dance that is being produced and performed in Europe. Sasha Waltz is a more abstract choreographer who creates pieces in which the narrative is not relevant. She uses the dancers' bodies to create a visual composition. In *Kreatur*, we are faced with an intense composition full of movements and different dynamics. She is a choreographer that gives a lot of importance to physicality, technique and clean movements. Waltz is also known for her interest in creating visually interesting pieces that use not only the *corps the ballet* but also the sound design, lights, clothes and stage construction to create paintings. She is worried about the total dimension of the piece, and for that reason, her works are often compared to operas. Patricia Apergi creates stories and narratives, giving much more value to gestures and mime. *Cementary* is an especially slow dance piece in which the bodies on stage are frequently not moving, only existing on that space, breathing and highlighting the fragile body and the solitude of the individuals.

Despite their differences, both Waltz and Apergi are always trying to tell something to the audience, to transmit a message. The choreographers are, ultimately, storytellers, because they always have an intention and want to say something, to translate something through dance. However, it is not common to look to the choreographer as the one telling something, because (as already mentioned by Walter Benjamin in *The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*) the art of

telling a story, of narration, is becoming something rare. Information comes to us always very chewed: “no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information” (Benjamin, 1936: 4). What Benjamin tries to explain with this text is that all the information that affects an audience is always something that is already molded by a context, by a personal experience, being always received not neutrally but with some influence. To tell a story is to reinvent, to recreate. The audience is always influenced by the story, especially if the storyteller comes from the same reality and presents a narrative that connects with the personal sphere of the one listening/seeing the narration: “the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the greater becomes the story’s claim to a place in the memory of the listener, the more completely is it integrated into his own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday, sooner or later” (Benjamin, 1936: 5). This story is somehow an evocation of a reality that is also part of the audience’s lives and experiences. This happens with dance, and with all kinds of artistic practices (H’Doubler, 1968: 53). To absorb the message, to assimilate the narrative, to create a connection with what is being told, the audience must feel comfortable and in a state of calmness. Margaret H’ Doubler tries to explain that an art, to be significant, must always go through a process of influence which starts with an idea and is transformed into a visual entity shaped in accordance to real life and the personal experience of the audience:

Any work of art, to be significant and convincing, should grow from what its creator has within, growing and changing as the germ idea changes. Visual appearance is then the result of inner impulses and is genuine in conception. [...] Art is but a fashioning from life, and life is a progressive scale of values, developed from experience, which becomes more and more enlightened by experience and the developing intellect. (H’Doubler, 1968: 103)

In the case of dance, the body that is moving is the intermediary between the spectator and the choreographer, between author and audience. The body must be a representation that (even though having a personal history and experience, conditions and stylizes the movements, the dynamics and especially the interpretation) expresses this narration of a vision of a world and, at the same time, produces a new reality, a new cultural product or object to be absorbed by the ones watching the piece. *Kreatur* and *Cementary* are two contemporary dance pieces that have the ability to provoke restlessness in the audience and provide a new vision about a present time. The

choreographers use their dance companies to present a narration of the story of our times, scrutinizing society and human values.

The choreographer offers a new personal vision that tries to approximate his vision of the world, to show his or her point of view, to the audience, always trying to cause some astonishment in the one viewing. It is always based on this expectation of astonishment that knowledge is produced, on the desire and interest of knowing more and finding more information. Nevertheless, it is always up to the spectator whether or not they wish to withdraw something from the information given to them:

In observing a dance or a painting or any work of art, we may not be aware of the specific purpose intended by its creator – but it is present and actively exerting its influence. We find beauty only in terms of our ability to discover it; that is, we project into the particular dance those feelings of beauty which have been aroused and at the same time satisfied within us. To enter into an aesthetic experience through dance is to find satisfaction for the aesthetic sense of what we think beautiful movement should be. Under these circumstances we say ‘it is beautiful’. (H’Doubler, 1968: 112-113)

Dance has many technical and detailed movements and depends on a process of creation that is not just inspiration. As any other kind of artwork, the process of producing something is exhausting and longstanding. In this sense, and in the same line of thought as Bojana Cvejic’s, who does not see dance as a natural process but as a construction:

[...] dancing can hardly be conceived as a natural, spontaneous, organic, and thereby self-evident expression of the body in movement. It conversely implies a choice predicated on the thought that constructs the expression of movement and the disposition of the body to move, and thus constructs their conjunction as an artificial rather than a given bind. (Cvejic, 2014: 228)

These choices and constraints are related to the social agenda of the creators but also to the environment, to the social, cultural, political and historical context.

#### **4.2. *Kreatur* by Sasha Waltz**

*Kreatur* is a dance piece directed and choreographed by Sasha Waltz for 14 dancers. Sasha Waltz is the leader of the dance company Sasha Waltz & Guests and one of the most successful European choreographers at the moment. Her choreographies surprise both by their creativity, imagination, brightness and aesthetic sense as well by the depth of the themes that are covered. She always tries to call different artists to collaborate with her; for *Kreatur* she called Iris van Herpen to

design the clothes, Thomas Schenk for the scenes and Soundwalk Collective for the music. This piece had its world premiere on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017, at Radialsystem V in Berlin.

In *Kreatur*, Waltz proposes to explore, through choreographic movement, “the phenomena of existence against the background of a disrupted society: power and a lack of power, dominance and weakness, freedom and control, community and isolation”, as expressed in the website of the company<sup>60</sup>. *Kreatur* is a show that brings to mind her previous works, where she had already looked into social reality, as in *Körper*<sup>61</sup>, where she explored the exposure of bodies and their manipulation by society.

In *Kreatur*, the audience is introduced to the epic story of creation of humanity and interpersonal relationships, i.e. to a return to the origins of civilization. The bodies moving on stage are taken back to their genesis, to the natural and the innate, having lost some elements of the social and cultural mediation. The relations of power between dancers and the contact they establish with each other are somewhat animalistic and violent. Looking at those movements, it is even possible to make some connections with the Garden of Eden and the ideal of humanity without any social interference, with everything in its more natural form and structure. Notwithstanding, the relations inside the group are quite strange, not fluid nor organic, but something more disconnected. The distance between the bodies, how isolated and separated they are, is obvious. They seem to be in constant alert, in constant fear of something or someone. The dancers are always under the control of another dancer or being dominated by a stronger member of the company of the mass on stage. The piece functions around the idea that these relations of power are the foundation of human relationships, and that this dichotomy of dominance and subjugation is still present in today’s society.

Sasha Waltz transforms the darkness of society (a more animalistic and brutal vision of humanity) into movement, into a violent and powerful choreography: spasms, wrestling movements, contractions, and marked changes in movements’ dynamics. In *Kreatur*, the audience is introduced to movement in a raw way. Naked

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.sashawaltz.de/en/productions/>

<sup>61</sup> *Körper* means bodies. This piece is an exploration of each dancers’ particular movement and how it is possible to compose a piece that links body with architecture, since the idea of construction is kept in mind. The dance is an analysis of ethical and moral questions about manipulation of bodies and human characteristics, using the naked bodies as in a scientific lab where experiments are being done.

bodies appear on stage to present themselves in their purest state: “Movement is not the bodily expression of the subject of dance; movement is created as an object in itself that engages bones, muscles, ligaments, nerves and other body parts of the dancer in strictly physical activity” (Cvejic, 2014: 19). In this presentation, the bodies are what they are and are used to question some social issues according to their morphology, skin colour and muscles’ composition. In contemporary dance,

It’s all a question of body. Gone are the days of uniformity, and even though certain contemporary choreographers reflexively choose the same physical type of dancer, performances can be executed by the large and small, the fat and thin, black and white, Africans and Asians, very young and very old stars and unknowns, professionals and beginners. (Noisette, 2011: 14)

In this exploration of the limits of the body, the borders between the self and the other are constantly changing and being invaded, then immediately repelled and withdrawn with terror, using the materiality of the body and what is seen in a way that shows these biological differences and their social impact. Tragedy, the clash between humans, evil or selfishness, are transposed into choreography. Questions of race or gender are deconstructed and violence and aggression are used as language to provoke an impact on the audience; Waltz presents an experience of the obscure, the dark side of man, where the negative is exteriorized, exposing an inner self that is stripped away from any social or political layer. She translates into movements what we usually do, unconsciously, on a daily basis. Waltz calls onto stage a more animalistic and irrational action, even brutal movements, that dancers perform, stripped from any kind of sensitivity or morality. The audience is faced with a group of individuals that apparently represent the most innate state of humans, something almost barbaric.

The human is presented in this dance piece as an animal that is always controlled by social rules and influenced by society, living in a constructed environment, an environment built and structured by humans themselves. The movement exposes the most inborn and savage side of the human being, whilst showing, at the same time, the influence of civilization and culture to separate men from animals. In *Kreatur*, the audience is faced with a dichotomy between the human and some kind of animalism, something more innate and native that is not constrained by any civil law, rule or moral construction. More than studying any human values, the movement praises the more physical and visual features of humans; the body and the physical ambivalences, aspects, particularities and abilities. The choreography

exposes the body and its human limits. The body is used in a violent way, manipulated as a lifeless object.

The nudity of the bodies on stage allows us to perceive the forms of the human as they are, without any layer. The difference between the bodies, from the colour of the skin to the morphology or muscular variety between dancers, highlights the diversity of people in today's society. We do not have a homogenous society anymore, where everybody looks exactly the same, since each person's background is different. The costumes used, which could be described as sculptures by Iris van Herpen, work as extensions of the bodies, giving them a futuristic visual<sup>62</sup>. At the same time there is a return to a more animalistic condition through movement, there is a call for the future with the costumes that have a plastic look, thus presenting an idea of a composed and industrial element. With metallic colours and transparencies, the futuristic outfits present the natural body controlled by an element that is a creation and a result of technology. Inside this industrial shelter, there is a body that wants to break free and go back to the origins.



Figure 1: still picture from *Kreatur*. © Luna Zscharnt

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<sup>62</sup> Even though the choreographical proposal is about the phenomenon of existence, Sasha Waltz is worried about the future and the body in a future context, as well as about how people are going to react to a cyber reality, in which the aims and functions of a body will change with robotics and the automatism created by technology. For further information see: <https://youtu.be/JdisnFb7bt0>

*Kreatur* is a transdisciplinary piece that goes beyond the limits of dance with its creative settings, the clothes, the staging, and the impressive visual sculptures that add an extra layer of signification to movement and choreography. The meaning is not only given by the bodies of the dancers, but by the dance piece as a whole and the different elements that compose *Kreatur*. It can be said that *Kreatur* is an ultra contemporary piece about the confrontation of individualism, characteristic of the human society, and human fragility. The body is always a political instance and can be used as a narrative dispositive<sup>63</sup> of oppression and dominance, since the body is always a social construction and behaviours, gestures and posture are always controlled by values, rules and social experience. Waltz explores the relations of power in an evident way. She uses the different dancers' bodies to highlight the dichotomies between men and women, stronger and weaker, white and black, older and younger. Right at the beginning of the show, a big white male dancer enters the stage while a black small woman climbs to his back. In this duet, it is possible to see how the man is manipulating the woman, controlling her movements, being tough and even aggressive with her, who, in turn, seems to try to run away from that situation, from that aggression and control of movements. The question of race and ethnicity is explored further through the body that is moving. Waltz chose two bodies with a very different skin colour, which makes the physical differences more visible. The body, according to Jane Desmond, works as a text and dance as its language, or its code, meaning that the bodies in motion have a textuality that is more codified and more affective than the choreography alone: "we should not ignore the ways in which dance signals and enacts social identities in all their continually changing configurations" (Desmond, 1993-94: 57). In this sense, and as it has been mentioned before, the body that is moving is always a cultural body, with different meanings, history, social experiences and political visions. A dancer always embodies his or her surroundings, having an intrinsic value that goes beyond any choreography and adding a different layer to the piece. Laurence Louppe says that the notion of performer not only means that the dancer is a surrogate of the creator or author, but also that the body that is moving has, somehow, a power of creation (Louppe, 2012: 81). The choreographic creation is always dependent on the ones moving because, as

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<sup>63</sup> A narrative dispositive is an ensemble of different objects, discourses, materials and movements that allows to tell a story, to explain something and to communicate. To be connected through narrative always presupposes that there is a structure limiting the content, which facilitates a better organization for a better understanding.

Susan Leigh Foster defends, each body has a certain force, tension, weight, shape, tempo and phrasing that is related to each body's singularity<sup>64</sup>. The dancers' surroundings, their life experience and their biological conditions always affect how they incorporate the choreography in terms of a personal kinaesthetic, affective and mental representation: "dance is not the repository of meaning but produces meaning each time it is performed" (Giurchescu, 2012: 110). The dancers, their particular movements, offer a new layer to the movement, provide a new sense or signification to the gesture because the one that is executing is giving a bit of himself or herself in the act of producing that movement, like an interpretation of the original movement or idea designed by the choreographer: "Several bodies circulate and gather in the choreographer's body and sensitivity, and in this dialogue with the body of the dancers, themselves crossed by multiple personal histories, bodies multiply" (Louppe, 2012: 81 – my translation).

But returning to the dance piece itself, in order to understand specific points of this critical choreography against of state of humanity, it is fundamental to study in detail different parts and aspects of the performance.

Cotton cocoons are the first image that appears on stage.



Figure 2: still picture from *Kreatur*. © Sebastian Bolesch

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<sup>64</sup> See chapter 1.2, "Dance and representation", for example, where the value of the body that is moving is mentioned and these relations are explained.

They look fragile and, at the same time, protective. One person is inside this cocoon that creates a physical frontier between the self and the surrounding environment, maintaining him/her inside a shell that protects and guarantees safety, allowing that person to grow and to develop in an isolated and quiet place. However, since this shell has some porosity and is composed by thin wires, it concomitantly blurs the vision of the individual to the outside, as well as from the outside to the inside. It is easy to move and pass through the wire that constitutes the cocoon, but it creates a kind of fog that difficult the visual interaction. The shell that creates a blurred vision for/of the person eventually functions as a metaphor for the creation of the self and the different layers of subjectivation, character and personality that we allow the others to access. The individual and the society are independent, a relationship that dictates the limits of subjectivity: “The recognition of and regard for others, as an ethics of identity, stand in tension with the separateness of the self and the social actuality of difference” (Tonkiss, 2010: 119). In the modern city, to raise this barrier from the other so as to create distance is a manner of protecting oneself from the insecurity and the fear that are part of the city, as Bauman defends in multiple works. Tonkiss continues: “In this sense a central problem of modernity is manifest in the common anxieties of the metropolitan, the banal manoeuvres of urban life. Blanking people on the subway, we might console ourselves, is all just part of the unhappy struggle between the individual and the ‘supra-individual’ in the modern city” (Tonkiss, 2010: 119). One thing is what individuals are, the other is what they show and present socially. This demonstrates that Goffman’s idea of a mask and of different social roles that a person chooses to use is still relevant nowadays. It is in a body-presence interaction, through physical contact, that individuals affect each other simultaneously: “An interaction may be defined as all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another’s continuous presence; the term ‘an encounter’ would do as well” (Goffman, 1990: 15). An individual is never isolated in a society, but is under a constant shareable influence of the others.

In *Kreatur*, dancers are always being affected by each other, and it is in this mutual influence that they create a group. “Each ‘I’ brings the ‘we’ along as he or she enters or exits that door, finding oneself in an unprotected enclosure or exposed out there on the street. We might say that there is a group, if not an alliance, walking there, too, whether or not they are anywhere to be seen” (Butler, 2015: 51). An

individual is always inserted in a social group, sharing ideals and intentions with others. The social group in which we are inserted defines the person that we are. Each person is associated with a circle of people, never being alone. Being part of a collective is something normal, as nobody exists alone by him/herself or without the support of a group of people.

If initially the cocoons represent the space of one individual, a personal environment and safe zone, in a matter of seconds another person starts invading these cocoons and force the individuals to share the confined space, to be touched, to be transformed and to allocate something that apparently does not have an owner. An individual is not a product of only him or herself, but always a construction, a process of becoming influenced by culture, society and the expectations and judgements of others. According to Goffman, life is a performance and individuals assume a role in a specific context: “a performance is socialized, molded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectation of the society in which it is presented” (Goffman, 1990: 35). He continues by defending that the others, how they perceive the individual and how individuals present themselves “will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited value of the society, more so, in fact, than does [their] behaviour as a whole” (ibid). It is, thus, the other that defines a person’s identity and how one should be presented. People interact with who and what is around them as porous beings; all human beings are in constant mutability, absorbing the ideas, values and intentions of others:

We are not simply visual phenomena for each other – our voices must be registered, and so we must be heard; rather, who we are, bodily, is already a way of being ‘for’ the other, appearing in ways that we can neither see nor hear; that is, we are made available. Bodily, for another whose perspective we can neither fully anticipate nor control. (Butler, 2015: 76-77)

People are always in a circle of influence. Connections are established between people and judgements are done without speaking. Our bodies also react to the other and adapt to what is around us. It is our body that exists in a space and allows to establish the relations with environment, people and objects.

As previously said, the clothes that the dancers use change completely the moments and the signification of the dance. The most evident case is when a dancer appears totally covered wearing a full black suit with sharp nozzles. This figure, despite having a human body, is deformed and scary. It can be read as an oppressor,

who controls and manipulates a group, attacks and hurts, lowers and reduces the agency of others, puts pressure on others whilst increasing his or her power.

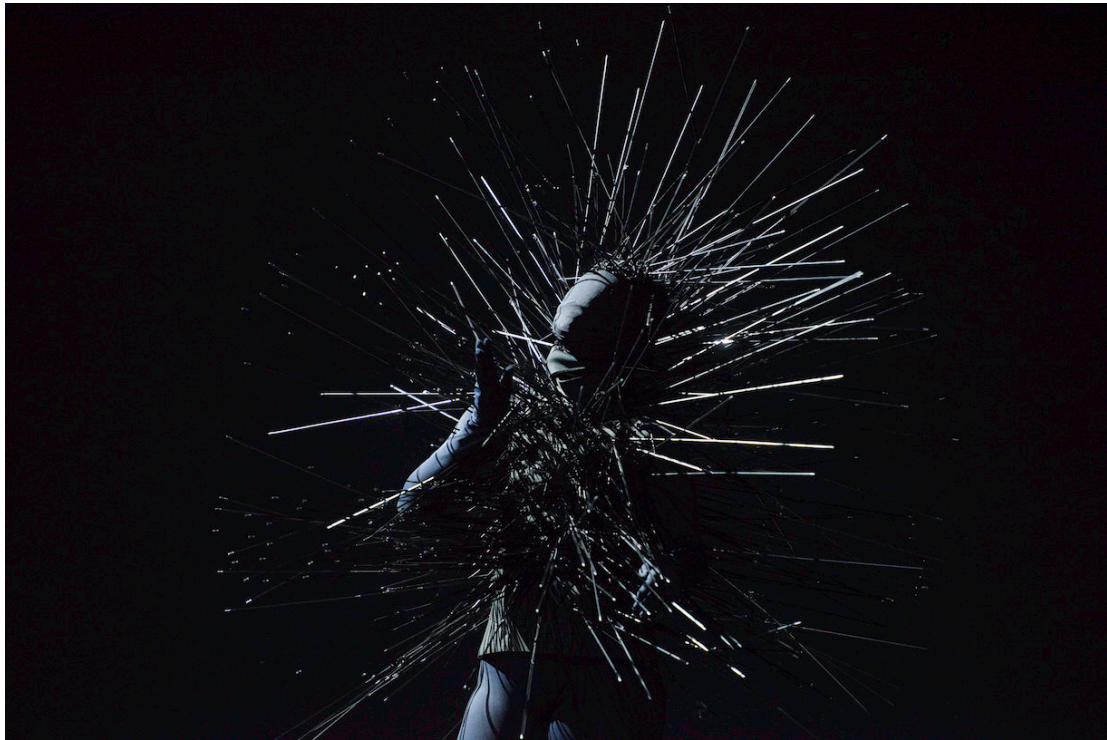


Figure 3: still picture from *Kreatur*. © Sebastian Bolesch

The character is similar to a dictator commanding the others, who, in turn, obey out of fear, panic, insecurity and instability. They function as a mass that reacts to external pressures without questioning their validity: there is a totalitarian order and an immediate answer, which is apparently given without freedom, subjectivism or critical spirit, as if the power of each individual's agency is cancelled. In a queue composed by almost naked dancers, the stranger figure touches each individual, who have to react to his selection. There is an interaction with the group and with someone specific that falls and is attacked and shaken by this entity. There is violence and aggression in the manipulation, yet, as time passes, the dancers give themselves totally to this strange body, allowing themselves to be manipulated in a relaxed and even intimate way. There is closeness, an intimacy that culminates in an affectionate embrace, a more sensual exchange of affection. An affective relationship is created with this body, with total permission to the touch of the other.

Sensuality and sexuality are also explored in this dance piece, having actually a simulation of sex, something more animal, as if symbolizing a return to the innate

origin, to savagery, without the interference of social rules nor any intimidations or constraints. Relations of power and body are present. Body and physicality, physical characteristics and forms of representation, are representations of power. To change the body to express power is something innate to Man, for example, to raise the chest and move it forward or, on the contrary, to look to the floor as a signal of submission. As Foucault says “nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power” (Foucault, 1980: 57-58). It is through the body than someone can come across as powerful and have some kind of influence on the other. This is related, according to Foucault, with desire and pleasure, and the idea of creation of knowledge: “Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. If it has been possible to constitute a knowledge of the body, this has been by way of an ensemble of military and educational disciplines. It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible” (Foucault, 1980: 59). Physical imposition and power relations allow the creation of codes and discourses without words that are imposed and read by the positions or movements of the individual. The body assumes a disciplined routine that dictates the person’s status.

In this small scene of sex, the dancers are using their bodies and their natural desires just for the carnal experience, for the wanting of the other’s body, for pleasure and sensuality. The nudity is common to all these bodies that are just exploring the otherness, the physical connection, and the sexuality. Foucault explains that relations of power penetrate in the bodies, without any kind of mediation:

If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first to be interiorised in people's consciousnesses. There is a network or circuit of bio-power, or somato-power, which acts as the formative matrix of sexuality itself as the historical and cultural phenomenon within which we seem at once to recognise and lose ourselves” (Foucault, 1980: 186).

There is something intrinsic to men that society controls but that can sometimes come to the surface and be exposed as something more savage and innate, without any of the codes and rules to which Foucault makes reference in *History of Sexuality*: “Sex then became the ‘code’ of pleasure. Whereas in societies with a heritage of erotic art the intensification of pleasure tends to desexualise the body, in the West this systematisation of pleasure according to the ‘laws’ of sex gave rise to the whole apparatus of sexuality” (Foucault, 1980: 191). With *Kreatur*, audience is presented to a more carnal movement, without any constriction. The movements are not just sensual, but sexual, more animalistic, and I could add, even brutal. This characteristic

transforms the dancers into a more grotesque, brutal, animal entity: a bizarre figure that looks human but is savage.

*Kreatur* has also a moment of teamwork, of cohesion for the sake of equilibrium and keeping everyone together in a tiny and small wall with stairs<sup>65</sup>. Being in this small, fragile and reduced platform maintains the group together: no one falls or is in a situation of unbalance. The force in these bodies, the energy that glues them to each other, is as if they were in a life or death situation. The fourteen dancers act as a connective mass. Here, there is no choreography or dance but real movements to maintain the balance, given that only together and by helping each other can this group keep everyone up on the platform. In modern society, according to Bauman, individuals feel abandoned to themselves, left to their own resources, which always seem scarce and inadequate. Instead of solidarity, there is a constant competition for survival (Bauman, 2009: 21). It is in this sense that Gerard Delanty talks about community as being relevant today because everything appears to be distant but, at the same time, globalization and improvement of communication systems facilitate the creation of communities, which can emerge not only within closer circles as family, friends and co-workers, but also with people that are not physically present (Delanty, 2005: 193). It is only through bonding with others, even if there is a dimension of interest, that a society might enter a cycle of progress and union. These groups of dancers, despite their individuality, sometimes need to work together and to help each other. An interesting fact, however, is that, when dancing as a group, a collectivity, the movements are softer and smoother. Being united brings calm to the group.

In different moments of *Kreatur* we are faced with episodes of exclusion and humiliation, of exacerbated exposure to the enjoyment of the other, in order to demote the other, the stranger, the outsider, the weaker and less capable of asserting himself. Those who most easily fall into disgrace, who cannot impose themselves, will enter a spiral of disgrace and be influenced by the others, who end up using them for their own purposes. Simultaneously, the show is marked by a mass movement, where the entire group is moving in the same way; yet, at a certain moment, they start to follow just one of the performers, who commands all the others. This act of leadership is

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<sup>65</sup> There is also another episode with these stairs, where two men move the stairs as if they are a mechanism, while a girl walks up and down, without having a place to go or to run to. It is a never-ending movement; she cannot stop, otherwise she will fall. We find here, again, Waltz's epiphanies about the automatism of the body and how it is going to work in a near future.

something that looks natural and changes from dancer to dancer. They become a united mass that moves together. In the mass, little groups start to change the movements, creating different spots of attention for the audience, The dynamic of the movements is the same, there is no break in the visual compositions; however, in those same groups, the way dancers are moving is different but in harmony. Some duets also start to appear, and then they are transformed into trios that grow to small groups and then are back to mass and collective movement. A movement common to all seems to be a reproduction of spasms, being highlighted the importance of the dynamics of movement in the various bodies. They all move together in the same way, as an organism that needs all the structures to work embedded to survive.

Loupe says that to be a dancer is to choose to be in relation with the world, using the body and the body movement as an instrument of knowledge, thought and expression (Loupe, 2012: 69). Besides the choreographic proposal, interpreters talk for themselves and take ownership of the movement, making it as their own to better showcase a certain feeling. The dancer is always a mediator between the choreographer and his/her ideas and the audience and their interpretation of the piece. Loupe defends that, nowadays, the big choreographers always offer this freedom to the dancers, allowing them to use their own body to explore the movement being performed and to add a new textuality to the image being created (Loupe, 2012: 81). This embodiment has its own textuality and constitutes a new layer of knowledge. On the other hand, the audience also apprehends something different: “Our perception is worked out and certainly alerted by powerful body reading tools, elaborated at the same time as the development of contemporary dance, which gave us access to deep impulses. Interpretations of readings have multiplied, as well as the abundant richness of the sensitive experiences that can be drawn from them” (Loupe, 2012: 82 – my translation).

*Kreatur* is a contemporary dance piece in which the audience takes on the role of extracting meaning from the piece and assumes, somehow, a role in the piece. According to Randy Martin, the audience also have a performative participation in this communication: they can take something from the piece and incorporate the empirical knowledge, put it into practice in daily-life replication. “A formal performance event is supposed to hold a mirror up to life, its ‘double’. The audience for a given performance, however, is not simply viewing some other experience, but using the occasion of the event to look at itself. [...] As means of reflection, both

performance and theory operate to produce certain self-understandings, or concepts of identity based upon a situation of seeing some other” (Martin, 2004: 47). Movement is always understood; there is always a communicative experience that results in kinetic effects. These effects are felt in the body of those looking at the piece, who not only have sensations of movement in their own body, but also identify in the body movement their own ideas, experiences and values. As Martin believed, a body always provokes something in another body as a social practice, since some gestures, expressions and intensions of movement have a certain specific meaning. “Kinetic effects, the stimulation of the senses or sentience, are feelings expressed directly from one body to another and amongst a group of bodies” (Martin, 1985: 55). As Carlson says, “Performance is always performance for someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that the audience is the self” (Carlson, 2004: 73). However, to study the real effect of choreography is necessary to isolate the unique communicative aspect of the body. The performance itself has a social responsibility, given that it is an act of narration with several meanings and concepts attached to it. When Miltz tries to define contemporary dance, she sees in this art a way to reflect the surroundings: “we want dance to produce unknown images or to question the images of the body we are surrounded by in media, publicity, films, everyday life. We want to be irritated, surprised” (Milz, 2008: 2). Waltz wanted to present a choreography that highlighted the more intrinsic human nature to bring attention to innate aspects of men and to how, despite all the social construction, bodies are relevant and have an impact, thus revealing something more brutal and grotesque about humanity. Reminiscent of Frederick Jackson Turner’s theories (2008), Waltz builds her piece around the opposition between the social and the natural, civilization and savagery, emphasizing the condition of humans as animals, as integral part of the environment, both the so-called natural one and the one built by humans.

#### **4.3. *Cementary* by Patricia Apergi**

*Cementary* is a dance piece choreographed by Patricia Apergi, created for her dance company Aerites Dance Company, about the urban labyrinth and the city as places of chaos. The city is introduced as both as a place of abandonment and a place of displacement. The world premiere happened on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March in Athens at the

Onassis Cultural Centre. Apergi is a Greek choreographer whose work is always focused on what is current, on her time. The urban environment and the cities are her most important focus of study, having already created two pieces – *Era Provera*<sup>66</sup> and *Planites*<sup>67</sup> – about the city and its habitants, the city as a place of conflicts and wandering. In *Planites*, Apergi explores the concept of movement and migration in the city: gentrification, creation of ghettos, occupation of empty spaces, the transformation of cultural areas, etc. On the stage, the dancers are always moving, running, walking around and creating different dynamics. The idea was to present the constant change of migration and of the journey with no end.

Through choreography, Apergi tries to explore the city, to reconstruct it, to explore its faults and misunderstandings, but also to highlight the people, their anonymity and isolation. In our daily routines, people are used to stay distant from the others, establishing relations of anonymity, even if inserted in a specific community and dealing with others directly:

The mundane manoeuvres of everyday routine (not making eye contact on the sidewalk, ignoring the weird intimacy of the crowded subway) in this sense play out at the micro-scale a broader tension between autonomy and community. In the modern city, as elsewhere, individual freedom goes together with impersonality and anonymity. (Tonkiss, 2010: 11)

It is characteristic of this choreographer to use the dichotomy between self-space and urban space as a manner to explore the concept of the city and its impact on socialization, to see cities as no one lands, as places that do not belong to anyone or anything, as places that, despite having a meaning, are deprived of meaning or incapable of permitting relations between subjects. The chaotic concrete jungle is just a passage, a space of transition as Marc Augé mentions in his analysis of non-places in the context of supermodernity (1995).

*Cementary* is a pun between cement and cemetery: the place of cement where the lifeless, the afterlife resides. Cemeteries are grey places without life where people

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<sup>66</sup> *Era Provera* is a piece that premiered in 2012 about the dynamics of the cities, the people who live there, the networks and the interactions between materials and individuals. This piece was proposed as an exam on the streets and on the urban condition, in a context where cities are always changeable. The city, the bodies moving, what is there and what is lost, the people who left the places and all the tactics and aspects that resulted from that urban experience were put onto stage by the choreographer.

<sup>67</sup> *Planites* was the second piece that Patricia Apergi created, one year after *Era Provera*, centred in the cities and the humans living there. It is the mind and the body of the city that inspire the author to create this choreography about a journey, the condition of always being in transit, without ever stopping. This struggle of never finding a place in the city, the uncertainty, the quest for being visible and trying to be someone is transposed onto the bodies on stage that are in constant movement.

are already separated from their past life and exist there only in the form of their body, their physical remains. The cemetery is a place of memories, of recollection of a time that has already passed, a place where nothing happens, with no future, options or dreams: a place of death, of grief, of sadness, of solitude. Apergi sees the city as a concrete jungle where people move only as bodies, without affection, as if they are just the shell of their real selves. According to the choreographer, in *Cementary*, we are presented to a post-apocalyptic utopian (but possible) society, where only the ruins of the buildings, of the relationships, and of the people still persist. Yet, *Cementary* is about more than just the ruins of the city. It is about the ruins of those who live in that urban place, the spoils of the man who can survive the disaster.



Figure 4: still picture from *Cementary*. © Tasos Vrettos

Again, just like in her previous work, invisibility, loneliness, detachment and the human condition are also explored in *Cementary*. As Valerie Briginshaw explains, cities and people are similar in this era: “the postmodern city, like the postmodern subject, is fractured and fragmented, it is falling apart and full of contradictions. It is utopian and dystopian, attracting and alienating. It is constructed as labyrinthine, free-flowing and uncontrollable, but also as containing and trapping” (Briginshaw, 1997:

35). Both cities and people, as constructors and constructions of their own space and context, live in a dichotomy of flows that, although free, appear as labyrinthine and confused. If, on the one hand, the individuals of the contemporary cities seek the other and affections, at the same time, they live a relation of isolation, estrangement and individualism. People and cities are entities composed of contradictory dichotomies that feed the fear and insecurity that reside in the big cities.

The choreographer talks about *Cementary* as a piece about time<sup>68</sup>. It is about the time people would take in this imaginative possible future society to touch each other. From the audience standpoint, the touch and the breathing seem to be the most evident issues being presented in this dance piece, in the sense that the relations and the distance between the individuals that live in this society is very clear. *Cementary* is a piece about cities and how the urban space is a territory of affections and connections, where people – despite being disconnected and having forgotten the other –, are always willing to be in touch with someone. Apergi follows the same line of thought as Unità di Crisi's text "The city as a narrative dispositive", where the urban space is described as "an immense machine producing forms, significations, symbologies, narrations, images, concepts and practices starting from the complex network of relations that gives life to it" (2014). The city is, thus, a significant ensemble, a communicative dispositive with different layers of text and meanings that is capable to create, to articulate and to generate discourses, narratives, symbols and representations.

Before anything else, however, it is important to make reference to the emotional and physical situation of the individuals represented on stage. Patricia Apergi let herself be inspired by the homeless people in the streets of Athens, rambling around the city. The economic crisis and the refugee crisis originated an increase of homeless people in every town, especially in the capital. "One of the most sinister effects of globalization is the deregulation of wars. Most present-day war-like actions, and the most cruel and gory ones among them, are conducted by non-state entities, subject to no state or quasi-state laws and no international conventions" (Bauman, 2007: 37). More and more, for various reasons, including armed conflicts and poverty, people are leaving their homes and looking for better conditions

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<sup>68</sup> In an informal conversation with the audience after the show in Guidance'18, Patricia Apergi mentioned how she sees time and touch as the biggest issues portrayed in the show.

elsewhere. These refugees<sup>69</sup> end up as people of no land, homeless and segregated by everybody due to the lack of integration policies. However, these people could also be useful for the host countries, as manpower for more works, to create new spheres of cultures, bring new knowledge and experiences.

The reality is that due to the lack of social policies, refugees end up being associated with the underclass. This social class, the stranger as Bauman mentions, is the one that nobody wants to get in touch with:

Refugees are the very embodiment of 'human waste', with no useful function to play in the land of their arrival and temporary stay, and with neither an intention nor a realistic prospect that they will be assimilated and incorporated into the new social body. From their present dumping site there is no return and no road forward [...]. (Bauman, 2007: 41)

The creation of refugee camps appears to have been implemented as a solution to this problem of lack of integration: "Out of that place, refugees would be viewed as an obstacle and a trouble; inside that place, they are forgotten" (ibid). Leaving them all inside a camp allows natives to forget them and to create a barrier between them and, thus, distance. Once they leave the camps, the streets are a new reality and things get even more difficult since segregation problems and exclusion get even more obvious and violence and aggression might even rise.

Apergi made the performers to embed these conditions of living in the streets and being abandoned, and also to explore the physicality of this condition. Visually, we see dirty and fragile bodies, curved, and with an expression of sadness and suffering. When the audience enters the performance hall, a group of dancers is already on stage, using old clothes with a lot of layers, hats and gloves. Their faces are dirty, they are apparently sick and fragile, wandering seemingly without destination or will on stage, as if lost in a space-time void without reference to what happens outside of that space that is presented to spectators. They tremble with cold,

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<sup>69</sup> It is important to make clear that a refugee is not the same as a migrant. A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. Normally they have no conditions to remain where they are, or are too afraid to return to their homes. According to the UNHCR "two-thirds of all refugees worldwide come from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia" (UNHCR, 2018). They have to ask for asylum to other countries, leaving everything behind them, and ending up displaced and detached from everything and everyone. A migrant is, according to the International Organization for Migration "any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is" (IOM, n.d.).

they writhe with discomfort, they scratch themselves with the dirt that has been impregnated in their bodies.



Figure 5: still picture from *Cemetery*. © Chatzi Andreou

These bodies are left abandoned and without any care, forsaken. They are avoided by the rest of the society, forgotten and ignored. Homeless people lack basic human conditions and their status as an underclass, very different from other sectors of the society, results in a general absence of empathy. Bauman refers to them as a group of people without legitimate social force, individuals outside any class, without any recognized social function, seen as useless and dispensable by the so-called normal members of society. The underclass is, hence, a group of people who do not contribute to social life and that society is willing to give up if it allows it to gain something in return (Bauman, 2009: 24). To be underclass is to be outside, to be excluded, to serve no purpose. According to Bauman, the only positive role that the underclass can play is to prompt those people considered decent and ordinary to cling to the type of life they carry, as the alternative, i.e. to fall to the underclass, is too horrible to even consider (Bauman, 2009: 83).

In *Cementary*, we are introduced to the theory of affection<sup>70</sup> and the relations that can be established between people, the time it takes to reduce distance and to allow touch, the back and forward that happens in these human relationships, the fear and the uncertainty to open oneself to the other and create emotional bonds with other people. Delanty says that, in our era, people are already prepared to handle distance and to maintain cold and non-affective relationships with others in a community: “Postmodernism merely tells people to accept the reality of fragmentation and the absence of any meaningful relation to the environment, since shared values and forms of life are alleged to have died with modernity” (Delanty, 2005: 58). To achieve the level of intimacy that results from touching the other, especially after a traumatic situation (it is important to remember that the piece takes place in a post-apocalyptic society), there is a moment when people feel the need to create relations of intimacy with the others, allowing to trust in each other and to believe in the sense of belonging and community. Human relationships must always be constructed throughout time and following a few steps of trust and commitment, which is represented in this dance piece through choreography, through the movements performed on stage and the interactions between dancers. Apergi’s proposal was to show how a community can be re-established after a traumatic experience<sup>71</sup> and how affection and connection are the foundation for creating something new that catalyses other social, economic, political and even cultural convulsions. When two subjects start an interaction, that does not mean that an affective relation of any kind is going to be established. All human relations are based upon communication and shared interests, values, experiences, and others things. To establish a relationship with anyone is always a process of knowing the other and of recognition, involving mutual respect, trust and feelings of belonging. During the piece, this approach between dancers is explored. The audience is introduced to different levels of relationship and it is easily understood how their bodies change as those feeling of trust, respect and recognition

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<sup>70</sup> According to Spinoza’s notion of affect as the ability to affect and be affected, affections are states of mind and body related with feelings and emotions. However, according to Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, affection is not related to a personal feeling, but to a capacity to influence another’s one body. According to the authors, to affect always involves a dialogue between two subjects, an encounter and an exchange of human sensibility.

<sup>71</sup> The traumatic experience is seen by the choreographer, as she said in the conversation after the show, as a moment that breaks with the harmony and the normality of a daily life. In the piece, it is the end of the world, but, building a bridge to our current reality, it is possible to make a reference to war, natural catastrophes as earthquake, fires, storms, etc.

are being constructed. To trust the other, to reconstruct together, means to create a new kind of community that makes it easier to overcome some events and resist harder periods:

[...] the contemporary world is full of examples of community as an identity of resistance, ranging from nationalism to religious fundamentalism to anti-globalization movements. The age of globalization is also the age of community. The search for community is a reaction against the globalization in the first instance: that is, a reaction against the break-up of stable social institutions and the continuity of the life-word. It is also a reaction against the progressive currents of the age, such as individualization and the crisis of the patriarchal family. (Delanty, 2005: 163-164)

In this sense, community presents itself as a solution for the fragmentation of social bonds. These communities are, however, based especially on communication systems and more virtual connections, where the feelings of belonging, trust and commitment are taken in account, or at least, since the connection is made through a technological medium, where everything is framed and (due to the logarithm) filtered. Individuals create more distance between each other because they are used to not having a physical connectivity with other people. Relationships are taking on a virtual role and affections are being relegated to a more internal layer of the self, needing more attempts and time to be established.

Detachment and fear of the other are what best defines individuals in this fictional reality. Still, in Apergi's choreography, the distance between bodies also diminishes as the piece unfolds, culminating, in the last scene, with a hand being gently placed on another person's shoulder. If in the beginning of the show the dancers are scattered across the stage, creating physical distance between them (even when dancing together, at the same time and doing the same choreography), as time passes, they begin to approach each other, ending up even touching each other's bodies, seeking that contact as comfort. At this moment, it is possible to feel the dancers' breathing calm down, tranquillity putting an end to anxiety. If in the beginning of the dance piece the choreography is marked by a tired, loud and gasping breathing, by the end of the show the opposite is true. Apergi used the physical distance that she felt happening in daily life and exaggerated it in this performance. According to the talk happening at the end of the show, even though people, nowadays, are creating barriers between each other – albeit, being connected virtually through different platforms of social media – for her, it was important to take this idea of being afraid

of touch, of feeling anxious and fearful of solitude, and of conquering peace, tranquillity and harmony whilst being close and in direct interaction with the other.

In *Cementary*, citizens also lose their right to see the sky. There is a fictional and industrial sky made of fabric that creates a barrier that functions as a ceiling throughout the performance – there is no outside, the inhabitants of this fictional city are always indoors, inside a building. This textile, that has a raw colour, that looks dirty and old, is the upper limit of the dancers. In this dystopian city, when looking up people can only view something produced by themselves.



Figure 6: still picture from *Cementary*. © Tasos Vrettos

The material of the fabric that is used as a sky reminds us of the colour and the texture of cement, just like the title of the piece as well. These citizens are enclosed in an industrial space, constricted to only those connections and individuals, oppressed by a structure which prevents them from going further, as if they are doomed to be forever entrusted to a limited space limited by concrete: as if buried under that cement-looking ceiling (which reinforces the link with the title and the idea of a cemetery). The horizon of these people is easily reachable: a very close barrier that makes very present the notions of finitude and closure. This enclosure, this finitude of the

environment – already explored by Sasha Waltz with the cocoons – and this detachment from the outside is a metaphor for exclusion, for the separation some individuals feel from other individuals and also from society in general, which moves away from their self and extrapolates the sphere out of their control. Just as Paul Virilio says “proportions are the limit of being” (Virilio, 2009: 34). This notion of finitude is just the result of the relativity between space and time and the phenomenon of acceleration, of the limits and of the impact that are present in the concept of grey ecology<sup>72</sup>.

Individuals, whose notion of space is defined by their own limits and their notion of self, tend to create an effect on the social and an adjustment to the circumstances and to the context. People trigger changes in the morphology and structure of the city whilst also being changed by the city and the urban environment. This notion of a mutual influence between individuals and the city is also presented in the choreography. The set, the lights and the scenario change according to the evolution of movements and the relation that individuals create between each other. The constructed environment and the artificiality given to the environment create a context in which everything is controlled by surveillance, by timetables, by rules and laws – in the contemporary city everything works in connection with other pieces that make the machine work and, hence, do not leave that much room to take risks or to improvise.

At the same time, we are being faced with a dichotomy in terms of the temporality of things, since we construct buildings and structures expecting them to survive time, while knowing that everything that is material somehow has an end<sup>73</sup>. Cement and concrete are the *ex libris* of modern societies, where the built environment determines men and their moves in the city: “concrete realized the prospect of transforming nature, and of transforming ourselves and our relationships

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<sup>72</sup> Grey Ecology, as already mentioned, results from the impact of Man in nature. However, it is not related with environment but with the idea and the concept of limits, space and time. Technology created a kind of pollution that resulted in an acceleration of everything and a contraction in the spacio-temporal dimension. It is a mental or abstract pollution that cannot be seen, but that changes the relations between Man and Cosmos. Grey Ecology is in direct relation with dromology, which is the science that studies the effects of speed in society. With this change of perception, there is also a change in relativity and proportion. What belongs to men and what is exterior to them is under a change and so are the limits not only of the self but of the space that is produced by humanity (Virilio, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> The idea of destruction is already implied in construction. See Isabel Gil “Nemesis’s City” for more about his idea.

with each other” (Forty, 2012: 14). Adrian Forty argues that to talk about concrete is to talk about modernity and the social changes related to a certain era, since the material is used to construct new buildings and inaugurates a new period of urbanization. The morphology of the city changes with this new material, affecting people’s relationships and their notions of time and space. Everything becomes closer, but also, limited, as different areas in the city are created according to different functions. The use of concrete changed the cities, as well as the urban culture associated to it. In this culture of concrete, the temporality of buildings is seen as something constructed to survive to time, since it was something constructed to protect, to create a barrier, to save men. Nevertheless, it usually ends up being destroyed by time, weather, use, etc., or even human intervention – both as a result of acts of violence or as a result of the desire to destroy one specific thing in order to build something new, stronger, and bigger. This constructed environment, built by men, is actually something with an expiration date; what remain is always the memory, the relationships and the immaterial creations of men.

In the society portrayed in Apergi’s work, the impossibility of looking at the sky raises the issue of verticality. The scenario of the show is marked by a big artificial brownish sky made of fabric that gives the sensation of reducing the size of the dancers. The difference between the size of the people and of the buildings is clearly emphasized as a relation of power, that is, usually, the poor and the homeless are at the lowest level of this relation, whereas wealth, power and control are in hands of those in higher positions (Gonçalves, 2010). Looking at a business, usually the CEO office occupies the top floors of the building, while in the basement we find spaces for machines, cleaning supplies, the kitchen or the laundry, for example. Considering the Greek crisis that inspired this piece, one can say that the dancers personify the Greek people. On a micro-level, it showcases people going through difficulties sustaining themselves and living a somewhat comfortable life, sacrificing themselves enormously just to survive; on a macro-level, it represents an entire population living under the oppressing thumb of their own government and the richer countries, who have the power to dictate their future.

*Cementary* is a piece about humanity and how the spirit of trust and commitment to the other can sprout from social convulsions, as explained by the choreographer in the conversation with the audience after the show at CCVF in Guimarães. In this imagined context, but plausible future, where humans end up

enclosed in a built environment, away from everything and everyone, the human nature and the intrinsic desire of affection and connection with others is eventually developed as time moves on. Small interactions appear in order to admit touch and the creation of bonds and of a community of individuals that mutually work and live together, who carry a common life.

## Conclusion

When Carlson (2004) talks about performance, he says that it involves the notion of doubleness: the actual execution of an action and the idea of that action. According to his point of view, the action has always an idea that is aggregated to it. If all the movements and actions have ideas attached or provide the opportunity to come up with an idea, this means that a dance piece is always a provider or a creator of new ideas and intentions, which may or may not be in the same line as the artist's original thoughts. It is within this mindset that Bojana Cvejic sees in contemporary dance a bigger interest in explaining the performance, through the title, the dramaturgic text or with a talk after a show:

The representational perspective on the so-called problematic duality of the performance-work is reflected in presentation protocols, such as the now almost expected artist's talk after a dance performance in which the choreographer engages, with or without the dancers, in a dialogue with the audience. The implicit aim of this theatrical convention is to compensate for the understanding which a reception of dance is feared to lack in comparison to text-based performance in theatre. (Cvejic, 2014: 63)

This need to make clear what the aims of the dance piece are is not only based on the fear of misinterpretation, but also on the fact that, more than ever, the art world is making an effort to make their works accessible to everyone. There is a general need to simplify the artworks (not in terms of conception and content but in terms of interpretation), since artists and authors view themselves as producers of knowledge and also as bridges between audience and new visions of the world, as mediators of art, culture and education.

Dance is, from my point of view, a teaching tool, in the sense that it may prompt new knowledge and the desire to generate change and action. Looking at the works explored and mentioned in this dissertation, the choreographers always emphasize their intention of influencing the audience, of triggering some kind of content in the audience, leaving room for a subjective interpretation according to a personal experience. The act of creating a contemporary dance piece entails the desire to create a new cultural object that allows a new reading about the world and positions the author according to his or her agenda, in a specific context. The choreographer then seeks to provoke a feeling of contamination that comes from a sphere of affection created by the emotion caused by the identification of the subject and the spectator with the other, the dancer on stage. Thus, a contemporary dance

performance can be seen as a mediation, since it seeks an intention of research. There is an ethics of mimesis of reality, always with a personal point of view, that erects bridges between society and the subject. However, this mimesis is not only a copy of reality, but a new representation that activates the creation of a new world. This position of worldmaking, of representation as praxis, is a performative act within which something new is brought about in order to produce a new object about the world.

Contemporary dance is seen in this dissertation as a performance of ‘worldmaking’ and as a socio-political representation. It not only functions as a mirror but it provokes something new on the other as well. Hence, dance is not a mere representation, but a process of creation. Dance is a language that allows to create discourses without words, using only the movement of the body to narrate something or explore concepts. These new discourses affect the spectators, who are stimulated to think and develop opinions about the things that are presented to them. A dance piece is an object that represents the world of the choreographer, but also creates at least two other translations of the same situation: the visions of the dancers interpreting the choreography and the vision that the audience constructs while seeing.

The experience of the spectator must also be linked with a situation of mediation between the individual and the world. It is not just a relation between choreographer and world, dancer and world, but also audience and world. Therefore, when evaluating a dance piece there are at least three individuals involved in this process of mediation with the world and, thus, different layers of experiences, values and embodiment being raised. When creating a piece, choreographers expose, through the settings, movements, and composition, how they position themselves in the world. The dancers add a new layer to the dance piece, since their personal life and experience is already embodied in them, giving a different meaning to the way movements are done, to the gestures and the interpretation defined by the choreographer as a creator. Finally, the spectator is the last individual that creates the final meaning about the issue being presented. The audience is reading what is on stage, and, at the same time, it is taking the original idea of the creator and adapting it to their personal world.

Through the writing of this dissertation, I have tried to defend that contemporary dance can be a reflection of a socio-political agenda and of an urban lifestyle, having always in mind the intention of causing some kind of effect in the

audience. The pieces analysed in this dissertation were not studied in the sense of their power over the spectator, since that was not the purpose of the work, but it was clear that the choreographers, the authors, intended to create certain feelings or to trigger some thoughts in the audience. In performances, these effects in the audience are caused during the presentation, putting the spectator also in the role of an agent. While he or she is seeing, a process of identification happens and an appeal to affections is made. The one exposed to the show enters a process of recognition and feels affected by the performance. The author (the choreographer), the medium (the dancer) and the mediated (the audience) are owned by the narrative and possessed by the narrative and begin to recognize and be recognized by an information heritage and affections, appropriating – each with their own method of filtering and selecting information – the knowledge to which they are exposed. There is, therefore, an embodiment of the situation, a personal absorption of the message that is passed by the author.

When talking about a mediation between the actual world and the audience, the choreographer can be seen as the mediator that wants to transpose a message through the dancer's body (the medium), using the choreography (the dispositive) to transmit a message transformed into movements. In this sense, the choreographer is a narrator that tries to tell something. And as all storytellers, choreographers add their own version to the story, based on their lives and experiences. This story is taken and interpreted by the audience according also to a personal point of view, highlighting and giving value to specific episodes or details. In this case, it is possible to say that to be a mediator is to have the notion of how free and uncontrollable the situation is. The mediator can create an effect and an impact in the audience using affections, but they know that their role is only to originate a situation of astonishment. It is this situation that triggers a process of knowledge.

It is important to highlight that in both pieces studied in this dissertation, none of the choreographers are interpreters of the choreography. Sasha Waltz and Patricia Aperi are authors of the dance piece, however, they use their company and the body of other people to construct a choreography that controls the movement that they combined. In this ensemble of movements, they imprint their message, concepts, values and experience in choreography. Their vision is embedded by the dancers, who assume the role of the medium. When the audience is presented that dance piece, they have the role of reading what is being told. It is, therefore, possible to say that a

relation of mediation and communication is being established between two poles: choreographer and audience.

Contemporary dance is characterized by being a dance that is focused on current times and is known as a dance that converges different techniques and styles, always functioning as a reflection of those moving and those creating the choreography. Contemporary dance is, thus, presented not only as a way to represent the social reality, but actually as an artform that allows the creation of a new reality and of a new object that encompasses the vision of a reality. This representation in dance produces something, and, therefore, this adaptation of a reality into a new format is a way of worldmaking and knowledge production. A dance piece is an interpretation of someone about some aspect of the world, always based upon an individual way of acting in the world. Just as Guy Debord states, each person's agenda is presented in the spectacle, no matter what kind of spectacle: "For the spectacle is both the meaning and the agenda of our particular socio-economic agenda. It is the historical movement in which we are caught" (Debord, 2006: 9). The society is always reflected in the piece. Dance is, as other works of art, a socio-political act that is inserted in an individual context and that is specific to a group or community. Despite being something related to a person, a dance piece is always something contextual and that belongs to the group. Just as H'Doubler says, the experience of receiving, interpreting and giving value is something that is related with an individual; however, the experience happens in a social context and thence it is always shared with the rest of the group:

All experience, of course, is individual, yet we are sharers in common satisfactions, joys sorrows, and pleasures. No matter how individual our feelings are, the thrill to the perfect is an experience common to many. We are social creatures and as such seek not only one another's company – but one another's approval. (H'Doubler, 1968: 115)

This aspect of living in a community and inserted in a society is determinant for the way the message is received, since humans are cultural beings dependent on their own context. In this dissertation, the intention of working with cities and urban lifestyle is related with the similarities that a body can have with a city morphology and the experiences the city entails.

People are in a constant process of creating the self and of creating the city. The environment and the body are both human creations, dependent on the other's judgments and feedback. Apart from the bodies that circulate in the city transforming

the structure and functions of the urban space, places also have an important impact on each individual. Each individual has a different way to embody the city, just as the city is constructed by the actions of each individual. The cartography of a city is made according to a collective experience of community and of group construction of habits and customs. Nevertheless, each person has a different vision about a city based on his or her own experience, creating different narratives about the same place. The process of embodiment of urban experience is a personal process that is due to the relation of the individual with the surroundings and the process of recognition and being recognised in a specific context.

Corporeality is a concept important in this dissertation, since it allows watching a body as something personal, social, emotional, biological and psychological. Dance, like other kinds of art, is always connected to socio-political issues. Dance is part of a social reality; it is an element of reflection, of expression, that has a meaning and a message to be expressed. The bodies of the dancers and the cities are very similar. Both present a map of signs and references, which are personal, fragmented and multiple according to a specific context and to the amount of things already embodied. The cartography of the city becomes similar to the cartography of a body, collecting elements, signs, objects and phenomena to document them. Both body and city are constructors and constructions of the performativity of life. People mold themselves to the cities where they live, absorbing a lot of urban elements; but the cities also grow in accordance to the citizens' characteristic lifestyles. Bodies and cities are always inscribing themselves in each other, building a collective urban memory that is based on the body of the individuals. The city is not just a space where people move but it becomes an entity that is lived and living as well, functioning not only as a background but following the same changes as the bodies moving.

Looking back at the question created a year ago, I must assume that asking if dance could be a reflection of a socio-political agenda was an obvious point of departure. Dance is always a way of someone to be in connection with the society, it is a political praxis and a social experience. What should be asked and what I actually end up studying in this dissertation is the intentions of the choreographer, or at least their proposal, and how a message can be transmitted through body and through movement and how people can connect and create some knowledge around that kind of art.

While writing this dissertation, it became clear that choreographers are worried about the contemporary times and their own context, endeavouring to archive, to create, to register what is happening. They, hence, use art to cope with the story of our times. This necessity to create at the same time as things are happening is a characteristic of our contemporary era where the instant and the now is central to everything. The efficiency of communication is now dependent on the ability to produce information from the now and at the exact moment it happens. All issues and opinions are past due and what is relevant quickly ceases to be.

Both *Kreatur* and *Cementary* are contemporary dance pieces in which the connection between body and city, society and individual, affect and isolation are explored, following the state of current times. In these performances, dance is showcasing a vision about a reality, presenting a narrative, that allows the confrontation with theoretical concepts that end up permitting the creation of an analysis of our times, using art and its intentions to understand how people deal with urgent issues.

In Sasha Waltz's *Kreatur*, the choreography tries to show the phenomena of existence against the background of a disrupted society. The dance shows a story about humanity, exposing a side of humans more connected to the animal and the grotesque. Waltz tried to demonstrate the most innate part of humanity that, without any social restriction, emblazon the more violent and darker side of how humans create relations. The choreography exposes the limits of a body, through choreography, with movements that are very precise and with a lot of changes of dynamics. In *Kreatur*, a piece that makes use of the settings, lights and music to create a visual composition that mesmerizes the audience, Sasha Waltz manages to explore the concepts of individuality and interaction, revealing a side that everybody wants to hide from the society. This piece creates a restlessness in the subject because it puts the public in direct relation to something that they try to forget. *Kreatur* is a provocative piece that leads one to question about the limits between human and animal, how we relate to others, and how selfish one can be to ensure survival.

Patricia Aperi, on the other hand, explores the concept of the urban labyrinth and the city as places of chaos, a dystopian city that has no sky, where everybody is displaced and recovering from a traumatic experience. Human connection does not seem to exist and isolation and solitude are the normal state. The dancers represent the role of homeless, who roam the city without creating relationships, in a constant state

of anguish and insecurity. As the piece evolves, we see that there is a need for affection and rapprochement with the other, eventually lowering the barriers and the distance between the subjects. Approximation and how it affects people is explored through a very slow and drawn choreography that is evolving and gradually bringing the subjects closer, culminating with a touch on someone else's shoulder. *Cementary* is, above all, about humanity and how the spirit of trust and commitment to the other can sprout from social convulsions. Like *Kreatur*, it focuses on the world of the humans, on the space they build and occupy (the city, *par excellence*), on how they behave (how they are turned into social beings ruled by laws, customs and norms of conduct) and on the type of relationships they establish (with themselves, with the others and with their surroundings).

To conclude this dissertation, the two different approaches to dance and society studied here allow to analyse the contemporary society from different perspectives and for different purposes. Both *Kreatur* and *Cementary* were the pieces that had the biggest impact on me as audience, making me think about our times, society and the issues that humanity is going through. They were actually what triggered this dissertation, in which I reflect about the relation between dance, city, audience and reflection (both in the sense of representation and in the sense of thought). After this big process of analysis, I realised that I am ready to start studying audiences, mediation and education through arts. Academia still seems involved in an inertia of analysing the now and is still trying to find answers to problems of the past. I know that only now we are facing the results of our past actions, but the times are different and the times are racing and, for me, it still seems important to analyse the urgent questions we are dealing with daily, especially when realizing that it is too easy to forget and to let some issues die without anyone studying them in detail.

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