

Performance Art as Spiritual Practice

Gilson Motta & Tania Alice

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (*Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – UFRJ*)/
Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (*Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - UNIRIO*)

mottagilson@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The text discusses performance art as a spiritual practice, considering the interweaving of ethics, aesthetics, spirituality and politics. Based on the concept of itinerant performances and their relationship with the practices of meditation-in-motion present in Buddhist traditions, the text focuses on two projects carried out by the authors: *Audioética itinerante (Itinerant AudioEthics)*, by Gilson Motta, and *The Dance Project / Brazil*, by Tania Alice. The analysis shows that itinerant performance can affirm itself as an individual and/or collective political gesture that questions the control and the domestication of the body, proposing an experience of perspective conversion or liberation, in order to reinvent temporally the urban space. The itinerant performances seek to build the consciousness of freedom, an essential factor in the current Brazilian social and political context, which is marked by the resurgence of forms of censorship and repression.

Keywords: Meditation; Dance; Itinerant performances; Performance and Buddhism; Politics.

Walking as spiritual practice

Tsai Ming-liang's *Journey to the West* (2014) shows a monk, played by Lee Kang-sheng, who walks out of his monastery and, slowly, always looking down, walks to the city of Marseille. The movie continues the experiment, of a slow walk in the urban space, started in *Walker* (2012). *Journey to the West* is highly experimental, with shots that can provoke and distress some viewers, due to their length and static nature. What we see is only a slow and orderly character moving, in a choreography, through town, in contrast with the other passers-by, who watch in curiosity. Thus, the movie juxtaposes two experiences of temporality and urban living, which involve different temporal and spatial concepts. The monk's slow movement seems to make the space denser and broader, if compared to the other passers-by. It is an intense film experience, which subverts the aesthetic patterns we're used to and which are marked, among other things, by an accelerated temporality.

Journey to the West ends in a quote that also gives us a key to interpret the film and helps us to understand that everything in existence is conditioned by the human perspective. It doesn't only point out the fact that it's only through sight that we validate the existence of beings and objects, but also that these beings manifest themselves as a dream, a dewdrop, a cloud: things manifest themselves as illusory, fleeting and impermanent. The experience of watching the movie, therefore, is similar to a meditative practice, where we focus our attention in a particular object for a set period of time, exercising our attention. As viewers, we look at the different kinds of spatiality and temporality presented by the monk, who interrupts the urban flux, placing himself in contrast to his fellow passers-by. We see the monk as a strange body among the crowd, which waits for him to pass and watches him. In this process, we reflect upon the mainstream lifestyle of urban centers. There's a move that can happen for the viewer from contemplation to critical thinking. In other words, our perspective in watching the film seemed to walk the limits of aesthetics, spirituality, politics and ethics.

As we know, in its origin, the word *ethos* indicates a lodging. It's less about the place where one lives, as a building, and more about the fact of dwelling and how it is lived. There is, therefore, a close kinship between *oikos*, *ethos* and *polis*: while the word *astí* refers to material aspects of a city, the word *polis* indicates its character, its way of being, that is, the way in which we inhabit this common space¹. Therefore, *oikos*, *ethos* and *polis* deal with the idea of living together, sharing, connecting to something different, to what comes together and to what comes apart. In a complementary perspective, *ethos* is connected to the exercise of learning to live together, relating to others, re-evaluating and transforming our behavior. It is in this sense that Leonardo Boff, for example, states that ethics isn't ready-made:

The human being separates a part of the world so that, shaping it to their will, they can build a permanent protective shelter. Ethics, as a human harbor, isn't something readymade, built all at once. The human being is always making the home they built for themselves more inhabitable. Ethics refers to everything that helps to improve the environment so that it becomes a healthy dwelling: materially sustainable, psychologically integrated and spiritually fertile (Boff, 1997, p. 90-91).²

Now, this exercise in learning, this self-work proposed by ethics, is also what Michel Foucault calls spirituality:

We will call “spirituality” then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth (Foucault, 2005, p. 15).

The act of walking can thus be seen as a spiritual activity. According to French philosopher David Le Breton, who thinks about affect created by urban displacement, “staying in silence and walking are nowadays two forms of political resistance”³. Concerning Buddhism specifically, moving meditation - that is, the act of walking in a meditative state - was put into practice and developed by Buddha Shakyamuni himself. Nowadays there are many Buddhist Masters, from different schools of thought, who use moving meditation, such as Thich Nhat Hanh⁴ and master Gyalwang Drukpa⁵. Walking meditation is therefore seen as an “exercise”, as cultivating of oneself, as a subject’s formative activity. Slow walking imposes a return to the self, the rediscovery of a natural rhythm for breathing, a sharper perception of things, in a state of mental serenity. That is, even though it’s the most banal thing a human being can practice, walking can result in a modification of daily habits, a departure from automation, a change in body consciousness, a disruption of conditioning. Walking, as we see in *Journey to the West*, is a spiritual exercise that entices an ethical and political reflection.

If the work of filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang served as a prologue for this text, it’s due to the fact that, in our artistic practice, we attempt to bridge the gap in the dialogue between art, spirituality – particularly Tibetan Buddhism – and a reflection regarding urban space, which can’t be separated from ethics and politics. Some of our performances – as we’ll see further on – are similar to the monk’s walk in Tsai Ming-liang’s films. Thus, in this article, we will reflect upon these three areas – spiritual, ethical and political – through two performances: *Audioética itinerante (Itinerant AudioEthics)* and *Dança livre para todos (The Dance Project)*.

Audioética itinerante, created by Gilson Motta, was designed in 2013 and presented three times: in 2014, when SESC/Campinas (“Serviço Social do Comercio” – Social Activities from the Industry) invited the performance art collective *Heróis do Cotidiano (Daily Heroes)* for a presentation; in 2015, in the terrace of UFRJ’s (“Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro” – Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) Fine Arts School; and in a workshop offered to UNIRIO (“Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro” - Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro) students, in a class taught by professor and performer Tania Alice, in 2015. We’ll describe this proposal in further detail later on.

The Dance Project/Brazil, created by Tania Alice, consists of meditative movements performed in urban spaces, affecting and being affected by the environment. This performance was shown in various locations: in the Dominican Republic’s Festival Internacional de Arte Acción “Paraíso e Deslocamento” in 2013, in Rio de Janeiro’s Festival 100 em 1 in 2013, in Curitiba at Bicletaria Cultural in partnership with Diego Baffi in 2014 curated by Fernando Ribeiro, in Brussels during a

workshop at Université Libre de Brussels' graduate school also in 2014, at SESC Campinas and Escola SESC in 2015, and in Festival de Teatro de Fortaleza in 2016. For three hours, participants explore the principles of moving meditation inside a room, before physically choosing and marking down with tape a space for moving meditation in an urban space, where they collectively perform a two-hour dance to the sound of a playlist previously curated for the occasion. In this performance, dance isn't understood as something that's done, but as something that is, leading to a different perception of the use of urban spaces, letting one's body flow in this context.

In short, this present paper will deal with meditation and performance through these two experiences.

Towards an aesthetic of walking

The process which led us to itinerant performances began with the work of the performance art collective *Heróis do Cotidiano*⁶, directed by Gilson Motta and Tania Alice. The project consisted of performing urban interventions to discuss contemporary heroism. This discussion was presented in the following way: if, traditionally, the hero acts in order to protect the order from the threat of chaos, nowadays, the fact that the forces of order – laws, State, police, political institutions – promote disorder leads to the inversion of the hero's role, who becomes the generator of a temporary state of chaos, in order to give visibility to forms of social exclusion and inequality. One of the strategies for it was the intervention in functionalized urban spaces, in order to reterritorialize and potentialize affects and fluxes. Such performances inserted themselves into what we called poetic activism: the reconciliation of artistic action with social and political perspectives through questioning the use of the urban space, the values and conditionings in force, in order to create new sociabilities and to propose alternative forms of action and reaction to social devices. In this process, the collective started to conceive performances based on trajectories through the city, such as a meditative walk open to the public, done in 2015 in partnership with collective Bando Filhotes de Leão (Lion Cubs Band) and collective Movimento Cidades Invisíveis (Invisible Cities Movement), consisting of crossing the town from Zona Sul (South Zone) to Zona Norte (North Zone) in silence.

This and other projects awakened in us the interest in studying walking as an artistic-performative act. As we know, this kind of artistic project is part of a lineage that, in the European context, is connected to the Baudelairean figure of the *flâneur*, gaining artistic sureness with the work of Dadaists and Surrealists, through situationists and land artists, until it reaches artists such as Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, Francis Alys, Tehching Hsieh, Gabriel Orozco, Stalker Collective, Paulo Bruscky and others. It's worth noting that this act of walking involves a resignifying of the city itself. Thus, walking can be seen as an anti-art action, in the context of the Dadaists' banal city. The surrealists' roaming is presented as a way of revealing a dream city. In the context of land art, the action of walking becomes a way of intervening in nature. Therefore, itinerant performances have their own place in art history, becoming an object of investigation for many researchers because they present aesthetic, social, political and philosophical developments.

In general, the aesthetic of walking questions relationships between body and city: walking is shown as an individual and/or collective political gesture, questioning bodies' control/discipline and domestication; as a form of individual expiatory pilgrimage, adding religious symbols and values; as an element of resistance, empowerment and decolonization; as a way of creating new identities and sociabilities; as a way of generating tension between public and private spheres, between the social body and individual bodies. These various strands were explored in classes offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels at UNIRIO and UFRJ, such as "Contemporary Art and Mobility", taught by Tania Alice, and "Aesthetics applied to theater" and "Scene and performance", taught by Prof. Gilson Motta. In fact, the reaches and developments of this kind of artistic production are countless. However, besides the specifically artistic-social-political sense present in itinerant performances, there was another element that started to interest us in a more pointed way, namely the fact that walking is connected to a spiritual practice, that is, moving meditation.

Moving meditation is a spiritual practice found in Eastern spiritualist traditions, such as Buddhism. However, before delving deeper into this practice, it's important to remember that, even in Western thought, walking is often associated with a mental or spiritual activity – more precisely, the act of walking is seen as a poetical-philosophical activity. Frédéric Gros, Merlin Coverley, Thierry Davila, Francesco Careri and Rebecca Solnit have written works analyzing this correlation. In *A Philosophy of Walking*, Frédéric Gros shows how the act of walking is a creative dimension, related to ethical values, different means of time and space perceptions and certain qualities and virtues.

These readings were an inspiration to create performances involving walking. In 2012, Gilson Motta created in UFRJ's Fine Arts School the Laboratório Objetos Performáticos de Teatro de Animação⁷ (Performative Objects Animation Theater Laboratory). In the first step of research, the Laboratory worked a series of urban interventions based in the figure of Ananse⁸. The performance consisted in walking slowly through Rio Branco Avenue, in the city center of Rio de Janeiro, in order to create a space of contrast with the rhythm of passers-by. The intention was to show the time of old age, in order to create a discussion regarding the condition of old people in our society. However, another layer was added to the issue of old age: that of racial issues, considering we were dealing with an African character. Therefore, the performance had a more radical social and political aspect, because old people are excluded due to a series of factors, but black people feel their exclusion much more deeply due to various historical and social reasons. This discussion about growing old, in particular, led to a partnership with performer Marcelo Asth, who is currently researching performance in old age for his PhD, under the guidance of Professor Tania Alice⁹.

The performance piece *Audioética itinerante* happened during the same period, but its program didn't initially involve social and political discussions. The performance was only focused on creating a performative action that proposed a constant meditative state involving movement, associated to a theme strictly linked to the context of Tibetan Buddhism and heroism.

Moving meditation: *Audioética itinerante* and *Dança livre para todos*

Audioética itinerante is a moving meditation performed in public spaces by participants/passersby. Based in the concept of the Six Perfections, the performance has the goal of developing virtues of ethical skills which are, in the context of Tibetan Buddhism, called “Perfections”, that is, generosity, ethical discipline, patience, enthusiastic effort, concentration and wisdom¹⁰. The performance is conducted as follows: the proponent offers the participants the possibility of developing one of those virtues. Presented with five folders, each one in a color corresponding to each of the virtues (green, red, blue, yellow and white), and each one containing an MP3 player, earbuds, a cape and a mask, the participant chooses one of the virtues. If they choose Concentration, for example, they will be wearing a white cape and mask. The participant wears the outfit and puts on the earbuds connected to the MP3 player. Then, for 15 to 20 minutes, they will listen to a narrative related to the virtue they chose. When listening to the narrative, they must perform the actions proposed by the narrator. In this manner, for the duration of the story, the participant will move through city streets, creating plastic and dramatic situations through inter-relating with other spectators/participants. After the recording ends, the participants return to where the proponent is waiting, in order to share their experience. This “sharing” – that is, reporting one’s experience – constitutes what is considered the “perfection of Wisdom”, because it implies reflecting upon the act. This statement is recorded/filmed by the proponent.

Figure 1: *Itinerants AudioEthics*. Photograph by Gilson Motta.



In the foreground, the performer Maria Luisa Marques, in the background the local service employee. Venue: Terrace of School of Fine Arts of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).

To better understand the proposal, we will describe in further detail the recorded narrative and the actions that the participant must execute during the course of the performance. All five recordings have a common base, from which they start approaching each specific Perfection.

Audioética itinerante starts with David Bowie's song "Heroes". After a brief presentation by the proponent, the narrator says:

You have received a cape and a mask and are dressed like a super-hero. Super-heroes from comics and movies have exceptional strength and can fly and run extremely fast to fight criminals and save the world. You might not have these powers, but you can certainly do much more interesting and powerful things. Don't believe me? Well, I'll talk to you for 15 minutes to help you discover these powers and the hero within you. Let's go! Wait! For now, stand still. That's it! To begin, I'll ask you to speak the salutation that the Coletivo Heróis do Cotidiano usually does before each performative action. The salutation goes as follows: "Against the insane world, Daily Heroes!".

The narrator asks the listener/performer to perform a series of gestures and movements that match the salutation. Afterwards, the listener/performer is present to their mission: they have to be, for example, a Hero of Generosity (or Concentration, or any of the other virtues). We'll use the Perfection of Generosity as an example. The first step of the mission is a "still contemplation", constituted by decreasing speed in walking, until the listener/performer is still. When they are still, the performer must contemplate things around them for three minutes.

Then a moving meditation begins. Based on a few principles of Buddhist psychology, such as considering desire, attachment and aversion as the motors of human action, the performer is encouraged to find an object that attracts them:

Observe everything that brings you pleasure, whether it's a tree, a stone, a building, a monument, a landscape, an object or a person. Walk towards what attracts you. If it's something unattainable or inaccessible, that's ok. Just stop in front of the object of your attraction. Stay there, watching this element.

From this point of attraction, the performer must physically show their affection for the object:

You only have to stop in front of an object and make a movement that shows you're donating all your attention and generosity to it, offering your body, your time, your senses to what attracts you. Imagine you're donating maximum happiness to what attracts you.

This first Generosity exercise becomes more complex when the performer is encouraged to interact with other people:

Now, your mission is to find a person and donate to her what you think is more important for her. You can donate your time, your attention, your smile, your look, your affection, objects you carry with you, a word, your

happiness, and much more. Find at least two people and donate yourself entirely to them!

This structure is repeated in each Perfection: a still meditation, a moving meditation, an action involving interaction with other people. It's worth mentioning that, in many Perfections, in order to reach the development of a certain virtue, it's necessary to explore its opposite. In the case of "ethical discipline", for example, the performer is encouraged to relate to an object that offends them and physically show their aversion to it, that is, exploring indiscipline. In the case of Patience, the performer is encouraged to let rage bloom and to observe how their mind and body react to this feeling. And so on. Regarding the final step of the performance, what's expected is that the performer awakens in themselves and in others that virtue, or, even better, that they realize they need action and others to hatch the virtue to which they aspire. The performance's final narrative is common to all, preceding the conversation between performer and proponent:

Dear friend, through the art of performance, we try to reach this state of complete giving of ourselves to others. We try to be fully present in a here and now that's always escaping us. We try to transcend our limits. I hope you have felt some of those feelings and that this performative action was as good for you to do as it was for me to create. Thank you very much for participating! Now, go back to where you found me, return this device to me and tell me your story.

This performance was created in the context in which the collective developed meditative practices, both as a form of performer preparation and as a performative action, as we did (still) meditation in public spaces and some movement meditation as well. It's worth noting that, different from other thought systems, Buddhism – both Mahayana and Vajrayana – involves a constant attention; in other words, conceptual and theoretical study isn't enough to transform mind and behavior: to fully grasp a concept, it must be experienced, felt, reflected upon, questioned. Considering this fact, *Audioética itinerante* was created in order to directly integrate a Buddhist concept to an artistic practice. However, to our surprise, there was a strict correlation between Perfections and the idea of heroism.

In the context of Buddhism, the Six Perfections are, in a way, connected to an idea of heroism (thus the fact that participants received masks and capes to perform the action). More precisely, in the context of Tibetan Buddhism, the concept of "Bodhisattva" indicates a being who has decided to bring all beings to enlightenment and is practising the Bodhisattva Path." (Patrul, 1998, p. 406). The path of a Bodhisattva indicates a constant process of spiritual development of a value that constitutes the touchstone of Buddhism: Compassion. The development of compassion involves a long process in which, through meditation and charity practice, positive mind qualities are awakened, ignorance and selfish habits and patterns are decreased or eliminated and we turn entirely to helping others – with no distinction or discrimination – through speech, thought and actions, in order to conduct everyone to freedom from Samsara, and illumination. According to Chadgud Rinpoche:

Such compassion - the desire to alleviate the suffering of all beings equally—is part of the meaning of the Sanskrit term "bodhisattva". *Bodhi*

refers to wisdom mind, which is completely selfless. *Sattva* can be translated as “hero”. A bodhisattva is someone who has taken on the sole task of meeting the needs of others, no matter how difficult that might be. His self-centredness has been reduced to the point where wisdom, love, and compassion arise naturally, benefiting any situation. Motivated only by concern for others, he would offer his own life without regret if he saw that it would be of help. So the mind of the Bodhisattva is heroic, vast, and of limitless benefit (Drolma, 2003:5).

In this way, the performance proposes actions that can directly benefit others, as well as eliminating harmful feelings and thought patterns. The play with heroism happens in the process through which the participant/performer overcomes some personal limits and starts devoting themselves to others, benefitting them. What we consider important here is precisely to show a little of that moment of sharing, because, through performers’ statements, we can grasp how each one experienced the performance.

The same Buddhist philosophy is found in *The Dance Project/ Brazil*. In this performance piece, dance is based in free movements explored during a workshop when investigating actions such as “sliding”, “jumping”, “twirling”, “articulating”, “changing plans”, among others, in a set of exercises that aim for presence and attention organized towards inside (body) and outside (city) spaces, with no standardization or normalization, encouraging an exploration of authentic physical movements. In the performance, the therapeutic virtues of these calls to dance were observed, virtues given by the body’s natural self-regulation, because, when it’s freed from forceful and regulating movement patterns, it gains an autonomy that brings self-presence. The body, in free dance, finds its own regulating mechanisms, releasing excessive energy and accumulated tensions. Gabrielle Roth, when conceiving her *5Rhythms* practice, helps us understand what happens in this process. We don’t learn a set of accumulated movements previously conceived for dance, but the different movements of life, until the dance that happens in the moment of one’s death – in other words, the dancers learn to dance impermanence. Dance is then constituted as a moving meditation, according to the practice of the *5Rhythms*. According to Gabrielle Roth:

When we practice *5Rhythms*, we learn to creatively express aggressiveness and vulnerability, emotions and anxieties, edges and ecstasies. It reconnects us to cycles of birth & death and hooks us into humanity and the spirit of all living things. Within the group context we create connection and community and hone our instincts and our intuitions. We are made up of all walks of life – every culture, religion, race, gender, age and sexual preference are welcome. *5Rhythms* transcends dance. The movement is the medicine, the meditation and the metaphor. Together we peel back layers, lay masks down, and dance till we disappear...Only to rediscover ourselves through it all¹¹.

In this sense, the performance puts, as the greater horizon for the performative practice, the establishment of a bitransitive relationship of presence – performer and participant – establishing in this practice a connection, a bridge between the

participants' internal ecology and an external ecology (interference in urban spaces), in the construction of a world ruled by other values than sad affections promulgated by power structures who attempt to frame and standardize subjectivities. According to philosopher Pierre Ansay in the essay *Spinoza peut nous sauver la vie*:

Spinoza's potential is the force inside us, the force of affirmation, of joy, of power, of bond, of investment, of improvisation capacity. We aren't professionals of lack, but creators of something different (Ansay, 2011, p. 33-34).

In a Buddhist perspective, it's about recreating life in its potential at every instant.

In order to reach that reaction, the performers put themselves in a state of vulnerability, generating an internal availability from which the regulation of the autonomous nervous system can be built. In the practice, it's also observed that the experienced body is a body in relation, in a state of perpetual becoming, experiencing its unpredictability, its state of improvisation, producing new relations in the artistic field, integrating internal and external, body and mind, internal and external ecology, therefore referring to the Buddhist philosophical notion of co-emergence, which considers that the emergence of objects and happenings is inseparable from a mental position. By the practice of those actions, the workshop participants and the passersby who spontaneously interact with the performance, letting themselves be contaminated by the proposed practice and by the energy created by it, design together a meditative poetic experience, generating thought and existence structures for the expansion of freedom, beyond social conditioning, answering in an empirical fashion to the question posed by *5Rhythms* and by dance in general: "Do you have the discipline to be a free spirit?"

Figure 2: *The Dance Project*. Photograph by Igor Keller.



Performance *The Dance Project*, by Tania Alice. In the image: Tania Alice and students of Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO) in the “100 em 1” Festival, in Rio de Janeiro.

Walking as political praxis: perspective conversion, reinvention of coexistence and freedom

Walking and creating have always been related. Besides, the act of reporting the experience of displacement has always incited the poetic imagination of human beings: the displacement is originally a propellant of poetic creation. A narrator/storyteller describes things that happened elsewhere – in other spaces and other times – and, with this, incites the imagination of listeners-spectators, which is imaginatively displaced to other spaces. Displacement is a fundamentally aesthetic experience, whether it's concrete, made with the body, or imaginary: the essential consisting in the act of going to another place. The action of walking is a creative activity; however, we forget this obvious fact. Besides, because we live in an urban space determined by forces of globalized capitalism, which functionalizes bodies, time

and spaces, we tend to forget the creative potential of walking, limiting ourselves to a kind of functionalization of walking, involving discipline and a stiffening of body and perception.

The performative proposals in question, *Audioética itinerante* and *The Dance Project/ Brazil*, always promote, at the end, a brief report of the experience by participants/performers. Every statement is an object of interest for various reasons. On one hand, they create these reports of displacements; on the other, we know that both meditation and dance involve a physical activity that can't be permeated by discursive thought. Besides, we consider it important to know how the performance proposal was received by them and how it modified or didn't modify their way of seeing and inhabiting the world.

Even though there are radical differences in the reports, determined, for example, by the fact that some participants are visual artists, or other physical artists, and others not artists at all, we notice there is an interesting common factor: the disruption of a habitual state of perception and the entry into a kind of fictional time-space, which is associated with a space of freedom and broadening of creative potential. If, on one hand, we can consider that the artistic experience always establishes such a space, both in recipients and in producers, on the other hand, there's a particularity to this process: in *Audioética itinerante*, the performer/participant has to listen to the narrative, entering a game of obedience, and, at the same time, to execute a series of actions of a contemplative order. In other words, many of the statements mention the difficulty of entering the game and then the meditative practice. The greatest challenge isn't playing, entering the time-space of the poetic creation game, but entering the field of contemplation. When this challenge is surpassed, they seem to experience a space of full freedom. In this way, expressions such as those which follow appear often in statements, whether they are from *Audioética* or from *The Dance Project/ Brazil*: "You disconnect from everyone", "it was therapeutic", "I only lived that moment", "I was totally immersed in it", "I disconnected from things around me", "I changed my way of looking at things" were some of the recorded statements. In the free dance performance, it's suggested that performers describe their internal experience at the end of the practice with a feeling: "free", "relaxed", "happy" and "connected" were the most often evoked words in this context.

Among the ideas expressed in these statements, we will focus on that of "feeling free" and "changing the way we look at things". These ideas will be considered as interdependent factors. In *Marcher, créer*, Thierry Davila describes the effect of *estrangement*¹² caused by the act of walking itself. The author states that often the act of walking leads us to displace the usual reality into zones of uncertainty and strangeness, which make the reality be reborn in a different way, putting ourselves in front of another city, another scenery, in a landscape we thought we knew. Therefore, it's all about a conversion of perspective, a sharpening of the senses and an escalation of perceptive capacities, which make us rediscover the world as if it was shown for the first time. Thierry Davila calls this operation *dépaysement*. This word has no easy translation but shows great semantic depth, indicating what we feel when we're out of our country - expatriation, displacement, uprooting, disorientation. Walking-dancing-

meditating promotes a mutation in the space and a transformation of perspective, launching the body into a state of extra-normalcy, a state of potential.

One of the participant statements describes exactly that experience. The actor Hugo Kerth tells us that, at a certain point in *Audioética itinerante*, he was asked to choose a fixed point to stare at and create an affective relationship. The author chose precisely the Sugarloaf Mountain. Because it's one of Rio de Janeiro's landmarks and a place that activates many memories and affections, he found it hard to create a new relationship to the spot. However, he states that, with contemplation, he observed that:

[Sugarloaf] is just a rock... And we see it with so many languages! And observing around I noticed that there are other rocks as beautiful as this one. Then I started to equate it all: they are just rocks! And then, when [contemplation] ends, things go back to having the same meaning as before, they return to their language and paraphernalia. But it's different, of course, since it's a distant perspective, but everything makes sense again. While I looked too deeply, it was whatever, a rock like any other, even if it had cables and everything. But, when it was over, everything went back to making sense, that is, the language that everyone establishes¹³.

We thought it was an interesting statement, because it shows precisely the experience of displacing a well-known reality into a zone of strangeness. It's as if the Sugarloaf, full of language and meanings, was emptied, becoming nothing or "uprooted". And then it became again.

Returning now, more directly, to the connection between ethics, aesthetics, spirituality and politics, we can say that that experience of perspective conversion/liberation temporarily reinvents the urban space, creating heterotopias. For Thierry Davila, itinerant performances don't operate through refusal or destruction, such as done by Modernism, on the contrary, they create strategies of insertion in the city and its territories; they create a set of devices fit to make sure the walker's activity happens. It's a question of carving out territory given through singular displacements, physically modest and visually striking, creating fractures in the midst of a given order, to produce a change in perspective. In other words, the itinerant performances work with and against context, affirming themselves as interstitial art that occupies intervals, minuscule urban spaces, that activate spaces as invention territories. For Davila, these operations are similar to Hakim Bey's TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zones), which create a guerrilla zone, but dissolve before the State can appropriate them. In the same way, itinerant performances recapture the space through plastic agency and show themselves as actors of a molecular game which displaces and defeats control zones – just as TAZ do – to input, in the megalopolis's interstice, an autonomous rhythm which is, until a certain point and for a certain time, uncoordinated. As we know, heterotopias are a space of rupture, a space which invents its own time, in a duration that follows its function as a counter-place. By installing their own time, heterotopias also present themselves as heterochronies, that is, space-time zones in which beings move or inhabit a rupture with traditional or mainstream time. These territories (autonomous zones), in the measure in which

they're the example of another space and another time in the inside of a city, are the possible expression of a city with no coordinates. Well, this is the operation that *Heróis do Cotidiano* have promoted since their origin and also the operation we see in *The Dance Project*, for example. The whole time, it's about promoting perspective conversions, which are also processes of reinventing ways of inhabiting the world and living together.

The perspective conversion frees us, that is, it frees us from a series of mental patterns, judgements and previous analysis of things, frees us from our usual emotions, frees us from what is known. In exchange, it grasps the world as pure opening, as pure being possibilities, integrating the inherent risk in moving in cities such as Rio de Janeiro. As stated by Lama Padma Samten¹⁴ it's a form of freedom generated by experience.

When producing things, I see that, independent from the final content of what I produce, there is a constructive, luminous, dimension, which I put somewhere to see it better later. It already belongs to a nature that we'll never abandon, it's incessant. We begin to discover what's incessant; then, in the midst of the multiplicity of objects that rise and decline, there's an incessant action which is that luminosity. Along with that luminosity, there's an incessant action which is the natural freedom we have in front of things, which I can, with luminosity, build in a way of another, but I can only build it one way or the other, because there's a freedom^{15, 16}.

It's this consciousness that performances try to build: the consciousness of freedom, even inside more tumultuous contexts, coopted by power logics. In the current context of generalized mental confusion in a post-coup context¹⁷ which tries to settle an ideology connected to economic domination and restraints of individual liberties through various means, we can see the censorship of performances which point to the freedom of the body, such as the one recently performed at the São Paulo Modern Art Museum (MAM) by Wagner Schwarz, putting in scene a naked desexualized body, only delivered and available for manipulation and displacement. The performance, as many other works of art in the current context, was followed by numerous policies emerging from protests of pseudo-moralist reactionary and fascist groups, transmuted into art critics and defenders of the traditional Brazilian family's "good" mores, based on traditional values of family, homeland and property. Faced with this fact, searching for freedom through moving meditation in artistic actions, workshops and personal experiences seems like a small drop in an ocean. Let's then echo for the final reflection a Confucius quote, which takes particular meaning in the current post-coup context, reminding us of a Spinozan position: *"Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."*

Notes

1. Cf. Matos, Olgária C. F. Ethos e amizade: a morada do homem. Available at: <http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/pdf/ide/v31n46/v31n46a13.pdf>. [Accessed 20 November 2017].
2. “O ser humano separa uma parte do mundo para, moldando-a ao seu jeito, construir um abrigo protector e permanente. A ética, como morada humana, não é algo pronto e construído de uma só vez. O ser humano está sempre tornando habitável a casa que construiu para si. Ético significa, portanto, tudo aquilo que ajuda a tornar melhor o ambiente para que seja uma moradia saudável: materialmente sustentável, psicologicamente integrada e espiritualmente fecunda.” (Boff, 1997, p. 90-91)
3. Cf. David Le Breton interview with Grupo Joly, available at <https://desenhares.wordpress.com/2017/10/21/ficar-em-silencio-e-caminhar-sao-hoje-em-dia-duas-formas-de-resistencia-politica/?platform=hootsuite>. [Accessed 21 October 2017].
4. Cf. Hanh, Thich Nhat (1985), *A Guide to Walking Meditation*. Nyack, New York: Fellowship Books.
Hanh, Thich Nhat (2000), *Meditação andando: guia para a paz interior*. Petrópolis: Vozes. See also: Hanh, Thich Nhat (2014) *Felicidade: práticas essenciais para a consciência plena*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
5. Cf. Drukpa, Gyalwang XII (2011). *Iluminação diária: o caminho para a felicidade no mundo moderno*. São Paulo: Pensamento. Drukpa, Gyalwang (2012) *Everyday Enlightenment: Walking the Path to Happiness in the Modern World*. London: Michael Joseph.
6. Heróis do Cotidiano acted from 2009 to 2015, with core performers Jarbas Albuquerque, Lara Siqueira, Marcelo Asth, Marcio Vitto and Rorigo Abreu. The collective then became the platform Performers Sem Fronteiras (Performers Without Borders), which creates participatory projects in conflict and trauma zones.
7. Cf. www.objetosperformaticos.com.br
8. Ananse is an important character of the Axanti culture, from the area now known as Gana.
9. See: <http://projetoperformancia.blogspot.com.br/>
10. Regarding this theme, see, for example: Rinchen, Geshe Sonan, *The Six Perfections*, Ithaca NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1998.
11. Cf. <http://www.5rhythms.com/gabrielle-roths-5rhythms/> [Accessed 17 October 2017].

12. The word “estrangement” is a neologism created by Thierry Davila.

13. This statement was given by actor Hugo Kerth, on the occasion of the performance in 2015.

14. Lama Padma Samten, formerly Alfredo Aveline, a physics professor at the Federal University in Porto Alegre, invited H.E. Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche to teach in Rio Grande do Sul and facilitated Rinpoche’s purchase of the Khadro Ling land in 1994. His organization, Centro de Estudos Budistas Bodisatva (CEBB), which he founded in 1986, organized Rinpoche’s early teachings in Southern Brazil. Lama Samten received training from teachers of various Buddhist traditions including Zen, and traveled to Asia on several occasions. Recognizing his qualities as a meditator, Chagdud Rinpoche ordained him as Lama Padma Samten at Khadro Ling in December, 1996.

15. Part of a Lecture given by Lama Padma Samten at a retreat in Rio de Janeiro in November 2010. Available at: <http://www.cebb.org.br/coemergencia/>. [Accessed 12 October 2017].

16. “Ao produzir coisas, vejo que, independente do conteúdo final do que eu produzo, existe uma dimensão construtora, luminosa, que eu coloco em algum lugar para olhar melhor depois. Ela já pertence a uma natureza que nós não vamos nunca abandonar, ela é incessante. Nós começamos a descobrir aquilo que é incessante; então, no meio da multiplicidade de objetos que sobem e descem, das paisagens que sobem e descem, existe uma ação incessante que é essa luminosidade. Junto com essa luminosidade, existe uma ação incessante que é a liberdade natural que temos diante das coisas, que eu posso, com a luminosidade, construir de um jeito ou de outro, mas eu só posso construir de um jeito ou de outro, porque tem uma liberdade”.

17. The deposition of President Dilma Rousseff, in 2016, has been characterized by various sectors of society as a State coup. The overtaking of power by then vice-president, Michel Temer, is then seen as a “post-coup” period, which has been marked, among other things, by repression of freedom of expression. More information can be found in the article published by Gilson Motta and Tania Alice in collaboration with the Belgian researcher Karel Vanhaesbrouk in:

<https://blogs.mediapart.fr/taniaalice/blog/301117/temps-obscurs-au-bresil-le-retour-de-la-censure>

Bibliography

- Ardenne, Paul (2002) *Un art contextuel*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Ansey, Pierre (2011) *Spinoza peut nous sauver la vie*. Charleroi: ASBL.
- Benjamin, Walter (2000) Paris do Segundo Império. In: Charles Baudelaire: um lírico no auge do capitalismo. *Obras escolhidas III*. São Paulo: Brasiliense.
- Bey, Hakim (2001) *Zona Autônoma Temporária*. São Paulo: Editora Conrad.
- Berenstein, Paola Jacques (2003) *Apologia da deriva. Escritos situacionistas sobre a cidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra.
- Boff, Leonardo (1997) *A Águia e a Galinha – uma metáfora da condição humana*, Petrópolis, Editora Vozes.
- Careri, Francesco (2013) *Walkscapes: O caminhar como prática estética*. São Paulo, Editora G. Guilli (*Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*, Ames IA: Culicidae Architectural Press, 2017).
- Coverley, Merlin (2014) *A arte de caminhar. O escritor como caminhante*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes (*The Art of Wandering: The Writer as Walker*, London: Oldcastle Books, 2012).
- Davila, Thierry (2002) *Marcher, créer. Déplacements, flâneries, dérives dans l'art de la fin du XXe siècle*. Paris: Éditions du Regard.
- Drolma, Lama Shenpen (2003) *Change of Heart: The Bodhisattva Peace Training of Chagdud Tulku*, Junction City, CA: Padma Publishing.
- Drolma, Lama Shenpen (2011) *Para abrir o coração: treinamento para a paz de Chagdud Rinpoche*. Três Coroas: Makara.
- Foucault, Michel (2004) *A hermenêutica do sujeito*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. London: Picador, 2005).
- Gros, Frédéric (2010) *Caminhar, uma filosofia*. São Paulo: É Realizações Editora (*A Philosophy of Walking*, London: Verso, 2015).
- Guattari, Félix (1990) *As três ecologias*. Campinas: Papirus (*The Three Ecologies*, London: Continuum, 2008).
- Hanh, Thich Nhat (2014) *Felicidade: Práticas essenciais para uma consciência plena*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes.
- Lemoine, Stéphanie et Ouardi, Samira (2010) *Artivisme: Art, action politique et résistance culturelle*. Paris: Éditions Alternatives.
- Patrul, Rinpoche (1998) *The Words of my Perfect Teacher* (Trans. Padmakara Translation Group, 2nd Ed.), Boston: Shambhala.

- Patrul, Rinpoche (2008) *As palavras do meu professor perfeito: um guia para as preliminares da essência do coração vasto da grande perfeição*. Porto Alegre: Makara.
- Quilici, Cassiano (2014) "O campo expandido: Arte como ato filosófico", *Revista Sala Preta*, PPGAC-USP. São Paulo: USP, n. 14, Vol. 2, 2014.
- Rinchen, Geshe Sonan (2009) *As seis perfeições: como atingir o bem-estar supremo*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.
- Roth, Gabrielle (2005) *Os ritmos da alma: o movimento como prática espiritual*. São Paulo: Cultrix (*Sweat Your Prayers: Movement as Spiritual Practice*, New York: Putnam, 1998).
- Santem, Lama Padma. Coemergência. Available at: <http://www.cebb.org.br/coemergencia/>. [Accessed 12 November 2017]
- Solnit, Rebecca (2016) *A história do caminhar*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes (*Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, London: Verso, 2001)
- Visconti, Jacopo Crivelli (2014) *Novas derivas*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.