

# Beyond the Playboy and the Hero: The (Re)constructions of Roberto Carlos's work in "The Songs You Danced for Me"

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The aim is to examine how the musical work of Roberto Carlos was mobilized in the danceshow "The songs you danced for me". The contact between the songs and the contemporary dance defined different meanings. The results indicate that such contact reaffirms romantic love and the heroism of the protagonist, but also opens possibilities for relationships that escape from the heteronormative romantic ideal.

*Keywords:* Roberto Carlos, *The songs you danced for me*, contemporary dance, Brazilian music, Brazilian dance, Jovem Guarda

## Introduction

The danceshow "The songs you danced for me", directed and choreographed by Alex Neoral, became one of the biggest successes of Focus Cia. De Dança, one of the most active dance companies in Brazil and acclaimed by specialized critics and the audience. In the show, four couples dance to 72 songs performed by the singer and composer Roberto Carlos. The show revisits the artist's hits, such as "Detalhes", "Outravez", "Desabafo", "Cama e mesa", "O calhambeque" and others hits released from the 1960s to the 1990s. Roberto Carlos's songs have been admired by several generations and combined feelings when dealing with themes related to love and relationships. The romanticism of such songs carries messages that have importance to the lives of countless people, who directly identify with the lyrics and melodies of the songs. Neoral's proposal was to explore the plurality of feelings brought by music with dance (Focus Cia de Dança, n.d.).

The aim of the article is to examine how Roberto Carlos's musical work was mobilized in the structuring of the dance show "The songs you danced for me" in terms of continuities and ruptures between the messages of the lyrics of the songs and the dance. The central argument points out that, among the multiple possibilities created by the contact between the songs performed by Roberto Carlos and the contemporary dance movements choreographed by Alex Neoral, varied meanings for the songs were defined, which can not only reaffirm, reproduce and enhance elements such as the romantic love and heroism of the protagonist in Roberto Carlos's work and already disseminated in Brazilian popular culture, but also open possibilities of interpretation for the construction of human relationships that escape from the heteronormative romantic ideal, such as the recognition of betrayal as a common aspect in love relationships and the conception of other forms of love, such as homosexual love.

### **Music, Dance and the Body in Mass Culture**

A song is composed of verbal and musical languages, which act simultaneously in the production of meanings. While the verses of a song—the verbal language—can express feelings, objects of the natural world and their symbolisms, actions and social facts that assume specific meanings, the sound of the song—the musical language—produces in the listener bodily, sentimental and intellectual effects. The emotional tone of the melody can reinforce or even subvert meanings expressed in verbal language and define the identity of the song itself in a certain genre, directing the meanings of the symbolic elements (Anaz, 2014). The verbal and musical elements mobilize physical and bodily sensations, so that the rhythm promotes the association between music and body and induces dance (Baugh, 1994).

Some songs become hits by stimulating such sensations in the audience, and mass idols emerge from a complex range of strategies around their image and talent, as well as from production and consumption, which make the singer give shape to the symbolic product from all the available apparatus, including the technological one. The articulation between voice and image around the song is consolidated by television, which, as a technical and artistic medium, offered the singer, in mass culture, the conditions for the promotion of this articulation, impregnated not only with the rationality of the media, but also the audience's wishes and desires (Zan, 2013).

When the association between the music and the body induces dance, the body moves, understands its presence and perceives the world through the senses. It promotes an exchange with the surrounding world in psychic, material and cultural terms, which can lead to endless creations. When feeling the presence of the voice in music, the body listens to the sound that vibrates in the dance from the body movement, as a presence interpreted by the action. Thus, performance is projected internally and externally as a physical and symbolic expression, in which gesture and words are associated in a game that can be marked by complementarities and conflicts (Fernandes, 2001). The representation of the lyrics of a song in an act such as dance demonstrates this event based on human experience, which is a global sign—in the light of its knowledge through cultures that interpenetrate and fit into the complexity of its relations with the words— and also a singular one, as a particular expression of the feelings of those who move (Zumthor, 2001).

The body can be more than a support for the communication of the lyrics of a song. It can also be an interpreter, an entity that uses itself to present useful actions to questions of aesthetics. Bodily physicality gives a sense to the world and finds in the lyrics of the song an understanding of reality. Although the sound of the word and the image of the body are rationally separated, the relations between them are intricate and multiple. The performance of the body in the interpretation of the lyrics by its own language, with gestures and expressions, determines heterogeneous connections between signs and their objects (Deleuze & Guattari, 1995).

Contemporary dance does not necessarily bring a "flashback" or repetition movement. However, it represents the uncertainties and indecisions. In this context, the body of a dancer and the voice of the interpreter of a song are undefined. When they are combined, they can define diverse meanings of the text in the lyrics of a song and the context to aestheticize them. In this sense, the body and oral code systems are configured as a continuous work between the body and the voice in the light of uncertainties to lead to multiple aesthetic productions (Fernandes, 2001; Lyotard, 1983).

### The Construction of Romantic Love in the Work of Roberto Carlos

In Brazil, popular pop-rock songs started to be composed in the mid-1950s (Anaz, 2014). The development of a "youth culture" was stimulated by the developmentalist proposal of the Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek's government, which allowed an expressive growth of urban middle classes. In the music industry, critics pointed out that Brazil imported styles that emerged as a result of a North-Atlantic social structure, which was not exactly compatible with the Brazilian one (Abramo, 1994; Dantas, 2015; Ramos, 2009).

In 1965, Record TV launched the show "JovemGuarda" ("Young Guard"), aimed at the youth audience based on the ideas and production by a team of specialists in advertising and marketing. The TV show, created out of a large advertising venture, aimed not only to broadcast popular music to young people by the presentation of their idols, but simultaneously to advertise products and services associated with the young lifestyle. It contributed to the definition of new consumption habits, while the military regime implemented national development policies based on conservative methods, which crystallized "good customs" and "family values" (Zan, 2013).

The presenters of such a program were the singers Wanderléa, Erasmo Carlos and Roberto Carlos. The latter quickly became a youth idol not only for the success achieved by his previous albums, but his good looks, which, according to the program's producers, could contribute to win over the young audience and raise its popularity (Martins, 1966). The program went beyond the limits of television and became a movement marked by the consumption of products linked to such idols. It was, at the same time, widely criticized by nationalist groups—who understood JovemGuarda as a mere reproduction of a foreign style, especially the Brazilian versions of international hits—and a large part of the artistic class for introducing electronic instruments, having an excessively simple song structure and maintaining its reference in foreign music (Paixão, 2013). For the first time in Brazil, young people also became mass consumers distinct from the "adult" audience, defined their consumption preferences and established new customs (Dantas, 2015; Hobsbawm, 1995; Tinhorão, 1998; Zan, 2013).

Although the themes, profiles and sounds of American rock predominated, elements more strongly linked to Brazilian culture, such as soccer, for example, became part of the imagery built by the songs of Jovem Guarda. In this regard, the first compositions by Roberto Carlos and Erasmo Carlos can be allocated, such as "Pareina Contração" (1963) and "É Proibido Fumar" (1964) (Anaz, 2014). The rock songs and ballads composed by Roberto and Erasmo Carlos included basic themes of the popular music, such as the happiness of romantic encounters, the suffering of separations and unrequited love or even trivial everyday events, which involved elements such as humour and irreverence (Zan, 2013). The production of versions of foreign songs in Portuguese was still present at JovemGuarda, but gradually it gave space to Brazilian pop-rock composers, with an emphasis on Roberto and Erasmo Carlos's productions, which generated a cultural and economic fact that positively marked the growing importance of the Brazilian music market: Brazil became one of the rare countries in the world where national music predominated in the music market (Dantas, 2015).

Despite the criticisms, Roberto Carlos—together with other artists of Jovem Guarda, particularly Erasmo Carlos—gathered symbolic elements consolidated in the Brazilian mass culture from the construction of the imaginary of romantic love. This was based on the character of the "playboy-hero", a loving guy who is a heroic

protagonist in the songs and shows himself to be fearless, rebellious, omnipotent, endowed with greatness of feelings and ready to face journeys in the name of love. He is a "playboy", because he is seen as a character who has powerful and fast cars and an extravagant appearance, uses slang-based language and adopts a rebellious behaviour (Lopes, 1999). He is also a "hero" in filling an archetype characterized by adventure, achievement, challenge and drama. In songs such as "Quero que vátudo pro inferno" (1965), "Eu tedarei o céu" (1966), "Se você pensa" (1968) and "As curvas da estrada de Santos" (1969), the imaginary of romantic love—composed of loving subjects made for each other, whose destiny inexorably unites them—is built by symbolic elements linked to the suffering caused by the separation or the absence of the loved one; to nature, mobilized to show that neither the grandeur of the sky nor the sun can eliminate the absence of the loved one and the loneliness of the protagonist in the lyrics; and the declaration of the feelings of the protagonist to the loved one. The senses of the greatness of forces and the challenge that the "playboy-hero" faces in the conquest of the loved one reveals the lyrics of the songs as narratives of true journeys of a heroic protagonist in the search for the "great love of life", who follows an outlined loving destiny, aims to meet his soulmate and reveals the idealization of the loved one (Anaz, 2014).

As a successful singer, Roberto Carlos put his voice and body up for sale to dominate the audience with the control he exercised over his techniques and resources such as gesticulation, mimicry and singing, which, used together, allowed him to excite people (Prokop, 1986). Melodrama—whose fundamental aspects are the feeling and the understanding of reality by popular classes based on family relationships—is a striking aspect in numerous Latin American productions—such as Mexican soap operas and Brazilian country music—in the light of the accentuated tendency of production and reproduction of traits of traditional sociability, even with ongoing modernization processes, to place itself as a fundamental reference for the understanding of contradictions expressed in popular culture (Martín-Barbero, 1983; Morelli, 2008). There are strong melodramatic features in Roberto Carlos's musical production from the 1970s to the present day.

### **The (Re)constructions of Roberto Carlos's work in "The Songs You Danced for Me"**

In "The songs you danced for me", it is possible to say that the associations between the movements of the bodies of the dancers choreographed by Neoral and the songs by Roberto Carlos that induce dance were diverse. From these associations, there are parts of the dance show in which the effects are the reaffirmation and enhancement of romantic love and the image of the "playboy-hero" of Jovem Guarda. Among them, it is worth mentioning the choreography, during "Detalhes", by one of the couples, who intertwine their bodies in a sensual choreography, mainly moving them or lying on the floor, dragging and rolling over it. The sensuality and realization of love are evident in other sequences, such as the approach between couples in the low light in "Falandosério" and the combination of quick movements with arms and hips, which resemble the choreography of Jovem Guarda among the couples in "Eu tedarei o céu".

One of the parts in which romantic love seems to reach its peak is the famous kiss sequence by a couple of dancers to the sound of "Eu te proponho" and "Seu corpo", combined with their intercalated verses, almost constituting a new song. With their lips together, the dancers make movements of bodily dexterity and strength. There are times when the male dancer holds the female dancer in the air, and she holds herself on his thighs. Both throw themselves to the ground in sensual movements, in which their bodies touch and intertwine without separating, as if the realization of romantic love would take them to a transcendental position in the empty space.

The courage and adventurous spirit of the "playboy-hero" are developed in the sequence in which a male dancer is led by others to walk on chairs that change their position all times, with the combination of "As curvas da estrada de Santos" and "ForçaEstranha". The disdain for existence because of the failure to conquer the beloved one is enhanced when the dancers fall on each other's laps and push each other while sitting on the chairs in "Quando" ("When you dismiss me / My life almost ended"). References to the choreography style typical of the rock songs of the JovemGuarda era are made in "Desamarre meu coração", which highlights the stripped-down lifestyle of the "playboy-hero". Aspects of exaltation of feelings and experiences when dealing with themes related to love and relationships are amplified when the dancers come to talk to people in the audience and join them in a lighter choreography to the sound of "De tanto amor". Maternal love is also exalted when dancers approach lovingly older women in the audience during the song "Lady Laura", a song by Roberto Carlos in honour of his mother.

If some associations made during the dance show reiterate, reaffirm or enhance elements of Roberto Carlos's work such as the romanticism and heroism of the "playboy", the choreographies made by Neoral seem to attribute renewed meanings to the lyrics of some songs, showing alternative meanings to the texts and / or the context to aestheticize them. For example, during "É preciso sobreviver", the choreography not only distances itself from the movements of intimacy between members of couples, but these couples are exchanged during the dance. In this exchange, it is suggested not only the possibility that romantic love is demystified due to betrayal—seen as common in real relationships—, but also the possibilities of love in addition to those present in Roberto Carlos's lyrics, such as homosexual love. In this sequence, two same-sex dancers kiss while couples remake themselves along the choreography.

The reference to the exchange of couples and the instability of relationships considered as ideal is also explicit in another sequence, to the sound of "Cama e Mesa", a song that points out that the protagonist who would like to be, in the life of the beloved one, the "good thing, liberated or forbidden, everything in her life", as if he objectified himself before the loved one. Such instability appears in the sequence in which the song "Fera Ferida" is played. The dancers change their position in chairs facing another dancers, as if looking for new relationships in search of happiness, which is never found, contrary to the realization of eternal romantic love, which is so desired in several Roberto Carlos's songs.

Such sequences prove that, in the dance show, the body in dance can cause reinterpretations and ruptures in the forms of the text, which makes the relationship between the text and the body significantly more complex and even tense. While there are times when movement and words are clearly associated in a game that can be characterized by complementarities (Fernandes, 2001) and aspects of Roberto Carlos's original work are reaffirmed and enhanced such as romantic love, there are also conflicts, such as the deconstruction of love ideals and the conception of other forms of love, such as the homosexual one. The dance amplifies the dimensions of the text, in the light of the incorporation of other perspectives that interpenetrate and fit into the complexity of its relations with the words (Zumthor, 2001). In this sense, the dance show produces, reproduces and enhances traits of traditional sociability, but explains the contradictions expressed in popular culture with the manifestation of alternative possibilities for the construction of human relationships in the light of the modernization of these societies (Martín-Barbero, 1983; Morelli, 2008).

## Final Considerations

In Brazil, Jovem Guarda represented a process of technological innovation and differentiated economic impact in the country by exploring the music market in addition to concerts and radio programs. It was the first generation of artists to act and use television as a means of promoting and marketing music, in addition to impacting sectors such as fashion, advertising, merchandising, cinema and magazines. With Jovem Guarda, music has become a product of mass consumption in Brazil in its multiple marketing possibilities (Dantas, 2015). Since then, Roberto Carlos's work has incorporated strong melodramatic characteristics to preserve its matrix in romanticism and the more traditional forms of building sociability.

In the reinterpretation of the musical work of Roberto Carlos in "The songs you danced for me", contemporary dance brings not only a movement of repetition, reaffirmation or enhancement of already placed elements, but an analysis of the past and a proposition of alternatives to those that were posed. It thus becomes a space of uncertainty and indecision due to the simultaneous existence of continuities and ruptures, complementarities and conflicts with the original work.

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