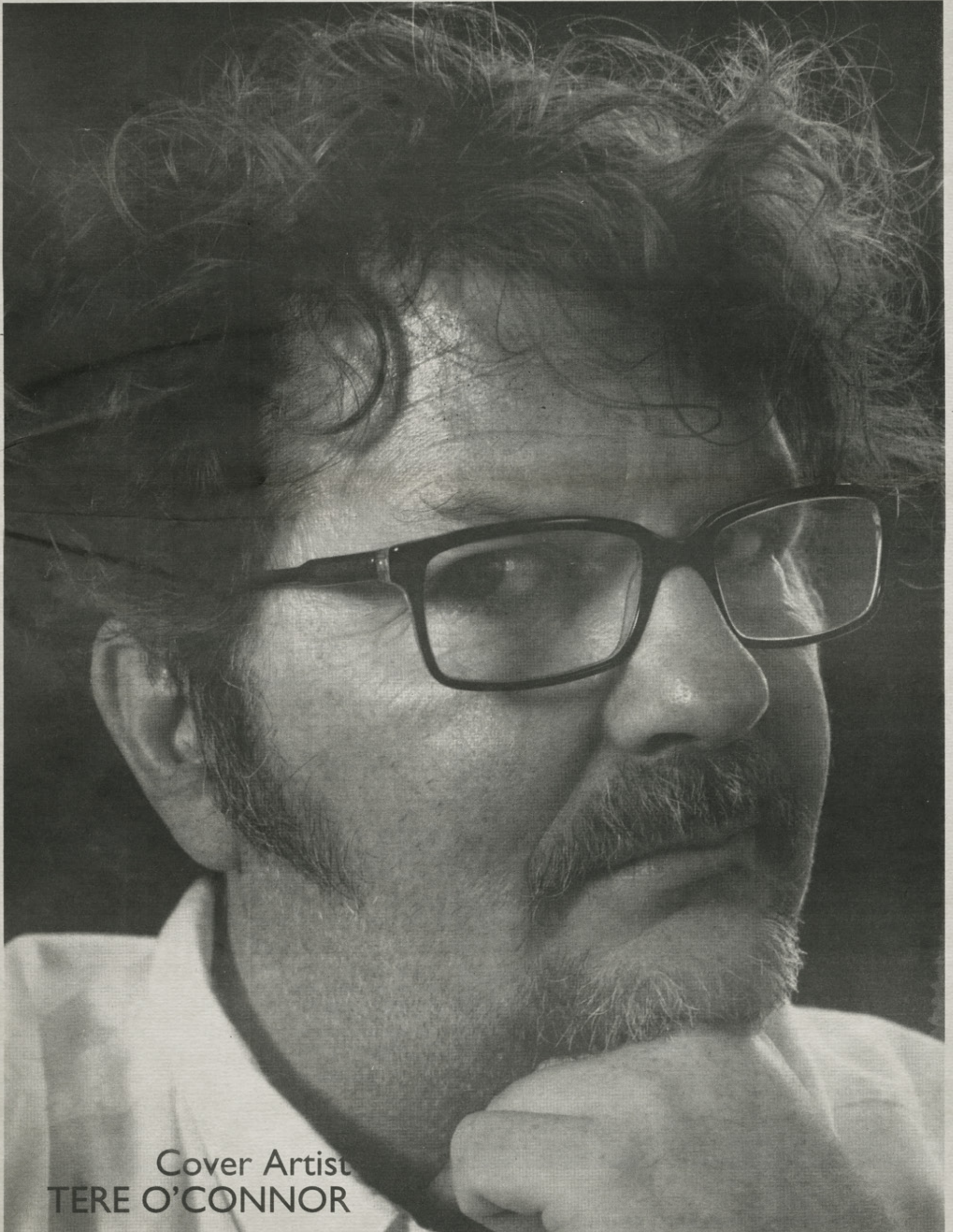




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FOCUS ON THE WORK: THE CARNALITY OF BODIES by Cristiane Bouger

Brazilian artist Lia Rodrigues creates a singular form of intimacy through the carnality of bodies, achieving distinctive political and aesthetic discourses through her dance¹. *Aquilo de que somos feitos* (Such Stuff As We Are Made Of) is a dance piece, created by Lia Rodrigues Cia. de Danças in 2000, the year of the 500th anniversary of Brazil. When presented in Rio de Janeiro, the choreographer charged R\$1,99² for the tickets, stating: "We are second-rate meat."

The choreography can be understood as a work in two parts. In the first part, the audience is invited to sit on a triangular slice of the floor as the performers present Rodrigues' work completely naked, revealing other visibilities of the body, in the unexpected compositions and variations of silent solos, duos and trios. As some of the choreographic sets are presented, the viewers are invited to change their position in the room, sitting in another triangular slice of the space as the work continues on another side of the room.

Here, the nudity of the bodies, in such intimate and close space, unfolds the carnal aspects of them. What we see is not the sensual or voluptuous body so over-emphasized in our media and culture, but a real and naked body. As viewers, we share this nudity and this carnality, because we are not invited to read something "behind" it, but only to perceive it: to envelop and embrace the bodies with our eyes. The codes are surpassed. The forms presented give us back our own body, revealing its nature and perspectives.

The first part of the piece ends with the first sculpture-bodies collapsing, lying on the floor, and moving in the direction of the viewers who were seated in the same space. The viewers stand up or move away from the naked bodies collapsing in their direction. From this point on we see overlapped bodies, one on top of another on the floor.

In the second part of the piece, the nudity of the bodies gives way to a more allusive moment: the explosion of brands, slogans, media and ideological symbols are evoked by the performers: Pikashu, Aiwa, Just do it, Coke, Che Guevara... the dictatorship that dominated Brazil for more than 20 years is immediately brought to mind through the 70's counter-culture references of the dance. The dance develops explicit verbal messages here, confronting by assumption the consumerisms, globalization and cultural banalities imposed or absorbed in our daily life. Asking for peace is also a major factor of the work.

These two parts of the dance seem to reveal different approaches to its reading. The first part of the piece makes us visible through what we see. More than offering symbolic and psychological environments and narratives, Rodrigues' dance is an experience offered to our active consciousness that enables us to capture what we see with a philosophical attitude rather than merely as entertainment. On the other hand, the second part of the choreography is more allusive and, maybe, takes us to a more symbolic reading/relation with the work. However, the piece talks directly to the viewers; it is not a representation of historical or cultural facts but the direct speech influenced by them.

NOTES

1. The political aspects of Lia Rodrigues' work unfold in constitutive directions: one of the strong aspects of her work comes from the decision to direct all the investments of the sponsorships her company receives into the development of the performers, rather than spend this money in set design, costumes, light design and other expensive props or structures for each piece. This option concentrates the development of her aesthetic in the bodies of the performers. Another political act implicit in this choice comes from the fact their pieces can be presented in any room, school, gallery or ordinary space, making it possible for the piece to travel to small cities in Brazil that do not have a theatre or an appropriate space to receive dance works. On the other hand, Rodrigues equally presents her work in spaces such as the Walker Art Center and in several festivals and spaces all over Europe, USA, Latin America and Canada.

2. Nowadays R\$1,99 is an amount equivalent to approximately US \$0.60. But this amount is also a reference to popular stores spread all over the country that sell Chinese products and in which all the goods cost this amount (like Jack \$0.99 in NYC). Through this fact, Lia Rodrigues Cia. de Danças incorporates as a political act charging popular prices for their tickets in order to make their dance visible to a larger audience.

CRISTIANE BOUGER (Brazil) is a theater director, playwright, performer and video artist. She conceived and directed the documentary *Community, Activism and the Downtown Scene*—an independent documentary about the experimental scene in New York (2006). She is a member of the visual arts collective "e/ou" (and/or) and of the collective Cauliflower - worldwide artistic micro-community.