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'Why the Body?'

Education as Somatic Intervention

The last years, which were characterized by Covid-19, catalyzed and disseminated intense transformations in body conceptions and in the ways in which this dimension, the body, is actualized in the world (Purnell, 2021). These changes in the ways in which we live our bodies have always existed (Vigarello, 2016; Corbin, 2011; Courtine, 2015), but they are occurring even more rapidly. In various spheres (social, academic, economic, etc.), we can see rearrangements of the body's value, its exhaustion (Vigarello, 2020; Cray, 2013) by the incessant processes of control, the feeling of lack of time and indebtedness (Lazzarato, 2012), and new ways, sometimes excessive, of classifying bodies (Givens & White, 2021; Davis, 2022).

In the delimited environment of the arts, in the second half of the twentieth century, *body art*, *performance art*, and the so-called physical theatre used the materiality of the body to explore less conventional modes of expression. These artistic manifestations destabilized the boundaries between the supposed real and fictional, instituting, or at least "irritating" (Fischer-Lichte, 2008) the ethical and aesthetic parameters in force. In this context, as a wide-ranging phenomenon, performativity (Austin, 1962; Zourabichvili, 2012; Féral, 1982, 2013; Féral & Bermingham, 2002; Butler, 1990; Desportes, 2010; Preciado, 2018) unfolded as a promoter of a greater diversity of bodies in daily life and in the media. The vulgarization of body modifications, sometimes radical (Pitts, 2003), and the criticism of ableism, along with inclusion movements also present in the theater (Newson, 2004; Delbono, 2004; Kelleher et al., 2007; Tackels, 2005), promoted other parameters of competence and a greater openness to other ways of seeing and living the bodies.

In everyone's daily lives, we found a rediscovery of the importance of body care for health as a whole, with particular attention to mental health (Friedman, 2022), and to aging processes, *pari passu* its capture as an economic "asset" (Hutson, 2013). In the field of cognition sciences and mind philosophy, trends tuned to the so-called Embodied Cognition (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Varela et al., 1991) have been consolidating and making practically inadequate views that separate body, brain,

and mind, or that do not consider the relative fusion between the aspects named as rational and emotional (Damásio, 1994).

In a paroxysm of perception changes that have accelerated greatly since the beginning of the 20th century (Crary, 2001, 1990), we are immersed in audiovisual and remote meetings, in the metaverse, and in augmented and virtual reality. These new forms of perception reconfigure both the ways of living in time and space and the notion of relationship and presence (Gumbrecht, 2004). They destabilize the very fabric of the real, with a magnitude certainly never seen (Ball, 2022; Lazzarato, 2019), and perhaps even desired by any aesthetic movement. Biomedical engineering and advances in the relationships between body, prostheses, and devices (Hwu & Krichmar, 2022) maximize and take to the limit an ancient phenomenon: the use of body extensions (tools and writing being perhaps the oldest). Today, everyone is resigned to the inevitable use of smartphones (prostheses used by all bodies), which aggregate and materialize all these changes daily.

The terms *post-human*, *technoscience*, *bodymedium* (Greiner, 2021), if deep down they do not define a real novelty, they appoint our alarm in the face of the intensity never seen before of changes in our relations with the world (Cappelletto, 2022). In the field of Artificial Intelligence, AI, which since its introduction is haunted by the central question of imitation or substitution of humans (Turing, 1950; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Russel & Norvig, 2016; Azhar, 2021; Tegmark, 2018; Bostrom, 2018), we see the increasing ubiquity of machines that make decisions for us. This also affects our always bodily situated relation to knowledge. Historically, for many decades it was understood that there were a number of human skills that would not be covered by Artificial Intelligence, with its strictly mathematical operations (Mitchell, 2019; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980). Our supposed superiority would then be forever guaranteed, considering, for example, that “human understanding is a skill akin to knowing how to find one’s way about in the world, rather than knowing a lot of facts and rules for relating them” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 5). But since the development of *deep learning* and *machine learning*, many machines and systems perform functions that did not exist before, and without imitating human ways to do the same, with capabilities that are not comparable to ours. Even if there are divergences between optimistic forecasts (Lee & Qiufan, 2021) and others tormented by the increasing control over lives and precariousness of employment (Russel, 2019; Johannessen, 2018), AI already shapes a situation that probably will make us irrelevant (Harari, 2019, 2016).

If more apocalyptic scenarios are disturbing, we can consider that there are still activities that only humans can perform, or that will take time to be occupied by machines. The rise of AI maybe triggers a transition where rational and conventionally measurable cognition, which in the twentieth century was more valued than physical effort (which was thus surpassed as value), will also be replaced. As a viable strategy, given the imminence of our obsolescence, we can think that the so-called “fourth industri-

al revolution” will make us reconfigure what we consider as thought and knowledge (Schleicher, 2018; United Kingdom, 2019; Magela, 2021; Johannessen, 2021). And this crisis will increase the importance, especially in education, of embodied and complex cognition (Gigerenzer, 2007, 2008, 2015; Dehaene, 2020; Biesta, 2021). In this respect, we need to pay attention to the interest that corporate culture (LaPrade et al., 2019) and the “global economic agenda” (OECD, 2015, 2017, 2019) have progressively given to what has been called emotional, social, and interpersonal skills, or “soft skills”. These “behavioral skills” (for example, perspectivation, agency, self-regulation, teamwork, flexibility) can be vividly worked in a pedagogical practice of theater (Magela, 2020), where cooperation (Tomasello, 2019) has a unique role. The promotion of creativity and its relationship with art classes sets an example of action in this sense (Winner et al., 2013; Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019; Winner, 2018; Oliva, 2015).

Strangely enough, sectors of the economy seem interested in occupying a place that may not have received our due attention: to put into practice a conception, already proposed since Nietzsche (1999, 2001) and addressed for decades, in which art is imbricated to life, in an expansion of the notion of aesthetics (Gielen et al., 2015; Schaeffer, 2015). A movement that can be seen as “a reversal (...) of the historical development that led in the philosophy of the eighteenth century from *aesthesis* to aesthetics, from sensory experience in general to the arts in particular” (Arnheim, 1969, v):

Aisthêtikhós is the ancient Greek word for that which is “perceptive by feeling”. *Aisthêsis* is the sensory experience of perception. The original field of aesthetics is not art but reality – corporeal, material nature. As Terry Eagleton [1988] writes: “Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body”. It is a form of cognition, achieved through taste, touch, hearing, seeing, smell – the whole corporeal sensorium. (Buck-Morss, 1992, p. 6)

In the case of theater education, we have, for many years, elements to weave a more expanded view of its pedagogical scope, addressing the theatricality of everyday life (Goffman, 1956, 1974; Burns, 1973; Evreinov, 1930; Neveu, 2018). If we take into account these positions less tied to the professional artistic activity, we would adopt theater education as an education of theatrical perceptions that occur through a somatically theatrical form, where the theatrical attention is being touched and enhanced in the students’ bodies during the class. Because if “a body’s structure is the composition of its relation” (Deleuze¹, 1990, p. 218) and if “my body is made of the same flesh of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 248), so it is in the body that relations are actualized, accomplished.

It does not seem an exaggeration to consider that this dimension of body intervention in aesthetic, artistic, and cultural education may at some point be the main objective of pedagogical work in basic education and in educational evaluation processes. And

¹ Here, Deleuze refers to Baruch Espinosa’s philosophy. But there is no considerable divergence between his ideas and those in which Deleuze is considered as “the prince of philosophers.”

an education that aims to expand other forms of cognition than strictly rational (increasingly perceived as limited and replaceable) will have difficulties in fulfilling its task if it does not consider the somatic dimension (Hannah, 1980) as a crucial field to its work. For it is in the body that this expanded education is effective – an education of a strongly aesthetic, artistic, and cultural nature, sensitive to the challenges that the world will put on us.

But if so many social spheres and world processes have symptomized the importance of the body, how has aesthetic education, or at least theater education, acted in this process? What place has the body had in these classes? How do these classes mobilize the body today? Do they?

Perhaps an interesting start to address these and other questions about the body is to investigate the various connections of the body dimension with the world, its ways of being in the world, and building it.

This journal is an opportunity for investigating the body's place in cultural, artistic, and aesthetic education. It will be a valuable place for these explorations.

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