



I have a Body, I am a Body: somatic approaches to movement at an undergraduate dance course

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ABSTRACT – I have a Body, I am a Body: somatic approaches to movement at an undergraduate dance course – In this article, I started from the experience of somatic approaches to movement at the undergraduate dance course of the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria to propose a discussion about the pedagogical and artistic implications of this choice. I explain my point of view as a teacher and artist, as well as my understanding of the use of somatic approaches to dance, and explore the students' experiences. Within the framework of performance as an analytical paradigm, articulated from the viewpoint of Somaesthetics, I point out some ways provided by such a choice in promoting emancipatory pedagogical practices and expanding the artistic possibilities of dancers.

Keywords: Dance. Somatic Education. Performance. Pedagogical Practices. Somaesthetics.

RÉSUMÉ – J'ai un Corps, je suis un Corps: approches somatiques du mouvement dans les études universitaires en danse – Dans cet article, je présente mon expérience des approches somatiques du mouvement dans le cours de danse de l'Université Fédérale de Santa Maria et je propose une discussion sur les implications pédagogiques et artistiques de ce choix. J'explique mon point de vue de professeur et artiste, ainsi que la façon dont je conçois l'utilisation des approches somatiques en danse, et je propose une incursion dans l'expérience des étudiants. A partir du paradigme analytique de la performance, en relation avec l'approche de la Soma-Esthétique, je présente quelques pistes ouvertes par ce choix pour proposer des pratiques pédagogiques émancipatrices et élargir les possibilités artistiques des danseurs.

Mots-clés: Danse. Éducation Somatique. Performance. Pratiques Pédagogiques. Soma-Esthétique.

RESUMO – Eu tenho um Corpo, eu sou um Corpo: abordagens somáticas do movimento na graduação em dança – Neste artigo, parto da experiência com abordagens somáticas do movimento no Bacharelado em Dança da Universidade Federal de Santa Maria para propor uma discussão acerca das implicações pedagógicas e artísticas dessa escolha. Explicito meu ponto de vista enquanto professora e artista, bem como minha compreensão do uso das abordagens somáticas na dança, e convido a uma incursão na experiência dos alunos. Sob o enquadramento da performance como paradigma analítico, articulado à perspectiva da Soma-Estética, aponto alguns caminhos proporcionados por tal escolha na promoção de práticas pedagógicas emancipatórias e na ampliação das possibilidades artísticas dos bailarinos.

Palavras-chave: Dança. Educação Somática. Performance. Práticas Pedagógicas. Soma-Estética.

Yesterday, to map the skeleton. It is hard to stay focused. A sense of repetition. Difficulty in accessing the experience, in being in the experience. Expectation. Do they like it? How will they like it? By the way, those are things difficult to deal with thus far. A feeling of being responsible for... For what really? For the students' experiences? For Michel's 'success'? Wanting to be accepted and respected and taken seriously as a teacher? As an artist? Being unable to easily find the bones.

And then stopping. Vertical. Observing. Still outside myself. Feeling the back of my neck closed after having felt very 'connected.' What to do with that? 'Do not interfere,' says Michel (it is so good to have Michel's voice here). But how to accept the possibility of not interfering on this head tilted back? I accept it. I try not to interfere. I focus on my feet. The weight which shifts incessantly from one spot to another in my feet. Doing half-pointe. Discovery: my shin relaxes. I was not aware the muscles in front of my tibia were tense. My left leg much more tense than the right one. Pressing the floor more strongly. I exaggerate that pressure. I like to feel the rest of my body reorganising from that.

I manage to give up the 'teacher' on the floor, after remaining in semi-supine position. I almost fall asleep. I accept the difficulty in keeping my eyes open. I accept and dialogue with this difficulty. I let my eyes blink very slowly and then invite them to open again and rest on the space of the ceiling, but also in the skull orbits.

July 24, 2013.

The excerpt above is a literal transcription of what I wrote at the end of the *I Seminário/Laboratório de Criação: uma abordagem somática para a dança* [First Seminar/Lab of Creation: a somatic approach to dance]. It was the first event I coordinated as a teacher in the Undergraduate Dance Programme [Bacharelado em Dança] of the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM)¹ and basically consisted in a space for artistic creation and investigation based on a dialogue with the proposal of Michel Capeletti², a dancer and, at the time, was studying the Alexander Technique. At that time, he was concluding his residency at the Fundação Oswald de Andrade, in São Paulo, next to the Escola Nômada de Filosofia. Therefore, he had just spent one semester researching on forms of creation in dance through the Alexander Technique.

The idea of this text is to use the experience of working with somatic approaches to movement during two semesters of a Body Consciousness course (part of the dance programme's curriculum) to propose a discussion on the pedagogical and artistic implications

of that choice, as well as the trajectories it could indicate, both to the universe of university undergraduate degrees in dance and to processes of artistic creation (considering their pedagogical dimension). Before we begin this discussion, almost imperceptibly going through the ways of academic saying-writing, a short pause. To breathe. Connecting with the body and seeking a place in the writing which inhabits this body (of mine) which is the place from where I would like to speak. My intention is to develop not only a discourse on the body, but a discourse *from the body*³. This movement also corresponds to the desire for the reader to seek, in their body, a similar reading place.

The excerpt above came into being through a procedure called *automatic writing* which consists in choosing an arbitrary moment during which one writes *without thinking*, without filtering or without trying to select words in any way. In this case, the idea was to access what remained as a residue of the three-day experience around the connections between the Alexander Technique and creation in dance. On the other hand, this access road has the potential to bring to consciousness observations that, until then, existed only in the field of perception (perhaps these categories are not the most appropriate, but I will address this discussion further on).

The first time I had contact with this procedure related to dance was with dancer, choreographer, and teacher Tatiana da Rosa in the process of creation of the spectacle *FATO*, premiered in 2002, in Porto Alegre. Over the last twelve years, we used this resource at several moments of our artistic works, many of which also had the participation of Michel Capeletti, Dani Boff, Alexandra Dias, André Mubarak, and Cibele Sastre. It is important to state that this process is part of a series of procedures which were gradually shared and examined as an artistic investigation by this group in the performance of several works, sometimes as a group, sometimes individually.

As I seek to turn experience into text, I mention the names of these artists with the clear and strong intention to evoke and invite them to be here with me with the intensities that form me and the place where I speak from as an artist. A place which is, besides, and always, the place from where I speak *as* a teacher. The *as* brought up here is intended as a way to indicate transience and shifts, more than

temporalities or distinct contexts of speech or practice. I consider myself an artist who works as a teacher, and a teacher who works as an artist⁴.

It is important to ascertain one peculiarity in my relationship with somatic education as a field of knowledge. I have no specific training in any technique or method which is part of this field. Rather, this way of doing, understanding, and thinking movement came through my artistic experiences, through the different creative processes which had the aforementioned spectacle *FATO* as a starting point. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the creative process of that spectacle, along with the configuration of our *Arteria – artistas de dança em colaboração* [Artery – dance artists in collaboration] (founded by Tatiana da Rosa, Cibele Sastre, and Suzi Weber in 2001, and which later brought together several artists from the South Region of Brazil), is a milestone in the creation of a dance environment in the city of Porto Alegre permeated by aesthetic, ethical, and political references from the so-called postmodern generation of American dance. At that moment, Tatiana⁵ had just returned from a two-year period of studies at the Trisha Brown Dance Company, and Cibele had recently concluded her education at the Laban Institute of Movement Studies, both in New York.

These are relevant facts here because they contextualize an idea of dance permeated by a somatic understanding of body and movement. Today are widely recognised in the field of dance the influence and transformations aroused by the movement formed by Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Simone Forti, Debora Hay, Robert Raushenberg, and Rober Morris, among others⁶. In a recent article in collaboration with Gilberto Icle, Tatiana da Rosa affirms:

Putting into question the traditional marks and limits of what body and movement were in dance and, thus, of who can be a dancer, these artists were essential in the construction of poetics and practices articulated around enquiries on the politics of the spectacle. (Icle; Rosa, 2012, p. 17).

For the purposes of this reflection, I would add that these investigations also questioned the politics of the body. Precisely by distancing itself from the aesthetics of modern dance, still guided by the systematisation of codified techniques, those artists

were investigating the materiality of the moving body. To do so, they sought references from many different body work methods, systems, and techniques, among which were *yoga*, *aikido*, and some which today are included in the field of Somatic Education, like the Alexander Technique.

This way of doing-thinking dance is based on the idea of a continuum between everyday body and scenic body, and between art and life. Through aesthetic propositions grounded in the idea of “[...] body as something subjected to endless dialogues,” they sought to “[...] unravel and expose the power relations, the tacit agreements inscribed even in the bodily habits which established values in dance, the body and movement of a dancer according to hegemonic parameters” (Icle; Rosa, 2012, p. 18). This is the main reference of artistic thought which I brought to the Body Awareness course of the Undergraduate Programme in Dance at UFSM.

Through the opening text of this article, I invite the reader to accompany me while I revisit the dimension of the experience in order to talk about this somatic approach incorporated to the practice of dance.

Yesterday, to map the skeleton. It is hard to stay focused. A sense of repetition. Difficulty in accessing the experience, in being in the experience. Expectation. Do they like it? How will they like it? By the way, those are things difficult to deal with thus far. A feeling of being responsible for... For what really? For the students' experiences? For Michel's 'success'? Wanting to be accepted and respected and taken seriously as a teacher? As an artist? Being unable to easily find the bones.

The first sentence refers to the creation, one day earlier, of a procedure called 'mapping the bones,' proposed by Michel in the improvisation and Alexander Technique workshop.⁷ The procedure consists basically in identifying the bones in our bodies through their contact with the floor, as if we were printing, on that floor, a tridimensional map of our skeletons. This makes sense within this comprehension of dance based on the investigation of the materiality of the body as a resource for the recognition and expansion of its creative and expressive possibilities.

The text begins with the mapping of our bones and slides into affective expectations emerging from this mapping through recognition of difficulties in maintaining our focus on the concrete

experience of bones on the floor. This sliding into is neither disconnected nor fortuitous. Rather, it indicates, through the connections it proposes, the somatic comprehension of the (moving) body which is our food for thought in this case.

This comprehension has already been stated in different ways, by different artists, researchers of movement, theorists, therapists etc., so it is present in several fields of knowledge⁸. Consistent with the proposal of this text, I selected, from this set of ideas, those which formed my experience as an artist-teacher-researcher.

Thomas Hanna, who is considered one of the founders of Somatic Education as an autonomous field of knowledge, defined it as “the art and science of the inter-relational process between awareness, biological function and the environment, all three factors being understood as a synergetic whole⁹” (Hanna, 1983, p. 1 in Fernandes, 2012, p. 3). From this perspective, he proposes that we think the body as a *soma*, that is, as something perceived from an inner viewpoint, through our proprioceptive system. This shift in viewpoint, according to the author, transforms what we are observing:

The *soma*, being internally perceived, is categorically distinct from a body, not because the subject is different, but because the mode of viewpoints is different: it is immediate proprioception – a sensory mode that provides unique data (Hanna 1986, p. 4).

The ability to oscillate between the two modes of perception is in the nature of the body-soma. They may either see themselves based on internal information, observers of themselves, and based on what Hanna calls “[...] third-person viewpoint” (1986, p. 4), that is, as an object among other objects in the world. Therefore, I can say, *I have a body* or *I am a body*. The difference is the mode of perception triggered. It may also happen that both operate simultaneously and, in this case, the difference between *having* and *being* a body is simply a matter of emphasis.

At the same time, the first-person's self-perception is always a process of observation and self-regulation. The act of observing interferes with what is observed. Such process of self-regulation is not always (and normally is not) completely assimilated by so-called rational consciousness, which corresponds to the range of voluntary sensory-motor actions we are able to name through language.

However, through another method of awareness, associated to the capacity to inhibit and isolate phenomena that occur in the organism so they are likely to be recognised by the proprioceptive system, these processes may become gradually known (or, said in another way, they may be part of the repertoire of rational consciousness).

Thus, since the body-soma sees itself as its own regulatory agent, the subject ceases to be someone who reacts unconsciously to the environment, understanding themselves as active in their relationship with this environment. From this perspective, we may infer that, by working with the aid of a somatic approach in class, we are providing the students with an opportunity to regard themselves as agents of their own process of learning and, therefore, subjects who actively interfere with their environment through conscious actions.

The second paragraph of our introductory text refers to some *means-whereby* (Alexander, 1992) the Alexander Technique, understood here as constitutive of the context of somatic approaches to movement, deals with this process which, according to Hanna, connects *awareness* and *consciousness*.

And then stopping. Vertical. Observing. Still outside myself. To feel the back of my neck closed after having felt very 'connected.' What to do with that? 'Do not interfere,' says Michel (it is so good to have Michel's voice here). But how to accept the possibility of not interfering on this head tilted back? I accept it. I try not to interfere. I focus on my feet. The weight which shifts incessantly from one spot to another in my feet. Doing half-pointe. Discovery: my shin relaxes. I was not aware that the muscles in front of my tibia were tense. My left leg much more tense than the right one. Pressing the floor more strongly. I exaggerate that pressure. I like to feel the rest of my body reorganising from that.

Observation is a basic procedure of several techniques and methods of somatic education. As I said earlier, this observation may be both from a first-person viewpoint, an inner observation, and attention directed to objects around, and to oneself as yet another of these objects. In the case described above, the initial indication was to observe oneself internally, even if one always assumes that any indication may or may not be followed by the one who receives it. Interestingly, even aware and quite comfortable with this premise, by stating that I still felt *outside myself* by observing, I end up highlighting an implicit judgment, as if the ideal was to have given

priority to inner observation. A judgment which extends through some sentences, in an inner dialogue oscillating between perception of the *closed neck* and questions about what to do with it.

That is when Michel proposes non-interference. My inner dialogue heads towards investigating on *how* not to interfere, *how* not to do something with what I observe and, mainly, what does not satisfy me when perceived. Almost imperceptibly, the way I observe shifts to the internal focus in a constant relation between proprioception and reflection.

One way we found was to shift our attention from what was presented as a problem difficult to accept – the closed neck – to another part of the body, considered, at that moment, less problematic: the feet. The description of this process of observation indicates constant alternation between proprioception and rational consciousness (or rather, thinking in the terms proposed by Hanna, between awareness and consciousness).

Some fundamental principles of the Alexander Technique appear in the process I described: conscious control, primary control, directions, and inhibition. *Conscious control* is about the choices we make voluntarily. In this case, at first, it can be the decision not to interfere with what I observe.

Primary control deals with the relational organisation between head, neck, and back, which, according to this researcher, resonates throughout our postural organisation. Broadly speaking, it is about finding balance in this relation where one is not applying unnecessary tensions in order to support the head (vertically in this case, but this applies to any position) and which ends up generating other tensions and blockages throughout the body.

The strategy found at that moment was to *direct* thought towards another part of the body, ignoring the impulse to correct the position of the head. Focus on weight, which was perceived as being in constant movement through pressure of the soles of the feet on the floor, became a personal investigation of the *means-whereby* I was keeping myself upright.

According to Alexander, the *means-whereby* include “[...] the inhibition of the habitual use of the mechanisms of the organism, and the conscious projection of new directions necessary to the

performance of the different acts involved in a new and more satisfactory use of these mechanisms” (Alexander, 1992, p. 33).

The employment of these means is linked to a shift of focus. Through conscious control, we decide to take the focus away from the final goal to be reached and direct it towards the ongoing process to reach it. In the situation described, therefore, we may understand that conscious control was, more than only deciding not to interfere, to consciously choose to abandon the desire to succeed – in this case, to stand while keeping one's neck relaxed – in the name of surrendering to the process which could (or could not) lead to the desired goal.

What is interesting here is recognising that, even practicing, for many years, a somatic approach to movement, suddenly I see myself creating new ideals of posture, body organisation, and movement which can be as limiting as others, notably guided by imitation in an external way or by imitation of an ideal form to be achieved, as is the case of several techniques and more conventional dance teaching methods. Indeed, it is again an imprisonment within what Alexander (1992) called the habit of *end-gaining* and that we could relate to simple ideas such as desires to do something right, to please, to correspond to expectations, to be accepted, to be loved etc. As the concerns that had already appeared at the time of mapping the skeleton, presenting themselves as factors which create distance from the concrete experience of the body.

This *direction* of thought is closely linked to *inhibition* – the conscious decision not to do what we normally do in a given situation. Accepting the possibility of not reaching our goals is, in a way, a condition for this inhibition of habitual impulses which manifest themselves not only as tensions that are unnecessary, but harmful to the functioning of the organism. Throughout his research, Alexander little by little identified a fundamental relationship between what he called *use* and *functioning* of the body. The use is related to voluntary actions, and functioning, to involuntary ones. Although in the conceptual framework it seems evident that both categories can be differentiated, in practice, they proved much more indeterminate and so interconnected that their distinction is not really clear.

Several interconnected dimensions are involved in this relation – desire, thought, posture, movement etc. – pointing towards a unity of physical and mental processes. According to Alexander, “[...]”

when once it is recognised that every act is a reaction to a stimulus received through the sensory mechanisms, no act can be described as wholly ‘mental’ or wholly ‘physical’” (Alexander, 1992, p. 47). In this perspective, we may affirm that thought not only interferes with movement, but is already born as a movement in the body.

In another sense, not judging and not interfering with what we observe is necessary in order to give time for other ways to emerge, ways hitherto unknown, to react to the stimuli of the world. Walter Carrington, one of the main references in the teaching of the Alexander Technique, in a book compiled from his lessons to other teachers, affirms: “That is to say, given time, the pupil will learn to say no. It is definitely a matter of time – it’s a matter of time that’s got to be given on the part of the teacher and time taken by the pupil. It’s sheer time” (Carrington, 2009, p. 57).

This perspective is in close dialogue with the understanding of a body-soma proposed by Hanna. According to this author, sensory perception is always a motor response to a stimulus received. It is, therefore, always sensory-motor. In the Alexander Technique, action takes place in an intimate connection between these two dimensions of perception, so that any alteration in one pole is always an alteration in the other as well. Any change in my sensation of movement interferes with movement, as well as any change in the way I move changes the sensation I have of this movement. In a way, the work emphasizes hyphenated articulation (a resource which unites the two words without promoting a synthesis, but keeping the indicative space of autonomy of each one of them) between two interconnected dimensions of perception. It is as if, through inhibition, I could dilate this hyphen to the point of giving ourselves time to perceive other possibilities of motor response which are, after all, new sensations. This process may lead to what Alexander calls reeducation, through which we can develop new sensory-motor habits, expanding our range of choice when reacting to stimuli.

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Here we go back to the perspective of a unity between biological, sensory-motor, cognitive, affective, social, and political processes.

It is through relaxation and acceptance of non-interference, the conscious choice to give up my habitual relations (resting in the position considered the best by Alexander, the semi-supine¹⁰), that I may also give up a social role, that of *teacher*.

The attention given to the word indicates a role and a position of teacher which do not necessarily correspond to the idea I have about this position. The *teacher* who is abandoned together with the unnecessary tensions of the body is the one who occupies a place of excessive power (or, to be more explicit, an authoritative position). The same *teacher* who, at the beginning of this text, suffered from anxiety about the success of the event. This anxiety was motivated by the desire to succeed and being accepted and, ultimately, was based on an illusion of power. The difficulty in inhabiting the experience was partly resistance in ignoring this alleged control over the students' experience.

In this sense, the notion of working on the first-person viewpoint goes both for the students and for me as a teacher. In order to propose that they embark on a detailed and courageous examination of themselves, it is essential that I am also fully committed to this process. It is imperative that I dive into a simultaneous process of identification of control mechanisms, submission, and emancipation continually triggered in my experience of the world. Better yet if I were able to give them up (or, in Michel's words, say a *gentle no* to them).

Having situated my speaking place and my understanding of somatic approaches to movement, it is important now to allow for the emergence of some voices of the students-artists who surrendered to this adventure with me, identifying new issues emerging for the continuity of this reflexive experimentation. I will begin with an excerpt from my classroom diary:

We are in the first semester's presentations. The task is to present a small cell of movement which synthesises the experience of everyone during lessons. The last one to perform, Danieli, walks slowly to the centre stage of Teatro Caixa Preta (where our lessons took place). She is very close to the audience. She sits on the floor, crosses her legs, and leans her head forward, until her torso lies on her legs and her head on the floor. The rest of the class remains in the audience. Someone asks for silence – 'shhhh'. The main focus is on Danieli. Five seconds of near immobility and silence, contrasting with the previous agitation

in the environment. Enough time for one to introduce a new regime of perception, guided by time dilation and attention to detail. For us to be able, after all, to perceive the breathing of that body wrapped in itself.

It takes me a long time to realise that the hands which were stretched in front of her head for some time began to slide down to the floor. Following with the eye throughout the arms, I understand that it is the spine that slowly unfolds, leading the torso to a vertical position supported by the ischia. Her hands continue to slide from the floor through legs, belly, chest, until they reach her face, gently dividing her hair, while her legs are uncrossed and stretched, the back touching the floor. Hands and eyes follow the movement of legs, and then the whole body sighs. Danieli looks at the audience, while the sound of her voice is slow, soft, a little lower than usual, like a delicately articulated breath, as if coming out of a very intimate place of that body. This voice tells us:

‘When I first came, I was not able to do even this movement. When I first came, I had an empty bag. When I first came, I met everyone of you. I fell in love. On the day of the presentation, I only listened. I recall Cinara... But there were so many things, so much content, such richness, that I felt intimidated. [she sighs] I began this course with just a few jazz lessons, during childhood. But my wish... And because of you all a much stronger desire to be here... There was no way not to mention this class, these people, each with their own story, each with their own background, each with their own richness, which gradually filled, added, summed up... And today I am here. More and more eager to be with you [her voice becomes humid, wet with an emotion that rises and overflows through her eyes. I look around and see several eyes wet with the same tears. I see myself as part of that collective emotion]. A little help here, a little help there, running to the other side of the room to correct myself from there. Bibi, how does one do that, Bibi? Cinara, can you repeat with me once more? You all make me want to be here. And one day, perhaps, I will be a dancer as great as you.’

‘You already are,’ answers Cinara from the audience. Everyone applauds. Danieli stands up, thanking, and everyone invades the stage for a big group hug, which ends up in jumps and rhythmic shouting. A beautiful ritual to conclude the semester.

July 31, 2013.

Danieli’s movement cell condenses several aspects related to the specificity of work with somatic approaches to movement in the university context I have explained in this text.

An initial dimension of this work is quite concrete and, we could say, simple. Danieli comes to the Dance course with little or no recent experience in this practice. She comes, as she herself affirms,

between speech and movement, unable to sit on the floor with a straight spine and outstretched legs. Well, this certainly was not a result exclusively of Body Consciousness lessons, but of the regular praxis in different dance lessons of the course, five days a week.

Regarding her presentation, an approach to performance based on anthropology may enhance the reflection on some aspects of that moment. I am talking about the concept developed by anthropologist Victor Turner in dialogue with stage director and performance theorist Richard Schechner, founder of the anthropology of performance. According to Turner:

[...] man is a self-performing animal – his performances are, in a way, *reflexive*, in performing he reveals himself. This occurs in two ways: the actor may come to know himself better through acting or enactment; or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings (Turner, 1987, p. 81).

Thus, one of the aspects of human action is to be guided by an audience. Under this light, the action of the subject is considered, simultaneously, presentation and constitution of oneself. There is no opposition between these two terms: to a certain extent, constitution itself takes place *through* presentation of oneself. By promoting a suspension of the ordinary time-space relation, performative frameworks provide the audience with awareness as the gaze of the other as a *not I* and, through it, consciousness of oneself in a constant game of mirrors. This is the mechanism which suggests performative situations as *reflective arenas* (Turner, 1987).

Thus, we may affirm that the situation of performance, combined with a constant effort in refining the perception of oneself through work with somatic approaches, led Danieli to recognise the fact that she was able to do something she previously was not, and a relation of reflection with that, shared with the audience.

It is important to stress that Danieli's performance is not restricted to the enunciation of what changed in the concreteness of her muscular reality. This *something*, perceived as a physical achievement, leads to self-satisfaction, a feeling good about herself. Besides, it is intimately connected to perception of the environment and the affective bonds established throughout the process. It

combines, therefore, the physical, psychological, and emotional dimensions of body experience.

Throughout the semester, I proposed several activities with a partner: manipulation and recognition of the skeleton and bone connections, perception of breathing in contact (back to back, belly to belly), mutual distribution of weight, etc. As frequently occurs in these activities, several emotions surfaced and were embraced by the group. Although the main focus of the activities was not therapeutic, but creative, as the discipline progressed, a collective relationship of respect and acceptance gradually took shape.

I understand that much of this relationship is due to the procedures themselves. It is important to highlight, however, that such procedures have been established through a specific way of conduct, seeking to constantly enunciate principles such as non-judgment and acceptance (of oneself and of the other) in the instructions for accomplishment of tasks. I do not think it is by chance that some sentences uttered by me in class were repeated by the students, generally in a tone of affectionate mockery, as *Helô's catchphrases*. At other times of academic life, suddenly someone comes up with a *there is no right or wrong* or *we can always remove the sticky tape from the forehead* (indicating the possibility to relax the muscles of that part of the body), or even finish any statement by saying, after a brief pause, *or not* (which, in class, I often repeated after an instruction, referring to the fact that following it was a choice and not mandatory).

This attitude in class is guided by comprehension of the pedagogical process as performance in the sense of *reflective arena* (Turner, 1987) and emphasizing the collective dimension of the establishment of the performative event, according to Richard Schechner, to whom, in these events, the positions in relation are negotiated on the go (Schechner, 2002). Bringing this conception of performance closer to the field of education, the use of such procedure establishing resources is committed to a critical-performative pedagogy, according to the principles formulated by Elyse Lamm Pineau. Through the promotion of a conscious and critical relation with the learning process itself, I seek to encourage in the student their “[...] critical thinking, decentralise teacher authority, facilitate interactive and peer-oriented learning” (Pineau, 2013, p. 40).

Furthermore, according to Pineau, performance in the educational context may be used as a resource for demonstration or methodology. In this case, the presentation of the cell of movement at the end of the semester is not intended as a demonstration of acquired knowledge (which is typical of conventional pedagogy), but, as stated from Turner's approach, promotes a relation of reflection with their own moving body and, consequently, empowerment in regard to life.

This dimension of empowerment appears in Danieli's presentation, when she expresses the relation between perception of expansion of physical possibilities, overcoming expressive obstructions and the consequent possibility of seeing oneself as part of a *grandiose* group of dancers. Later, in the comments about the presentations, she would affirm:

Helô said I had to evaluate what I had experienced since the beginning until now. Perhaps my greatest difficulty, my greatest obstacle, which I did not even write in the text, is to overcome my shyness, to expose myself, to get there and... This is what I realised during lessons... And this is what I wanted to say.

The broadening of expressive possibilities, in this case, results also in the recognition of a new power in life: public speaking, to expose one's individuality in a collective space.

The use of speech as an expressive resource to perform the task of composing a movement cell again refers to the discussions that took shape through experiments of the post-modern dance generation in North America in the 1960s, which still reverberate in contemporary artistic practices. I wonder: to what point the practice of non-judgment and acceptance of what we perceive in our bodies, combined with the refinement of perception of our bodily processes, may lead to an expansion of what we came to consider movement? Extrapolating a bit the observed context, to what extent could this somatic approach expand, in the dancer, their conception of what dance can be?

Another story describes that those lessons, from the point of view of the somatic approach, offered a change of perspective to Crystian, a local artist, used to thinking of dance as something to be presented in contexts such as festivals, the end of the academic year, among others:

Because it is very different to plan a choreography especially for a festival [...]. There I only danced. You know, I did nothing, I did not think, this is in my text. Because this was something I always felt very strongly in your lessons: to listen to ourselves and to do what we feel like, what one's own body asks for, without necessarily having to think of the other who is or who is not watching and what they will think. [...] There was a time I even thought of giving up dancing. [...] In your lessons I learned to think of 'no, I do not need to do this in a virtuoso manner, in a beautiful way. I only have to learn how to feel, so it will come out, and what I think is true will come out.'

In Crystian's words, we can glimpse a double movement between thinking of choreographing a solo, which, for him, is somehow a habit, and giving up this known universe to dive into a new space which was experienced, authorised, and even encouraged during lessons. Launching into the unpredictable space of the dancing body in performance, that is, into a situation of being observed.

The double movement consists in giving up a recognised/known and internally institutionalised choreographic place, with its own logic already defined even before the beginning of the process, and, through the reflective arena of performance, create the possibility of reviewing one's own judgment and choose to accept or not the pressure that could be felt from a projection of what we imagine as someone else's judgment.

The two students mentioned so far related their speech to a text. It happens that the task was to present a cell of movement and to deliver, in writing, a reflective report about the process of creation of the work, articulating it with the experience during the semester. Still in the sense of expansion of expressive possibilities through somatic approaches to movement, the experience of two other students is an interesting material to be observed. Felipe is around 18 years old, he is a dancer and urban dance teacher, besides developing work as a clown. In the final conversation after presentations, he comments:

It's funny, isn't it? When the teacher gave us this activity to do, I thought, huh... I can't really write anything, seriously, and each time I try to write... [*tilts head to the side and twists his mouth, in a gesture meant to indicate difficulty.*]

The others laugh. I comment that, in the previous task, he said the same thing and delivered five pages of a very well articulated writing. He agrees:

This is what I was gonna say. That there was that other task and I wrote a lot! I was even surprised...

Amanda's account, coming from street practices in school projects, has the same dimension:

I only want to say two things. Firstly, that I had never danced alone. [...] I thought of a few things I was going to do choreographically, right? And then I thought: 'OK, I know what I'm gonna do.' And then: 'OK, I need music.' And I started to write, write, write... And then: 'OK, I'm only gonna read. [...] Then, I found this song and found what I had written. Then, I looked at it and: 'Jeez, I was not the one who wrote this.' The reason for the two things: the first, that I had never danced alone; and the second is that I don't write. [...] So, I looked at them and said: 'Guys, I was the one who wrote it!'

These reports lead us to inquire about the pedagogical potential of this work with somatic approaches as a way to expand the expressive possibilities in a broad sense, including writing as an expressive resource. By proposing as a task the elaboration of a reflective text *based* on experience, how much of that writing comes to be experienced as a practice that, far from being another language completely disconnected from the act of dancing, becomes an unfolding of body experience?

This idea is in line with a large part of the contemporary discussion (especially in the field of dance and the performing arts) on the relations between theory and practice. In 2000, in her research on Pina Bausch and the Wuppertal Dance Theatre, Ciane Fernandes proposed a connection between these two dimensions in a format that could be represented by the geometric shape of the Möbius Strip.¹¹ About the research methodology adopted then, she writes:

The Möbius Strip is the most appropriate conceptual-spatial representation for the study of Bausch's works. In the method of this research, we did not create a theoretical hypothesis to be proven in practice. In an artistic-scientific format, theory and practice challenged and recreated one another continually and mutually in a process of *writingdancing* and *working through* gestural and verbal language. (Fernandes, 2000, p. 34, emphasis added).

This researcher-artist kept on (even to this day) developing and deepening her investigations in this sense with the group *A-Feto*, of Universidade Federal da Bahia, and, in 2012, formulated the Manifesto of somatic-performative research:

Somatic-performative research applies procedures and principles of Somatic Education and Performance to dilute borders, synthesise multi-referential information in an integrated and sensible way, and establish unpredictable creative connections, with processual results in terms of dynamic and interchangeable performance/writings (Fernandes, 2012, p. 2).

This perspective helps us formulate the idea outlined in the students' reports, guiding the writing proposed in this article, of a peculiar movement between theory and practice in somatic education. Based on this peculiarity, writing is now experienced as practice. Dancing and writing become, thus, different interconnected instances of production of knowledge in dance, without hierarchisation between these instances.

A proposal of somatic-performative research dialogues with several aspects of the experience described in my first semester as a teacher of Body Awareness at UFSM's Dance programme. By working with somatic approaches to movement articulated with creation in dance, new modes of doing are gradually created and emerge from the process itself. The moments to present works (two during the semester, the first of which in a group¹², and the second, described herein, individually) may be understood as performances both in the sense of public presentation of something and in their dimension as reflective arenas (Turner, 1987), that is, frameworks capable of magnifying what was previously invisible to ordinary perception, as is evident in the speeches/performances of the students.

This notion of performance can be extended in order to consider teaching in a broad sense, particularly the relation of teaching in dance, thought as an artistic practice. Beforehand, we distanced ourselves from the current notion which, by thinking lessons as performances, refers more emphatically to the teacher's position as a performer (which would lead to analyses of their competence, efficiency etc.) and the students as audience (which would put them in a position of relative passivity that is not what we are seeking here), according to the critique by professor, actor, and director Gilberto Icle in a chapter of the book *Performance e Educação: (des)territorializações pedagógicas*, organised by professor and researcher of philosophy and aesthetics, Marcelo de Andrade Pereira. In this text, Icle affirms:

In Performance, there is a political meaning given by the form of organisation. Performance is, for its very *raison d'être*,

a collective experience. In this sense, a political dimension is explicit when we experience that break with already institutionalised knowledge and, above all, with knowledge thought as individual processes (Icle, 2013, p. 19).

Still dialoguing with Turner and Schechner, this reflective arena of performance is a framework that not only makes explicit social roles and positions, but repeats or updates them through mechanisms of repetition and improvisation that establish an extraordinary time-space. Thus, performance is always a zone of danger and possibility of transformation of social roles and positions. In this case, this transformation takes place through the body. In Pineau's words, "[...] since performance enhances our attention in relation to our own bodies, it provides us with a way to bring down and break with habits we take for granted" (Pineau, 2013, p. 52).

In this light, regarding teaching as performance involves a collective commitment in the existence of the class as experience, not only accepting, but making explicit the transient nature of the positions of teacher and students. For that to occur, however, it is essential that, as I pointed out previously, the teacher is willing to be in a position of dialogue with the students, giving up their role as a knowledge keeper. To escape the commonplace into which this affirmation may fall, it is important to go back to the body and to experience.

According to Icicle, "[...] Performance is pure experience, it is an action in the world, it is an intervention on people's lives. To intervene, thus, is a political act inasmuch as it ceases to reproduce expected behaviours to produce and invent the unusual" (Icicle, 2013, p. 20). Assuming the centrality of the body in the performative event, I ask: what body are we talking about and how can it find spaces to enable the emergence of these unusual behaviours?

Through Danieli's experiences, finding herself capable of what once seemed impossible and expanding – as well as Felipe and Amanda –, her expressive possibilities, or Crystian, allowing himself to dance in a previously inconceivable way (and, consequently, revisiting his values and desires in relation to that), we may think this somatic approach to movement may operate as a good way to create these possible spaces.

These observations of the artistic and pedagogical potential of such approaches, from the viewpoint of performance, bring us closer

to the proposition of Richard Shusterman, philosopher and teacher of the Feldenkrais Method, of a Somaesthetics:

Somaesthetics, roughly defined, concerns the body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aesthesis*) and creative self-fashioning. As an ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice, it aims to enrich not only our abstract, discursive knowledge of the body but also our lived somatic experience and performance; it seeks to enhance the meaning, understanding, efficacy, and beauty of our movements and of the environments to which our movements contribute and from which they also draw their energies and significance (Shusterman, 2010, p. 131).

The author's proposition is made in the context of an education for the Humanities in a broad sense. Bringing it to our case, dance teaching, it allows us to highlight the political dimensions of this practice, not always evident, even in the discourse of the very professionals who constitute the field. In the students' speeches, either verbal or gestural, composed by sounds or movements, I observe that much of the surprise with this dance approach which places them as agents of their processes is due to an integrated experience of learning relations guided by unidirectional transmission.

Such relations permeate the entire schooling process, especially the one based on the Cartesian episteme, which assumes separation and hierarchisation between the body and the mind (the first in a lower position in relation to the second and subsumed in the process of knowledge production). According to Pineau, in a conventional classroom, the body is registered more like absence. Going back to Bell Hooks' analyses of the bodies of teachers and students in the classroom, she points out:

This antisomatic prejudice is so endemic, affirms Bell Hooks (1994), that seriously questioning the way in which the body is schooled is, in itself, a subversive act equivalent to academic heresy. Schooling systematically domesticates our bodies; it imprisons them in rows of wooden desks, takes away their spontaneity through rigid limitations of time and space and, really, devotes a great deal of energy hiding the fact that we even have bodies (Pineau, 2013, p. 43).

Thus, it is not difficult to think that attention to one's own body is not an acquired habit of students who are able to enter university. It is perhaps less obvious that this is neither an acquired habit of dance practitioners. It is important, at this point, to ask ourselves

to what extent more conventional pedagogies of dance education, structured in a dynamics of imitation of a formal model offered by the teacher, end up taking shape as new imprisonments of the body within socially imposed ideas absorbed in a non-reflective way. The same could occur, in certain situations, when choreographers create moves for dancers to perform. Such pedagogies not only presuppose, but establish relations between an active and a passive poles. Those are, therefore, asymmetrical power relations.

According to Shusterman, recognising our bodily habits is also recognising the feelings of domination and oppression that generated them. Interfering with these habits, therefore, is a way to overcome and re-signify those feelings, constituting for oneself other possibilities for action in the world. For this author, the expansion of bodily possibilities acts directly on the expansion of possibilities of life choices. Ultimately, it is the condition of human freedom itself.

In this text, I drew from my bodily experience with a somatic approach to build the foundations of the comprehension of a body-soma, which moves, in perception, between the dimensions of subject and object, between *being* and *having* a body. I evoked artistic references to think this conception in creative situations of dance. Through the students' experiences, I sought to articulate this idea with the notion of performance as a collectively established reflective framework, to then propose, through commitment with a critical-performative pedagogy, dance lessons through somatic approaches to movement as a place for emancipation and proposition of forms of learning logics guided by a non-authoritarian or totalising paradigm.

In another shift of positions, I am heading to the temporary – and arbitrary – ending of this reflection, presenting Amanda's text (that student who *did not write*) and read by her during the presentation of her movement cell. Her words, moving between the dimensions of the physical and the affective and marking new expressive possibilities, connect us once again to the body-mind unity constituting the complexity of existing and constituting oneself as a subject in the world:



The Knot

I did not know it existed.
I did not know how strong it was.
It is in my chest, but is not the heart.
It is the knot.
Every part of it was touched during lessons.
Now I know it exists.
One part is unknown.
Shoulder blades, touches, and spaces.
Another part is lightness.
It is cries.
Ischia, tiredness, backbone, restlessness, vertebrae.
It's despair and relief.
It's Longing.
It's Sadness.
By not being able to give a voice to it in these nineteen
years of life, it has become the owner.
It found an exit door and accesses it all Wednesday
mornings.
A maelstrom of mixed, contradictory, and strange feelings.
Intense.
Inside me there is another self.
There is the knot.

Notes

¹ Writing this article would not have been possible without the collaboration of students from the course of Body Awareness of UFSM's Dance undergraduate programme. I thank all for their availability and trust and especially Danieli, Crystian, Amanda, and Felipe, for generously allowing me to use their testimonials and performances as material for reflection. I would also like to thank Letícia Nascimento Gomes and Caroline Turchiello for reading and making comments about this text, and the exchanges that go beyond their boundaries. To my teacher colleagues and partners, these experimentations owe a lot to your support: Gisela Biancalana, Sílvia Wolff, Marcelo de Andrade Pereira, Márcia Feijó, and Tatiana Wonsik Recomenpa Joseph (who, in addition to the endless exchanges we have found together, had the generosity to reread and propose changes in this material).

² Currently Michel is a teacher with a degree from the Escuela de Técnica Alexander de Buenos Aires, and coordinates the Espaço Thames – Arte y Técnica Alexander in that city.

³ I have worked with this idea of research and writing since my doctorate in Social Anthropology, concluded in 2010. At that time, by researching the politics of Capoeira Angola in the Brazil-France movement, I included my education in this bodily practice as the basis for the ethnographic method. This experimentation extended from field work to the process of ethnographic writing, constituting what I then called *anthropology from the body*. See Gravina (2010).

⁴ Here I join a movement within dance teaching which proposes the notion of a teacher-artist, both in the university context and in basic education. This debate is already quite advanced and may be followed through Marques (2001), Sastre (2009), and Gonçalves, Briones, Parra, and Vieira (2012).

⁵ I am referring to a person who was already introduced using only their first name when my proximity to them would make unnecessary the use of their complete name and artificial the use of only their surname. When I write the bibliographic reference to texts from the same person, I follow the standards of the Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas (ABNT).

⁶ This influence is not the object of this article. I merely highlight the aspects that interfere directly on the reflection I seek to develop here. For a detailed contextualisation of this way of thinking-making dance coming from the so-called post-modern generation of American dance, see especially Banes (1987), Novack (1990), Lepecki (2006), Rosa (2010), and Icle and Rosa (2013).

⁷ In restoring traditions and making explicit collaborative networks in dance to which I belong, it is interesting to mention that Michel learned about this procedure through me and Dani Boff, when we taught the workshop *Treinamento para um Abraço* [Training for a Hug] as part of her project *Corpo como Cruzamento de Intensidades*. The procedure was transmitted to us by Lisa Nelson, one of the representatives of American post-modern dance, during a one-week workshop at Sala Crisantempo, in São Paulo.

⁸ For an overview of the conformation of Somatic Education as a field of knowledge, see Fortin (1999).

⁹ It is worth to punctuate the interdisciplinary nature of Somatic Education as a field of knowledge. Thomas Hanna, for example, was a philosopher and somatic educator, and developed a perspective based on the combination of philosophy's theoretical apparatus and the practice of somatic education to build a reflection on body and world through existentialist phenomenology.

¹⁰ Lying down on the floor, with the soles of the feet planted firmly on the floor, knees bent, elbows on the floor and hands on the ribs. This position was considered great by Alexander for it allowed minimum engagement of tension and consequent economy of energy.

¹¹ "Mathematician and astronomer A.F. Möbius (1790-1868) discovered a surface, which he described as not having 'another side,' for example, a surface from the side of which one can get to the other side without crossing an extremity" (Laban, 1974, p. 98 apud Fernandes, 2000, p. 34). This figure is similar to a horizontal eight made with a single strip, whose right side becomes its reverse and vice versa.

¹² This first work consisted in presenting performatively the comprehension of the group of selected parts of the book *A Dança*, by Klauss Vianna. According to the students' responses, this dynamic of reading-performance-debate led both to the understanding of the theory and enhanced the articulation between reading and practice that had been experienced in class.

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