

Somatic Approaches in the Educational Formation in Dance: from the dryness of the background to curriculum as cartography

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ABSTRACT – Somatic Approaches in the Educational Formation in Dance: from the dryness of the background to curriculum as cartography – This article analyzes the relationships and contributions of somatic practices in the training in dance, in higher education context, based on a study between Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro. The main reflections will be presented, which emphasize the actual concept of Somatics and its possibilities of articulation in the teaching of dance in higher education. In our research, a coexistence of the fields is presented based on two main possibilities: the dryness of the background – Godard’s (2006) concept, which would characterize a request from Somatics in a punctual or utilitarian way –; and another, in which the interaction takes place in such a way that the whole gear of teaching and learning is modified.

Keywords: **Somatics. Dance. Teaching-learning. Performativity. Embodiment.**

RÉSUMÉ – Approches Somatiques dans l’Enseignement de la Danse: de l’arrière-plan stérile au programme comme cartographie – Cet article analyse les relations et les apports des pratiques somatiques dans la formation en danse dans un contexte d’enseignement supérieur à partir d’une étude entre Lisbonne et Rio de Janeiro. Les principales réflexions seront présentées, à partir desquelles le concept actuel d’approche Somatique et ses possibilités d’articulation dans l’enseignement supérieur de la danse seront soulignés. Dans notre recherche, la coexistence des champs est présentée à partir de deux possibilités principales: l’arrière-plan stérile – concept de Godard (2006), qui caractériserait une demande somatique ponctuelle, accessoire ou utilitaire –; et une autre, dans laquelle l’interaction se produit de telle façon que tout le rouage de l’enseignement-apprentissage est modifié.

Mots-clés: **Somatique. Danse. Enseignement-apprentissage. Performativité. Corporéité.**

RESUMO – Abordagens Somáticas na Formação em Dança: da seca do fundo ao currículo como cartografia – Este artigo analisa as relações e contribuições das práticas somáticas na formação em dança no contexto do ensino superior a partir de um estudo entre Lisboa e o Rio de Janeiro. Serão apresentadas as principais reflexões, das quais se enfatizam o próprio conceito de Somática na atualidade e suas possibilidades de articulação no ensino superior de dança. Em nossa pesquisa, percebeu-se uma coexistência dos campos a partir de duas possibilidades principais: uma seca do fundo – conceito de Godard (2006), que caracterizaria uma requisição da Somática de forma pontual ou utilitária –; e outra, na qual a interação se dá de tal forma que toda engrenagem do ensino-aprendizagem é modificada.

Palavras-chave: **Somática. Dança. Ensino-aprendizagem. Performatividade. Corporalização.**

The encounter of Dance with Somatics changed the teaching-learning of dance. This dialogue between the two fields claimed respect for the anatomical limits of the body, stimulated the exploration of new movement patterns and questioned pedagogical models and conceptions about body practice. However, despite the growing *corpus* of research on Somatics, as it is possible to notice by the proliferation of works especially in the last decade, it is still important to ask: how Somatics has been developing considering both the scope of researchers and their practices and the academic environment? Beyond it, which dance education courses consider the somatic field in their teaching-learning? What are the importance and the impact of this intersection?

These questions instigated us to conduct an investigation¹ in two cities on two different continents to examine the similarities and differences between the approaches of each teaching context. In the chosen cities, Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro, four institutions of higher education in dance were identified, two in each country: the Faculdade de Motricidade Humana (FMH) and the Escola Superior de Dança (ESD) in Portugal and the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and the Faculdade Angel Vianna (FAV) in Brazil. The chosen cities considered the proposer's experience as a faculty member who, from 2011 to 2017, was a professor at FAV, in Rio de Janeiro, and between 2018 and 2019, at ESD, in Lisbon. The designation by centers of higher-level education relates to the fact that these places form, in addition to dancers, future teachers.

Thus, this research started from a qualitative approach with methodological perspectives of Comparative Education and Cartography as a research method, and was guided by four types of procedures: documental collection, class observation, interviews and questionnaire survey. *Class observation* was dedicated to curricular units that could be sources for this study, like dance techniques (classical, modern, contemporary), specific classes of somatic contents and other subjects that involved the perception of the body, like Anatomy, Kinesiology and the like (see Table 1). At this stage, it was possible to perceive the pedagogical processes, as well as identify possible intersections of Dance and other fields.

	Inst.	Title of the lessons attended	Date (D/M/Y)
RIO DE JANEIRO	1	FAV Improvisation and Body Expression I	26/08/2019
	2	FAV Classical Ballet I	28/08/2019
	3	FAV Anatomy applied to dance	28/08/2019
	4	FAV Contemporary Dance - Technique and Corporeality	29/08/2019
	5	FAV Physiology applied to dance	29/08/2019
	6	FAV Contemporary Dance - Body, line and flow	05/09/2019
	7	FAV Contemporary Dance - Body and Space	16/09/2019
	8	FAV Improvisation and Body Expression II	16/09/2019
	9	FAV Classical Ballet III	17/09/2019
	10	FAV Classical Ballet V	17/09/2019
	11	UFRJ Dance Technique A - Movement	02/09/2019
	12	UFRJ General Dance Technique	02/09/2019
	13	UFRJ Introduction to the study of corporeity A	03/09/2019
	14	UFRJ Introduction to Dance Technique A	04/09/2019
	15	UFRJ Introduction to Dance Technique B	04/09/2019
	16	UFRJ Dance Technique F	05/09/2019
	17	UFRJ Anatomy for Physical Education	10/09/2019
	18	UFRJ Dance Technique G	11/09/2019
	19	UFRJ Introduction to the study of corporeity B	12/09/2019
LISBON	20	FMH Theatrical Dance Technique I - Contemporary Dance	04/12/2019
	21	FMH Theatrical Dance Technique II - Contemporary Dance	12/12/2019
	22	FMH Body Wellness Techniques	12/12/2019
	23	FMH Theatrical Dance Technique I - Classical Dance	13/12/2019
	24	FMH Anatomophysiology I	21/02/2020
	25	FMH Theatrical Dance Technique IV - Contemporary Dance	27/02/2020
	26	FMH Theatrical Dance Technique II - Contemporary Dance	03/03/2020
	27	FMH Kinesiology	09/03/2020
	28	FMH Expression and Communication Practices II	09/03/2020
	29	ESD Contemporary Dance Technique II	04/03/2020
	30	ESD Contemporary Dance Technique II	06/03/2020
	31	ESD Contemporary Dance Technique IV	06/03/2020
	32	ESD Kinesiology	10/03/2020
	33	ESD Classical Dance Technique II	11/03/2020
	34	ESD Contemporary Dance Technique VI	11/03/2020
	35	ESD Contemporary Dance Technique VI	12/03/2020
	36	ESD Classical Dance Technique VI	12/03/2020

Table 1 – Assignment of classes attended according to city, institution, and date.

Source: Prepared by the author.

In turn, the *interviews*, conducted with the teachers and coordinators/directors, allowed the exploration on our theme from the point of view of the faculty and the coordination (see Table 2). In the case of the inter-

views with directors, the objectives included the characterization of the education contexts in terms of the historical trajectory of the institution, pedagogical guidelines and possible interfaces with the somatic field. The interviews with the teachers intended to understand the academic and artistic trajectories, as well as to assess the didactic-methodological options and possible somatic references.

	Inst.	Interviewee	Date (D/M/Y)
RIO DE JANEIRO	1 UFRJ	Cláudia Millás	25/11/2019
	2 UFRJ	Letícia Teixeira	24/11/2019 and 13/12/2019
	3 UFRJ	Lídia Laranjeira	13/01/2020
	4 UFRJ	Maria Calfa	30/03/2020
	5 UFRJ	Sílvia Soter	28/06/2021
	6 UFRJ	Tatiana Damasceno (coordination)	10/03/2020
	7 FAV	Ana Bevilaqua (coordination)	24/03/2020
	8 FAV	Esther Weitzman	05/09/2019
	9 FAV	Helena Matriciano	11/11/2019
	10 FAV	Luciana Ponso	17/02/2020
	11 FAV	Márcia Feijó (coordination)	10/02/2020
	12 FAV	Marise Reis	05/09/2019
	13 FAV	Renata Versiani	04/12/2019
	14 FAV	Vanessa Mattos	29/08/2019
LISBON	15 ESD	António Pereira	01/04/2020
	16 ESD	Edgard Fortes	10/03/2020
	17 ESD	Madalena Xavier (coordination)	26/06/2021
	18 ESD	Margarida Belo Costa	03/04/2020
	19 ESD	Joana Braga (fictitious name)	31/03/2020
	20 ESD	Vitor Garcia	01/04/2020
	21 FMH	Alice Souza (fictitious name)	17/03/2020
	22 FMH	Ana Macara	25/06/2021
	23 FMH	Augusto Gil	09/03/2020
	24 FMH	Cecília de Lima	19/02/2020
	25 FMH	Daniel Tertius	22/01/2021
	26 FMH	Luís Xarez (coordination)	01/02/2021
	27 FMH	Rita Rato	05/02/2020
	28 C.E.M	Sofia Neuparth	06/07/2021 and 8/07/2021

Table 2 – Designation of respondents according to city, institution, and date.
Source: Prepared by the author.

In general, we found four educational institutions that weave different relationships with Somatics. As will be shown, each school is an *ecosystem* that creates and perpetuates conceptions of body and dance. In the following, we

will analyze the main issues that stood out, such as the undisciplined perspectives on Somatics nowadays, what is the space and what is its role in dance educational formation. This analysis, however, will not make a direct reference to its enunciator. As some of the interviewees chose to remain anonymous, the identity of all of them will be respected. We search for anchor points in the questions that recur and discuss the main issues together, without necessarily tying authorship to them. The asterisk symbol [*] will be added at the end of the quotations. The full transcription of all interviews as well as further information on this research can be found in Magalhães (2023).

Whisper down the lane effect: is every dance somatic?

After several decades of the creation of the somatic field by Hanna (1980), some principles of somatic practices are highly widespread in the arts and other media, as authors such as Eddy (2016), Fortin (2011), Grebler and Pizarro (2019), and Lester (2017) point out. However, not all teachers working with somatic approaches have educational formation in a specific technique. Some practices and ideas have been disseminated over time, and currently, populate a benchmark of work that uses them as a parameter. Raquel Cavalcanti (2019, p. 192) states that:

In this case, somatic ideas and abilities are eventually disseminated thanks to cross-pollination, that is, when an individual's hybrid knowledge merges and reciprocally influences the ideas and practices of others within the same community. Over time, this constant mixing of somatic ideas and practices with inherited or innovative contemporary dance practices creates a constantly developing platform of references and study practices.

What on the one hand has a great potential to disseminate and renew somatic approaches, on the other hand, ends up causing what we call the *whisper down the line effect*. This metaphor intends to demonstrate that something can be transformed to the point of losing its original meaning. That is, after decades of miscegenation, many times it is not clear where each thing comes from or what the original proposition was.

This effect ended up generating, besides the trivialization and an undue and uncritical appropriation of the term, perceptions about the field excessively vague or generic. This is reflected in the speech of some interviewed teachers, who state that: “all dance is somatic”*; “any kind of mobilization

and immobilization is a somatic practice”*; “even if we are bedridden, we are doing a somatic practice when we feel that we are breathing or feel cold”*; “dance is intrinsically somatic, by the very definition of what somatism is”*.

If all dance is somatic, if everything is somatic, then nothing is somatic. There are elementary notions and foundations of these practices that must be considered (see Magalhães, 2022). Every dance has the potential to be taught somatically, just as it has the potential to be taught mechanically and authoritatively. It is not because dance is an activity developed by the body that this makes it an intrinsically somatic practice. This field was developed precisely to differentiate the *soma* from the *body*, in which the soma is the (living) body perceived from a first-person point of view. This means that, to be considered somatic, in addition to meeting the fundamentals of the field, a class should take into account both objective and subjective knowledge regarding the experience of its practitioners.

In general, there is a reductionism that ends up limiting Somatics by making this term a synonym of *body consciousness*. As one of the interviewed teachers noted: “[...] people are opening the range of Somatics in a very broad way. All you have to do is call attention to the parts of the body, understand that it is necessary to be conscious, feel and perceive the body, and you would be giving Somatic Education”*. In the same way, another teacher questions:

Now everybody is somatic. Why? [...] I am impressed with this place of appropriation of Somatic Education. Everybody puts inside the bag, or the open flowered field of Somatic Education, everything that is not in the constituted technique*.

This difficulty in having clarity may be related to the fact that this is “a field under construction, which is always alive”*, as another interviewee reminds us, “it is not something closed”*. Besides, because it is something that relates to experience and subjectivity, it is not easy to express it with words:

It is difficult for me to talk about somatic techniques. Somatic techniques are lived. There are many techniques that you only understand because you have practiced them. If you haven't practiced them, it is very difficult to understand. In fact, I think that's one of the problems. If you're not doing it, if you're not involved, it's hard to understand what's going on. Sometimes it's hard to explain in words the importance of these techniques*.

Somehow, issues related to perception are slippery to language. Ginot (2010) mentions a theoretical delay related to Somatics, as well as in other issues concerning body practices. This delay does not mean an absence of discourse, but portrays the difficulty of expressing, through verbal language, something related to experience and subjectivity. Although Somatics is characterized as a living experience that goes through us, its materiality is of the order of poetics, corporeality, and expressiveness, which does not translate into a metric that can be measured or quantified. In short, Somatics is difficult to explain and understand, but easy to feel and perceive.

Undisciplined perspectives

How do teachers characterize Somatics, then? How can it relate to dance?

As will be shown, there is still a conflict to characterize Somatics. Each enunciator, based on their own singular experiences, seem to assume what we call undisciplined perspectives about the field, in which we borrow the vision of Somatics as an expanded interdisciplinary field, as defended by Pizarro (2020, p. 185). In this view, indiscipline is understood as the abolition of disciplinary frames, and we realize that, “since it is so undisciplined, Somatics slips through our fingers when not even a capture gesture is directed to it”.

In this sense, one of the interviewed teachers reminds us about the importance of thinking about updates: “[...] the question is what Somatics is today and what is dance today. And what dance are we talking about, what Somatic thought are we talking about. Because dance today is different from 30 years ago”*. She adds: “[...] I like to think of the somatic field as a set of approaches that deal with the body in its perceptive, motor, cognitive, creative and expressive aspects. The body in situation, the body in a context”*.

In a complementary way, another teacher shares an interpretation of Somatics that highlights its perceptive aspects and reflects that, despite being founded on an interiority, it is not closed on itself, but rather expands into contact with the outside world:

Somatics enables an intrapersonal knowledge, inside ourselves. It is from this integration with my own body, with bones and joints, from this fine listening to my own body, that I can listen to the other, that I can listen to the world. Therefore, for me, Somatics is an education for human relations because it starts from a body

that stops to listen to itself. And, if it stops to listen to itself, it will have a keener ear for time, space, the other, and for what is happening*.

The vision of these two professors relates Somatics as a system that deals with the living body in its relational drive with the other and with the external environment. Authors such as Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1992) or Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch (1993) perceive Ecology as an autopoietic organization² of structural and social couplings with the world in which the individual and the environment are always connected in a dynamic and biologically grounded process. In this conception, the human mind is *incorporated* into every organism and situated in the world, that is, the body scheme is not an object of consciousness or a partial representation of the body, but an integrated set of sensorimotor processes that is co-dependent of the environment. According to the authors, perception does not consist in the passive capture of an external world, but rather in an active attitude that has the effect of a subject and an environment that are in constant relation and are coupled and co-produced.

In this perspective on Ecology, Tim Ingold (2010) created the concept of *taskcape*, in opposition to the concept of *landscape*, as a resource to include history and culture in the ecological paradigm. The author uses the term *taskcape* to highlight the dynamics of landscapes. It is like an experience of traveling through a field of intertwined tasks, in which the field is the *taskcape*. Ingold compares this notion to a cookbook. Recipes are like stories; they have a narrative structure that, like the *taskcape*, does not generate a transmitted knowledge: “It is a knowledge that grew in me as I followed the same paths as my predecessors and under their direction” (Ingold, 2020, p. 30). The recipe, like the *taskcape*, is not knowledge, but it opens the way for knowledge.

As he states, “[...] history, understood as the movement by which people create their environments and thus themselves, is but a continuation of the evolutionary process” (Ingold, 2010, p. 17). By inhabiting the world, we are surrounded by the multiple historical and cultural traits that have been incorporated into the landscape, which are not a human prerogative, but of all beings that inhabit the world. In this sense, Fortin (2011, p. 37) states his belief “[...] that a practice of awareness about the self can help in a

transformation of the relational dynamics with our surroundings. The development of sensitivity is then seen as a springboard to reach the other”.

Another perspective demonstrated by the interviewed teachers considers somatic as an *approach*, that is, this field would relate to pedagogy and *how* to teach rather than *what* to teach. From this point of view, Somatics is understood “[...] not as a field of action, but as a way of operating. And, as a way of operating, it is within any area, any class”*. Alternatively, as said by another teacher, “[...] [the somatic practices] are comprehensive and are basic principles that also teach a way of being”*. Or, as defined by another interviewee, we could think of them as “attitudes”* called upon during a class.

GINOT (2010) reminds us that the intersection of these areas modified to a certain extent the teaching-learning of dance, by putting in emphasis an active-exploratory pedagogy that opposes to a pedagogical order of model and form. According to Fortin (1999), a first structural modification relates to the fact that dance technique classes are traditionally teacher-focused, while in Somatics it is clearly student-focused. This means that in dance practices with a somatic approach, knowledge is built on each individual’s own experience and the student is invited to take an active position in the teaching-learning process. This autonomy is not restricted to dance techniques. As one of the interviewees commented, somatic practices promote *availability* and *body sensibility*, called *skills* by the teacher, which would be transversal to teaching-learning in general. However, placing Somatics in such a broad and relative position contributes to reinforce the trivialization of the contents in which these practices operate. Somatics can be transversal to any technique; however, one cannot forget that as a field of knowledge it has its principles and foundations.

Another teacher reminds us of the awareness of *presence*, as named by him, and the expansion of one’s own movement repertoire. Moreover, he reminds us of the inclusive potential of Somatics, which, by summoning other bodies and other gestures, expands what we see as dance and promotes a more democratic access so that more people can dance:

It is the somatic techniques that allow us to have a somewhat more acute awareness of presence, of what we can call presence. At the same time, they allow in some way to feel more than think the origin of movement, the origin of this driving force of the body. [...] Moreover, it is through somatic practices that we, for

example, can broaden the range of movement of the performers themselves. In theatrical dance, thanks to somatic practices, we could also summon other bodies, different bodies and movements. Therefore, somatic practices themselves have this inclusive power, which you would hardly find in classical dance, in a Cunningham technique, or even in a Graham technique*.

However, we can ask: do somatic issues refer to all dances? This problematization was addressed by one of the teachers and is related to decolonial thought. According to her report, during a seminar, a dancer from Afro-Brazilian dance considered Somatics dispensable, since, for him, this integration would already be present in the very gestural construction of that dance. The teacher questions:

Maybe Somatics can even be understood as a response to something that was once divided in a Eurocentric, white perspective, and, because it was divided back there, it needs to reconnect up front. It is also important for us to be honest and understand how this term appears, how this field names itself and it names itself via North America and Europe*.

In a contextualization of the origin of the term *somatic*, we can remember that in the 1970s, Thomas Hanna, an American philosopher and academic, was inspired by the work of Moshe Feldenkrais, a Ukrainian-Israeli physicist and judo master. Hanna was co-opted by Feldenkrais' proposal regarding the health and integration of the body and sought to unify the various methods he recognized as similar under the term *somatic*.

However, many traditional practices from native peoples and eastern cultures have a holistic understanding of the human being without necessarily adopting a name to adjective them as such. Even some practices that we could recognize within the somatic project do not adopt this denomination, as is the case of the Angel Vianna Methodology, the Klaus Vianna Technique, or the *Anatomie Pour le Mouvement* (Anatomy for Movement) and the *Geste Anatomique* (Anatomical Gesture), these last by Blandine Calais-Germain. However, the recognition of other systems, methods and techniques does not invalidate Somatics as a field. Thomas Hanna (1980) created an epistemological dislocation opening possibilities for the expansion of a new paradigm.

From the point of view of higher education in dance, there seems to be a consensus about the importance of Somatics, although the space given to these practices varies enormously according to each context. For some in-

interviewees “[...] body consciousness is the basis for the understanding of any dance technique or experience”*, also, “Somatics is a *sine qua non* condition for the educational formation of the contemporary dancer”*. For others, however, Somatics plays a role “complementary to what is the training of dance technique”. These two visions present a great difference: while in the first one Somatics assumes a central and essential role, in the second one this role is only peripheral or secondary.

As a transversal approach to bodily practices, in one of the institutions, a teacher shared that, due to the educational proposal of that specific course, the intersection between dance and Somatics would be a condition given *a priori*: “Here, I think it is impossible to talk about a dance that is not connected to Somatics, because of the founder”*. In other words, the prerogative of this education degree course would intrinsically include the field of Somatics in its guidelines due to the pedagogical proposals of the course.

For Fortin (2011, p. 31), despite the recognition of the relevance of including Somatics in artistic educational formation, its presence seems “[...] always fragile, unstable and threatened, because it does not participate in the same way of the construction of the glorious, invincible and productive body of the dominant discourse”. For the author, the institutionalized practices of the professional milieu still often function according to an “[...] authoritarian pedagogy, which promotes docile bodies in the service of an aesthetic image that does not serve the dancers’ well-being”. Despite a committed attitude towards teaching-learning and the dance profession, divergences manifest themselves regarding the means to reach a certain goal. In a somatic perspective, to facilitate a global body reorganization, the dancer can adopt different strategies, even if they seem contradictory: control can be obtained by abandoning weight, relaxation can be used to find strength, amplitude can be obtained by working below the limits, visualization, in order to improve motor execution, slow tempo can be a resource to improve a *Allegro*, and so on.

However, as another teacher reminds us, it is fundamental “[...] to be careful not to bring Somatics to a place of universal panacea. Put [Somatics] in the place of the possible”*:

It used to be believed that ballet was the basis for everything. If you did ballet, you could do anything else. However, ballet is no longer the basis for everything. Would Somatics be the basis for everything? Actually, these methods are about gesture and you can't do an hour of Holistic Gymnastics, get up and dance. You change the floor plan, the type of coordination support and then you have to have a movement functionality*.

The risk of putting Somatics as a universal panacea is related to what Pizarro (2020) calls an *aesthetic of asepsis*: seeking, at any cost, a neutral body, without marks or records of past experiences. However, in the somatic experience it is not about erasing past experiences or old body patterns, but about creating new options and alternatives, expanding the body's capacity to move, feel, and express itself.

In view of the undisciplined perspectives that we observed in our investigation, we can further question: what would define the role of Somatics in a dance educational formation? Or what would be the impact of these practices if they assume a central and essential place? What if they were only as a complement, in a secondary role?

What is the project?

To the previous questions, we add the question of a teacher who asks: should we work with the somatic field in an integrated way with dance or study it separately? We propose to answer with another question posed by an interviewee who asks: "what is the project"?

If my project wants to go deeper into somatic education, don't mix it, because it takes time, because diving into this experience of a conception of corporeality is neither superficial nor fast. If the place of the project is to know deeply, to experiment, to know your own body related to Somatics: go deeper. If the place is to teach a technique and, in the construction of this technique teaching, elements from a method that you dominate are brought to facilitate the technical work, mix it*.

This means that the different possibilities of interaction between the fields promote different results. The study dedicated individually to somatic practices can promote the elaboration of varied perspectives on gesture and an expansion of the perceptual and kinesthetic vocabulary. For example, in one of the testimonies, a teacher shared that she offered a course called *Somatic Movements* in an educational degree course in Dance. It is important to say that she was an external teacher to the institution and proposed an

extra course, with a duration of twenty classes, which essentially addressed fundamentals of Somatics. For her, in this perception-focused class, students felt freer to explore, without worrying about movement form or dance technique. In her words:

What they realized was that there was a time to feel, to think about what they felt, without having that concern of building a dance product. They felt it was a surplus value to have that space where they didn't have to worry so much about a product or the aesthetic issue, or producing a movement that was beautiful, and they could dedicate themselves more to their body, to discover their body. [...] What I realize is that in these classes, they feel, in some way, freer to explore their body and they have time for this exploration without having so much pressure*.

During the course, a student discovered that the teacher was also a teacher of dance techniques at another school and was embarrassed: "How horrible! I've been there doing things... I don't even know what I've been doing!"*. That is, this student felt free in the somatic practices class to experiment. She performed gestures and movements that, for her, could not be considered dance, since they did not follow the rules or standards of what she understood to be dance. This example demonstrates that somatic practices act in a gestural decongestion and foster the expansion of perception and movement potential, since both are sides of the same coin. When worked separately, that is, with adequate time for students to devote to questions of consciousness and perception, somatic practices produce this deconstruction effect.

Let us return to our initial question about the role of somatic practices in higher education, as one teacher summarizes: "what interests us is to think about which dances, which perspectives of Somatics and what kind of bridges we want to build"*. The place that Somatics assumes in a given educational formation is closely related to the concept of dance, with the approach under which technique is seen and, more broadly, with the possibilities of who is authorized to dance.

What is dance? What is technique? Who can dance?

These seemingly basic and trivial questions can be crucial to weave an analysis from different contexts. We want to understand how the interaction between dance and somatic happens, but what does each degree of education program understand by dance?

This answer is often not explicit and, despite not having a closed and objective definition, it interferes in the choices each institution makes regarding pedagogical and artistic proposals. At the same time, it influences the teachers' lesson plans and the methodologies used and, later on, it may interfere in the choices of future graduated professionals. What is dance delimits the possibilities and dictates the priorities in the decisions about the pedagogical project and the curricular plan. That is, if an institution prioritizes an aesthetic style or a technique as ideal, it will prioritize contents that relate to the principles of the chosen model. Besides, the bias that determines what dance is will influence the hiring of teachers that dialogue with this profile. In short, the point from which each school sees dance will determine the type of education offered and will propagate a certain vision of the art.

In the interviews with teachers and coordinators, the vision of what dance is, even if implicit, was contrasted in statements like “[...] everybody can dance and manifest themselves through dance”* and “there are bodies that are easier to work with”*. The belief that everyone can dance establishes a relationship with dance as a means of expression. On the other hand, the conception that there are bodies more easily covers a vision of what dance is, in which there is a model or a form to be reached.

In short, dance is directly related to the approach and meaning given to the notion of technique. For the ancient Greeks and Romans, as Ingold (2000) notes, art and technology had the same meaning and were characterized as skillful practices. This meaning is already contained in the very word *ars* or *artem* (art), derived from Latin, and in the word that originated technology, *tekhné*, from classical Greek. Etymologically, therefore, art and *tekhné* would be related to the same meaning associated with the work of the artisan.

However, as time went on, what we saw was the separation not only between art and technology, but also between art and craft. Craft was relegated to the merely technical or mechanical execution of predetermined operations, and art, elevated to a place of experimentation, creativity, and imagination. “Where technological operations are predetermined, art is spontaneous; where the manufacture of artifacts is a process of mechanical replication, art is the creative production of novelty” (Ingold, 2000, p. 18). In this perspective, technique stands in opposition to thought, creativity, and spontaneity. As in Ingold’s anecdote (2000), the pianist, despite his perfect technique, if he lacks soul or intelligence, will have his performance doomed to become something artificial, shallow and worthless.

Marcel Mauss was the first to propose the notion of body techniques, understood as “the ways in which men, from society to society, in a traditional way, know how to use their bodies” (Mauss, 2003, p. 407). In this interpretation, body techniques, recognized in their plurality, are identified as something imposed by societies to individuals, “human standards of human dressage” (Mauss, 2003, p. 411). Each society would have its different techniques, from birth to death: techniques of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, techniques of movement, etc. Mauss (2003, p. 407) defines the body as “[...] the first and most natural instrument of man. Or more exactly, without talking about instrument: the first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, of man, is his body”.

This notion of body as instrument is used in approaches in which the body is seen as an object that must be polished and dominated in order to achieve success in an art considered ephemeral. In this type of teaching-learning, guided by a mechanistic vision, technique is perceived as a type of physical training or dressage.

Mechanicism, as defined by Dianne Woodruff (1999, p. 32), is the view that every phenomenon in the universe can be explained according to physics or chemistry: “This view provides the basis for technological and homogenous cultures that value everything measurable, weighed, and represented through numbers”. In dance taught in a mechanistic way, exercises and sequences are repeated countless times until they become automatic in a mechanical activity from which students expect to learn certain movements and acquire certain skills, such as spinning, balancing, and dominating foot articu-

lation. This vision of teaching privileges virtuosity (the mastery of form), quantity (the highest, fastest, and greatest), and automatism (repeating until the sequence is memorized). In other words, a technique brings together a set of instructions in the form of dance steps, organized sequentially, from the easiest to the most difficult. As Helena Katz (2009, p. 26) defines it:

Common sense designates as technique a practical activity, associated with the improvement of some skill of the body, which is immediately treated as a mechanical activity, to be repeated and without association with mental life. A pure doing, a practical activity, related to the body – and here it is already worth underlining that such understanding of body is that of body separated from mind.

This kind of understanding can give rise to a monolingual discourse, according to which individuals with different bodies must understand that learning to dance is the same as learning to reproduce a dance step in an effort to mimic its codified form. According to this thought, the acquisition of the techniques presumes yet a *forgetfulness*. Once dominated, they should become automatic in order to avoid thinking about the movement before performing it. Unfortunately, this kind of approach fails in teaching-learning in-depth body perception. As Woodruff (1999, p. 38) points out:

Unfortunately many dance techniques are little more than a series of exercises and mechanical sequences, which propose a vocabulary of ‘things to be done’, but which often fail to teach in-depth body perception, which is fundamental for the apprehension of a qualitative technical vocabulary.

On the other hand, another way to understand the technique would be, as put by Jussara Miller and Cora Laszlo (2016, p. 154), to understand it as an *investigation process*. It would be a set of several procedures that would not be based on dichotomies such as right and wrong, better or worse, but that would be related to “[...] processes of acting for the construction of a scenic body that does not reduce the person to an instrument to be polished, but refers her to the soma, to the individual who works with the autonomy of a researcher in readiness and investigation”. In this kind of approach, technique is seen as a *means* and not as an *end* to be achieved.

In this perspective, the notion of technique approaches the idea of a skillful practice (*skills*) with the environment, as Ingold (2000; 2010) suggests. Technique would be the result of a dynamic and relational process, in

which “[...] knowledge consists primarily of skills and that every human being is a center of perceptions and agency in a field of practice” (Ingold, 2010, p. 7).

Once acquired, the technique belongs to the subject and leaves marks on the body, like an imprint. An acrobat will always be an acrobat, whether he is in the circus or in the supermarket. Technique accompanies him ingrained in his gestures and movements, making it impossible not to recognize that he belongs to a gestural culture that has specific movements that run through his sitting, moving, or walking. “Thus, ‘style’ commits itself in and through the dancer’s body through his knowledge and convictions about the philosophy of the body” (Louppe, 2012, p. 81).

Having said this, it is important to emphasize that each conception of dance hides a vision about technique and, in the same way, all techniques contain an aesthetic. That is, any technique carries within itself, explicitly or implicitly, a worldview. However, as one of the teachers points out, some points of view are exclusive and do not dialogue among themselves:

One thing that worries me enormously and is still a very frivolous and superficial discussion: each of these perspectives has an idea of the body behind it. People sometimes put many things together on the surface, but by the time you dig deeper, the understandings of corporeality are not the same and this is perhaps something to think about: people do various educational formations, but they look at the other through what lens? Because there are lenses that are incompatible*.

In other words, there may be a certain incompatibility of languages: while Somatics proposes a holistic vision of the body and of learning, certain approaches to dance propose parameters that are opposite. That is to say, even if an increasing number of dancers seek somatic practice classes in a complementary way, this does not necessarily mean an automatic transposition of this practice to a more careful dance itself.

However, dance should not be analyzed as a simple object. “It must be considered, on the contrary, a reading of the world itself, a structure of deliberated information, an instrument of enlightenment on contemporary consciousness” (Louppe, 2012, p. 35). Each technique, and therefore each aesthetic, hides an ideal of body, and sometimes it is not possible to integrate views that bring into play opposing or excluding notions. In the same

way, it is not possible to think of a universal and absolute technique that serves all bodies, just as it is not possible to think of a body that adapts to all techniques. That is, there is a plurality when it comes to bodies and techniques, as put by Mauss (2003) with the concept of body *techniques* (plural).

This question leads us to the last point of this topic, which starts from the understanding that the comprehension about dance and the approach to technique will also determine who can dance. It is believed, as some teachers have said, that “dancing is a way of being and feeling the world”* or “dancing is exploring the body in various ways”*, it does not make sense the statement, also by the faculty, that “this course does not form dancers”*. Clearly, we are dealing with different views about what dance is and what technique is, which suggests, consequently, a demarcation about who can dance.

One of the teachers interviewed shared that, for many years, she had believed that she did not have a body suitable for dance, especially because she worked with classical ballet. “I came from a generation that suffered a lot from this stereotype of the ideal body for dance. I myself suffered, I spent a lot of time believing that I didn’t have a suitable body, mainly because I worked with ballet”*. She complements:

Today, obviously, I believe that everybody can dance, but it wasn’t like that. This was a thought that changed, not only in me, but in many of us. When I felt it in my own body, a capacity for change and acceptance, that’s when I started to think that for everybody it would be possible, but first I experienced it in my own body*.

Technique is also a historical manifestation marked by cultural aspects of the society in which it is inserted. That is, dance technique is linked to a dynamic of meaning creation that can neither be isolated nor closed in on itself. In a similar way, the educational institutions, in their choices about the perspectives of dance and the approach to artistic making, are inserted in a certain context that, reciprocally, creates and expresses visions about what dance is, what technique is and who can dance.

The body is the consciousness

As one teacher interviewed put it: “I am not conscious of the body. The body is the consciousness”*. If we consider the indivisibility of the individual, that is, if the body and mind are not separated, we should not say that we have body consciousness, as if the consciousness were separated from the body itself and located somewhere other than itself. In this perspective, we can ask: why are classes that propose a study of the body, such as anatomy, kinesiology, and the like, still held mostly in a traditional way? If the body were consciousness, which aspects of anatomical studies would be more important in a dance educational formation?

In our field research, among the classes we attended, the contemporary dance techniques proved to be more permeable to the dialogue with Somatics, even if some of them are still structured within a mechanistic perspective. The classical dance technique classes, on the other hand, are mostly based on a pedagogy of model and form. However, something that became evident was a disregard for the somatic field in the teaching-learning of anatomy, kinesiology and related classes, despite the consensus on the importance of combining these contents with their practical application. As one of the female teachers exemplifies:

I am not interested in knowing a lot about anatomy, I am interested in knowing a lot about anatomy applied to the work of doing. [...] This subject, in my point of view, is absolutely essential, as long as it is focused on what is the practical application to the work that the interpreter, the dancer, does on a daily basis*.

Etymologically, the word anatomy comes from the Greek and means to *cut into parts*. The Cartesian view of anatomy uses a model of the body that is dead, immobile, dissected, whose approach is intended to be objective through actions such as opening, dissecting, observing, naming, and organizing. In short, anatomy, in a scientificist perspective, is mainly based on the observation of the immobile body and in clinical situations, which may be useful for Medicine, but, for Dance, shouldn't anatomy have another approach that includes subjective and perception issues?

Thus, we ask: why not provide dance students with an anatomy class with a somatic approach? The scientific study of the body is indispensable and unquestionable. The question that arises is: from what is already

known about the contribution of the somatic field in relation to consciousness and perception, couldn't the anatomical study be allied to the experimentation of the body that considers its particularities and sensations? As Pizarro (2020, p. 32) argues, it would be an experiential, poetic and moving corporal anatomy, "thus, the traditional scientific Western anatomy, established as the science of cutting corpses, is now experienced as the art of sensitizing existence".

In this perspective, one of the interviewed teachers proposes a work that she calls *Anatomopoesia* (anatomopoetics). Through the idea of relational objects, by Lygia Clark, she develops an anatomical study for the living body, experimented as a hybrid field between science and art, proposed from a dialogue with the Angel Vianna Methodology. She explains:

From that moment, I started to create this research of science integrated to art and to develop several materials that I call, based on Lygia Clark, *relational objects*. The goal is to invite the student's attention to hear the content of science, but by moving the relational objects, the material itself, with a little art, create a bridge with their own bios, with their own body, which has all the subjectivity of a subject*.

We believe, as Pizarro (2020, p. 66) emphasizes, that "[...] a reform in the teaching of anatomy for dance is urgent, considering also the curricular paths that higher education programs have adopted for the training of dance teachers and dancers". A corporalized anatomy or an anatomy based on somatic precepts would be given as a study of the anatomical aspects of the living body by means of an experimental study, capable of opening space for individualities and subjectivities. However, more than using Somatics as a complementary and accessory content to Dance, our proposal aspires to engender a somatic culture as part of the whole process. That is, "[...] does not aim to experience concepts forged on the topographies of corpses, but rather, seeks to experience the sensibility of (co)moving on the paths of living tissue" (Pizarro, 2020, p. 73).

Mythologies of the body in motion

As Godard (2002, p. 20) argues, several elements contribute for an individual to build a symbolic relationship that permeates his bodily, affective, and expressive activity. These elements are determined by a "complex

mix of phylogenetic, cultural, and individual parameters” that create what the author has termed *mythologies of the body in motion*. “The mythology of the body circulating in a social group is inscribed in the postural system and, reciprocally, the corporal attitude of individuals serves as a vehicle for this mythology” (Godard, 2002, p. 21). In an analogous way, we can consider dance schools as barns, factories that originate, shelter and circulate certain mythologies. That is, each educational institution is like a system that creates conceptions of the body and of dance.

This idea is complemented by the words of a teacher interviewed: “We think that universities are all the same, but they’re not”. Each context is unique and develops knowledge from a certain perspective. University courses are plural environments that articulate different territories and have different objectives, despite being apparently similar. Each educational formation process is the result of multiple instances that convoke different areas of knowledge to concretize a certain teaching-learning proposal. In relation to our focus – the somatic field in interaction with dance – we observed in our research two main possibilities: a coexistence of fields in which somatic practices are requested in a punctual, accessory or utilitarian way; and another, in which the interaction happens in such a way that the whole teaching-learning gear is modified.

We can conceive of these possibilities using Godard’s (2002; 2006) analyses of gesture and perception in which the author addresses the issues between the figure and the background. According to Godard (2002, p. 27) “[...] we can consider the postural attitude and the pre-movement, which inevitably anticipate the gesture, as a background on which the apparent movement is drawn: the figure”. That is, the background correlates to an attitude toward weight and gravity that exists before the movement even begins, but which produces the expressive charge of the movement that will be executed. Put another way, and using a metaphor of the author about the works of Matisse and Lygia Clark, we can conceive the teaching-learning in two ways: one in which there is a dryness of the background and another in which the background vibrates in such a way that it takes the front and passes to the place of the figure itself. In his words:

This makes me think of Matisse, who when went to Morocco experienced a personal revolution. The background became more important than the figure.

The background began to vibrate more and more, and finally moved ahead of the figure. This is exactly what captures us in Morocco. Matisse is a beautiful example of what we were talking about earlier, it is the Moroccan context, which is a certain way of looking, of body movements, of behavior in society, of colors and the muffled sounds, which changed his painting. That is what Lygia Clark does. She is more interested in the background than the figure. That is, the still undifferentiated background, where the senses are agitated; this background allows to resume, inventing a new figure or games between figures (Godard, 2006, p. 78).

This image helps us understand how dance and somatic practices interact in such a way that this interaction causes a modification in several aspects, from the concept of body and of technique to the art itself. Since this kind of approach requires the development of a new way of thinking. On the other hand, when questions about corporeality and expressiveness are presented in a more peripheral or utilitarian way in relation to the teaching-learning of dance, we can think of a dryness of the background, in the sense put forward by Godard (2006).

Between the dryness and the background that vibrates passing in front of the figure, we can find several levels of presence of the somatic field, which are related even to the meaning of the word *formation* itself. If, on one hand, the Western dance teaching tradition is based on a unilateral transmission of forms to be repeated and reproduced systematically, and *formation* is closer to the idea of *formatting*, on the other hand, somatic practices propose a rupture that suggests a wider and more diversified meaning for formations, since they define themselves in a singular way and are established according to the teaching-learning double.

In this sense, we can analyze three aspects of the influence of somatic practices on teaching-learning. In a first type, we have the teachers' acting. The *curriculum putted into practice*³ would involve the quality made possible by Somatics for actions, thoughts or practices inside the classrooms. In a second type of involvement, we have Somatics as a curricular prerogative. In this case, we can think of a subdivision in which institutions would promote a more peripheral and utilitarian encounter with Somatics. And another, in which the crossing is more global, culminating in what Godard (2006) characterizes as the background vibrating to such an extent that it would go beyond the figure and reach the front. That is, teaching-learning

is so interwoven with somatic practices that it modifies this whole system in its multiple characteristics.

In our research, we found, among the four institutions, one in which the political pedagogical project did not include Somatics as a field of knowledge, being restricted to the practice of the teachers who may have been adjectivized by this meeting, in what Godard (2006) calls the dryness of the background. In two institutions, we perceived a crossover of the peripheral or accessory type, in which one or some curricular units are dedicated to the Somatic field, but this is not reflected in the pedagogical political project as a whole. Finally, in only one of the schools, we noticed an imbrication such that the background passed to the front.

In the experience of understanding the teaching-learning of dance in its relation to Somatics, more important than questioning what dance is, is to ask when it happens from a phenomenological and experiential perspective. As Sylvio Costa (2016) states, although we are in a new millennium, our culture and society still echoes an ideology of educational formation and about educational formation that is tributary to the 18th century. Consequently, dance education faces problems related to a dichotomous, linear and deterministic operating logic that unfolds in issues such as the fragmentation of knowledge, the separation between technique and creation, and the apartment between the doing and the thinking of dance.

However, if we question the mechanistic view that reduces the role of the university to professional training aimed at a supposed labor market, we can consider teaching-learning at the higher education level, as Thereza Rocha (2010) proposes, as a process of deconstruction and singularization. In this sense, it is important to realize how much dance has expanded in the last decades and extended the borders of its sphere of action in a constant elaboration. Dance today includes activities that in the past were not so easily recognized as possibilities for professional practice. Dance today is no longer restricted to dancing/performing, choreographing or teaching. Higher education, therefore, would act to help students become able to interact and respond to this new place, which is dance today, by finding and inventing their own space.

Thus, we propose to think about how the dance undergraduation would be if it were a practice of the self. That is, what would it be like if our

perspective on education was somatic and teaching-learning took place in and through the body, considering perceptions and experiences from the subject's own point of view?

In this proposition of educational formation as an exercise of the self, the curriculum would act as a cartography⁴, a passage, articulated with the somatic conception of corporeality and, thus, would point to logics more favorable to risk, experimentation, autonomy and diversity of possibilities. As Rocha (2010, p. 99) summarizes, “[...] somatic learning transforms life and is unmistakable, particular, singular, definitive, authorial”. This singularization process is necessarily dialogical. The student, by making himself indispensable, learns correlatively to make others indispensable, with the other singularities with which he cooperates, and sensitizes himself to a field of possibilities of invention and performance, leaving the school as the author of himself, his dance, and his performance space.

Notes

- ¹ Research conducted as part of the PhD in Arts at the Universidade de Lisboa, on a cotutel regime with the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, between 2017 and 2023.
- ² They produce themselves continuously in coherent and autonomous senses in couplings with the world (Maturana; Varela, 1992).
- ³ Fernando Vieira (2007) proposes that we think of three types of curriculum: the curriculum (or curriculum plan), the operational curriculum and the experienced curriculum. The first, the ideal or formal curriculum, can also be called curriculum as text or curriculum as paper and contains what is recorded in legal documents and the speeches of pedagogues and teachers. The operational curriculum would be the curriculum putted into practice and illustrates how teachers implement the formal curriculum. Finally, the curriculum experienced by students contains traces of the formal curriculum and the operational curriculum, but is expanded to fit the experiences of the students.
- ⁴ Cartography, in the sense put by Suely Rolnik (2006, p. 23), would be “a drawing that accompanies and is made at the same time as the movements of landscape transformation”.

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