



Embodiment Meets Pedagogy
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Resumen: This article objectives to undergo and explore methodological paths of encountering, interviewing, becoming and embodying ‘the other’ in the context of the big spectrum of Critical and Cultural Pedagogy. It introduces a brief narrative on the possible connections among Cultural and Critical Pedagogy, Embodiment, Agency and Performativity. What are the shades of Agency: Resistance, Will and Desire in relation to the development of Critical and Cultural Pedagogy? How Cultural Pedagogy is performed in a culture of resistance? How to trace significant patterns of resisting corporealities in physicalities and bodily methodologies? How aesthetics are affected by an insurgent political agenda and vice---versa? Visual material and videotaped narratives of few case studies will be used in the analysis and presentation of the work.

Palabras clave: Cultural Pedagogy, Critical Pedagogy, Embodiment, Agency, Performativity

1. Objetivos o propósitos:

This article objectives to undergo and explore methodological paths of encountering, interviewing, becoming and embodying ‘the other’ in the context of the big spectrum of Critical and Cultural Pedagogy. It is a work---in progress practice based research that I have recently engaged myself in as part of my PhD initial investigations. In times of global economic crisis, activist groups have been investing in creative forms of protest, demonstration and pedagogies as well as artists start to use categories of performance and theatre to better understand the world as a stage and people as subjects of social construction and transformation. In this context I find Critical Pedagogy and Phenomenology (to understand Embodiment) a multifaceted place for dialogues of the pedagogy of the arts (related to social transformation and beyond the mere production or entertainment of objects of an aesthetic character) and the experience. The close relations between “aestheticizing politics” and “politicizing aesthetics” have put together references in the realm of art practice and social engagement for an interesting and bodily dialogue. How to understand educational processes of empowerment without developing self---awareness in a collective? How to actually use self---awareness and the principles of the phenomenological body for being more critical and for expanding our notion of the world, its problematics and possible actions?

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2. Marco teórico:

These connections have come to my interest through some experience and participant observation in Theatre of the Oppressed sessions in a workshop facilitation at Pa'tothom – a participatory theatre cultural centre located in Barcelona. After that, I got involved in other formation courses and ended up knowing La Pocha Nostra – a collective led by Guillermo Gomez-Peña, what I take the initiative to name it as a post-generation genre after the Forum Theatre. I then try to identify possible relations between the methods of social and political consciousness of Paulo Freire and the Phenomenology conceived by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, -- that we only understand the world through the sensations and interactions with the outside -- considering the hypothesis in which several aspects of social and political sphere of social transformation are closely connected with the scope of embodiment, sensations and the phenomenological body.

As a Brazilian art educator I question and criticize the intercultural problematic gaps of understanding corporealities in community development, social emancipation, and political empowerment projects such as the Theatre of the Oppressed Method, conceived by Augusto Boal which defends to be a translation in theatrical terms of the essence of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and exists as a foundation for various pedagogical strategies, like the ones cited above. These points of intercession are clashed to the method of the Theatre of the Oppressed, by Augusto Boal, which offers an affirmative action of empowerment of groups and at the same time indicates cross-cultural problematics.

3. Metodología:

The major question that will lead my investigations surrounds these two correlated ones: How is agency socially constructed in the corporealities of artists who possess contents of resistance in their poetics? What are the strategies and how resistance is embodied in their creative practices? The following research questions are not necessarily in order of importance or relevance, but they are interconnected, interdependent and an extension of the two above. For every research question the specificities of the context of my case studies in Fortaleza will be highlighted, aiming to understand how cultural pedagogy is performed in a determined time and location. My objectives and problematizations are embedded along the text about the theoretical framework.

The choice of my case studies has also a special importance to the development of the research: all the subjects have been, at some point, relevant to the construction of my own aesthetical and political identity, in my hometown. Thus, I have always been

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curious in knowing how the will to transform the *status quo* has been built throughout my artistic experiences – and researching other bodies might rise a dialogue with my own, and then, it can create a collaborative narrative and experiential mosaic of knowledge that might lead not to objective answers but to enlighten crossing points of disciplines, subjects and practices.

The techniques and methods that will be applied to this investigation are thought with an idea that I, as a researcher, am continuously recreating narratives and reconstructing possible reasonings in theory, categories and subjects of my research – my case studies as well as my subjectivities. This is an attempt for a collective construction of knowledge, an approach that understands reality as constructed by experience and discourse through narrative inquiries.

Aside with the theoretical decisions mentioned above, my research methodology is composed by: a) bibliography revision of the major categories and transversal themes; b) data collecting in archives; c) interviews and collecting narratives; d) participant observations.

4. Discusión de los datos, evidencias, objetos o materiales

The method of the Theatre of the Oppressed, created by Augusto Boal, seeks, shortly, to promote, through theatre games, political emancipation and critical perspective of/from/by a certain group of individuals --- from acting as 'simple victims of oppression' towards interventionist active agents. But then comes the danger of applying the same bodily methodology to a diverse range of cultural idiosyncrasies. Oppression from who, from what? Can one be oppressor and oppressed at the same time? How to be self---critical in this multifaceted dimension? For Paulo Freire, consciousness of the self is in correlation with total awareness of others and the world. Through what the referred author called 'self---conquest' (and I would paraphrase him with the word 'self---awareness') we understand and 'conquer' the world, making it more human, closer to the way we discover things --- approaching the concept of the phenomenology of Merleau---Ponty --- 'sensing the world' through our body and perceptions.

The French philosopher Maurice Merleau---Ponty is part of the phenomenological and existentialist school of thinkers, dedicated to the analysis of perception. Before saying what phenomenology is, I would start stating what it is not. In Chapter four of Phenomenology of Perception – The Phenomenal Field – Merleau---Ponty clarifies that “this phenomenal field is not an inner world, the phenomenon is not a state of consciousness, or a mental fact, and the experience of phenomena is not an act of introspection or an intuition in Bergson’s sense” (2006: 66). So, this is a clarification that beyond the usual psychological interpretations, beliefs and/or

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common-sense affirmations that phenomenological analysis understands perception as a more practical synthesis than intellectual (and this is why he refers to Bergson, for Merleau-Ponty is an example of the pragmatists and opposes his positivist thinking to the idea that no truth is absolute and timeless). For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is the study of "the advent of being to conscience, instead of presuming its possibility as given in advance" (2006: 71). In other words, phenomenology is the method of describing the meaning of things, living them as phenomena of consciousness. For Garner, phenomenology is "the study of the givenness (the Greek phainomenon, derives from phainein, to show), of the world as it is lived rather than the world as it of objectified, abstracted, and conceptualized" (1996: 26). Conjectures, conceptual manipulations, and pre-concepts are nothing less than thoughts detached from the world as it is given and experienced and flowing in a continuous and ever-changing consciousness. This is not an empirical or purely psychological approach, but constitutive of the knowledge acquired to what is experienced.

I honestly find difficulties to see how phenomenology is truly performed and this work is a humble attempt to create possible connections between the longing for the body's self-awareness enhancement and the phenomenological attitude and performance as a manifestation of a conscious or unconscious creative practice that Boal develops in his Theatre of the Oppressed Method.

My experience with the Theatre of the Oppressed is not enough to deeply understand the emerging issues of corporeality in a global era, but having the body and the experience as a starting point, some possible connections can indeed be made. One extreme example of an intercultural clash was illustrated by a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop facilitator (whom I will omit his name for ethical matters) during one of the first sessions I attended in Barcelona: he told us how busy he had been, travelling around the world and facilitating workshops to groups of people in conflict zones. Among his many stories he shared one in which he was working together with a group of local women in a village in Afghanistan. After some Forum Theatre exercises and games, the issue of domestic violence arose, making a certain married woman act upon her own oppression, complaining to her husband. On the next day she was killed by him. This is a radical example of how sensitive cultural clashes in performing 'empowerment' workshops can be, and there are many more stories like that being performed in small proportions, some that we know and many that we will never know. The concise relation to Freire's Pedagogy seems to be misappropriated and misinterpreted, and the body awareness to understand the self, the others and the world, is undertaken by the method. In the following paragraph I extend on the issue of body and self-awareness.

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5. Resultados y/o conclusiones

The world of perception is revealed by our senses – no tools are needed to access it, and apparently just making a little move in our toes, we allow life to penetrate and build our way of understanding the world. For Merleau---Ponty, it is necessary to rediscover the world we live, outside the practical or utilitarian attitude. This has begun to be possible, thanks to expressive art forms (that give the possibility to the viewer/audience/performer to recreate the significance, despite of having a definite explanation of all manifestations of nature) such as the Theatre of the Oppressed and its potentiality to provide the body multiple tactile experiences. Art and science cannot provide a representation of the world that is complete, closed in it. When I say that one of my objectives of this work is to create possible connections, I mean that when dealing with an experience, there should not be any fixed conclusion – as objectivity is improbable or non---existent. Objectivity, for Merleau---Ponty becomes an impossible matter. Every observation is strictly linked to the position of the observer, which is inseparable from its situation and it implies a rejection of the idea of an absolute observer. For my study case, which happens to be the Theatre of the Oppressed method and codes through a workshop, it is necessary to bear in mind that I am, myself, the subject and 'object' of the investigation, and at the same time that my body is making connections and creating meaning of things, bodies of the other participants are doing the same, and actively influencing my perception of the whole picture – giving no space for total objectivity.

6. Contribuciones y significación científica de este trabajo:

As I reviewed phenomenology---related bibliography for this present work, I came across the category of Proprioception. The term derived from Physiology originated from 'proprioceptive', created by the English physiologist Charles Sherrington (1857---1952) to explain the human capacity to receive stimuli arranged inside the body itself. Proprioception is a concept to refer to the ability to 'know' or understand the position of every part of our body, to be sure which parts of our body are flexed, extended, twisted, which are being used, which are at rest, etc. Before getting to know this concept, which I am sure it will resonate in other future works of mine; I can give one habit of mine as an example and can very simply elucidate it in order to make sense of the theory. Every time that I feel under stress, worry or any kind of oppression I tend to, involuntarily, position my head forward from the rest of the horizontal line of my spine. This projection of my head to the front, in my physicality, represents that my body is suffering from an external circumstance. What I usually do when this happens (and it is happening at

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this very present time) is: 1) to use my self---awareness to acknowledge and to identified where the instability is taking place. 2) to change the posture and try to keep my spine in a straight position to re---establish the body's balance. In this sense, the acknowledgement of Proprioception could possibly be used for the workshop facilitations. Practically, the sessions led by members of La Pocha Nostra are already bring sensorial exercises and a closer approach to this – the participants can move on in their subjectivities from the starting point of their idiosyncratic corporealities – responding and reacting to sensitive bodily cultural clashes.

Proprioception refers to simple reflexes in our bodies that we can, with some practice, identify and restore the intended position. This research showed me, at its very end, that potential and future investigation in this realm indeed interest me, and relations to a more bodily treatment to 'empowerment' workshops can be done, while being always critical to the way individuals and groups interfere in cultural sensitive localities.

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