

"Mindful Body in Healing and the Arts" –

The Center for Body, Mind and Culture, 2-day conference, January 19-20, 2012

Paper: "Orientation for communication: embodiment, knowledge and the language of dance"

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Background: According to Dewey (Dewey, 1929: 92), 'thought...has been treated as a non-natural spiritual energy, disjoined from all that is empirical. Yet there is a natural bridge that joins the gap between existence and essences; namely communication, language, discourse.' However, there remains an ongoing debate within sociology (Burkitt, 1999) and physical education /dance (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009) about the role of the body in communication of knowledge. From the perspective of the embodied being, it could be claimed that interaction with the environment is the very catalyst for developing knowledge, where dance is an exemplar of this process. And yet there has been very little written about the contribution dance makes to (pragmatist) philosophy.

This paper focuses upon the role of dance (physical execution with intention of action)) in identifying alternative forms of knowledge and its relevance as a movement language. The exploration of dance as a language from a pragmatist context draws on a Somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2000) framework methodologically in order to organise the use of both practical and analytical activity

Methods: Initial findings are presented from two case studies conducted in schools in the UK. A series of dance based interventions, which included choreography and installations, were incorporated in order to explore the ways in which the young people (Respondents) developed understanding of their embodied selves within the spaces of the schools. The research adopts a narrative inquiry approach making use of a combination of ethnographic and narrative styles. For the purposes of this presentation, assessment will be made of the benefits of using dance movement as alternative to words as the starting point in the translations of empirical embodied experience into a language for communication and examination. The presentation will be a mixture of facilitated movement and talk*.

(* the movement element of the paper would mean that a minimum of 40-50mins would be needed in order for people to get moving. However if this is not practical for the conference schedule, the paper can be presented in a more traditional style taking less time.)

References

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Abstract for the Conference

“Mindful Body in Healing and the Arts”

19-20 January 2012

Boca Raton, Florida Atlantic University

From Mere Matter to Meaning: Biosemiotic Mindfulness

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and

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Conventional biological models of the body, especially of the human body, echo a number of Cartesian dichotomies in focusing upon developmental trajectories unfolding with a high degree of predictability. Part of this paradigm is the notion that bodily processes can be represented through mechanical models that measure or manipulate materiality, leaning increasingly on technology. In the midst of these reductionist analytical habits, the domain of somatic processes is positioned outside, or even in opposition to, the supposedly higher operations of the mind. In contrast to these modes of conceptualization, a biosemiotically-centered conception of the body is more readily able to account for the ways in which somatic processes in and of themselves are engagements with meaning and thus are forms of mindfulness.

In this paper we explore the ways in which a biosemiotic engagement with meaning and materiality can license an appreciation of how the body encompasses plural forms of intelligence, albeit intelligence not relying on propositional knowledge. In this task we focus on semiotic approaches to meaning as something that permeates diverse biological systems. Peircean semiotics in general and biosemiotics in particular are predicated on the assumption that meaning is not exclusive to the domain of human language games but also pertains to the behavioral, biochemical, and arguably aesthetic signs present among alloanimals and within the ecology at large. As a result, this formulation brings novel insights towards phenomena that Cartesian-based models of materiality cannot account for, such as the placebo effect.

Dance as an instrument for peace and identity construction

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The body and its symbolic, utilitarian and territorial uses constitute a crucial source for learning and analyzing the development of armed conflicts and their impact—present or future—on the communities that are part of it, such as victims, perpetrators and bystanders. In the particular case of the armed conflict in Colombia, a country where dancing is widespread and where ethnic diversity and the presence of two illegal armed groups has engendered diverse worldviews, readings of the body and of its symbolic, utilitarian and territorial uses are complex and profound.

Is it possible to engage with and re-signify the notions and imaginaries of victims, perpetrators and bystanders from the place where they were implanted—those harmed and displaced bodies, educated and trained to be instruments of wars, as well as those bodies that are alien to the conflict, those that only perceive it as a frame of reference—altogether, those bodies which, in the midst of war and indifference, continue to dance?

This conference presents the results of two processes that take place through the art hypothesis, especially dance and its ability to transform beings and surroundings—through the human tissue that it makes possible as a source of reconciliation and recognition of regional and cultural identities. These processes and their impact on pedagogy, aesthetic visions, and conceptions of the body are very important, and they speak to the enormous possibilities for transforming beings through their bodies and to the reality of communities as collective bodies.

Ana Carolina Ávila is a contemporary dancer and choreographer. She began her education as a dancer at the age of 13, first in ballet, and then in traditional dances and modern and contemporary dance techniques. She has worked and taught techniques and contemporary dance perspectives as diverse as Graham, Limón, Release and Contact Dance. She worked on a version of Wagner's *Tannhauser*, under the direction of Jan Fabre, for the House of the Opera of Belgium, in Brussels. Currently she works as coordinator of one of the units of a Pilot Art Education Project for the reintegration of young ex-combatants at the Office of the High Counselor for Reintegration in Colombia, from its design to its implementation and assessment. She is currently engaged in a capacity-building process with educators in vulnerable communities in four Colombian regions, developing pedagogical experiences around traditional dance as a source of identity and collective reconciliation.

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The Paradox of the Mindful Eater
a presentation proposal by

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Abstract

Humans are accustomed to look at food as a source of pleasure. A great deal, then, seek those pleasures that agree with mindful eating, that is, they derive pleasure from attentive or controlled culinary experiences. The range of practices associated with mindful eating is multifarious; one way to sort them out is to draw a threefold distinction based off on the types of meaning that a food can take. (i) The wine critic or a gastronome will sift dishes based on sophisticated examinations of their *taste*, broadly construed. (ii) But at times it may be momentous to concentrate on the *powers* of food, that is the way in which foods may affect digestion, strength, attention, or special conditions such as fever, cough, bile, etc. Mindful practices in this category were especially important to shamans and doctors in ancient times. (iii) Finally, foods can *evoke* feelings, atmospheres, situations, people, seasons, daytimes, etc. Mindful monitoring of attitudes and bodily gestures generated around foods is a key component in choosing a diet.

Now, at least in principle, none of the three types of practices seems to rule out the others. So, at least in principle, it seems that the mindful eater ought to be mindful of meanings belonging to *all* three categories above. But, practically speaking, this is often impossible. For example, the most refined foods are typically selected independently of their powers and their evocative significance; or, what is regarded as *healthy* is not always *fine* or even *evocative*. This is the paradox of the eater who aims to be mindful, but who cannot accomplish its task because of practical reasons. How can this paradox be sorted out? Which patterns of mindful dining can be recommended?

Abstract

Roberta Dreon, Habits, bodily techniques and life styles

In actual philosophical debate some important steps forward have been taken in the field of the so called embodied cognition. However we need a wider kind of approach, an existential or anthropological one, where our somatic structure can be considered as our basic modality to belong to and to be in relation to our world from inside of it. Sustaining that experience is not wholly or primary reducible to cognition, we need useful categories to think in this direction. Habits, bodily techniques and life styles are considered as fruitful conceptual means to deal with human practices, having their roots in our being naturally social and cultural kind of organisms.

Recalling Dewey's position, the essay sustains we must assign a structural role to habits in our willing, doing, thinking and feeling if we recognize we are not ethereal consciousness but heavy bodily beings. With Mauss, it will be underlined how nature and culture are deeply entrenched in human experience and how our body can be considered as a sort of biological anchorage for technical kinds of behaviours. Individual style is considered as a good resource to think to individual subjects according to a non-dogmatic point of view, as emerging from common ways of interaction with both a natural and social environment. Being expressed as a basic condition of style is interpreted as an opportunity to give up inner-outer dichotomies. Stylistic preferences and dislikes are finally considered as often belonging to primary qualitative kinds of experiences, we have to recognize and becoming conscious of in order to improve our conditions of dependence from social instances and to reinforce a kind of reflective morality.

Somatic exploration and narrative of women leaving with eating disorder

Somatic education questions fundamental social issues in a society where the relationship between body, women and hegemonic norms are complex. In this paper, we will present the results of two action research conducted with women suffering from eating disorders for many years. The aim was to 1) describe the women's experiences of somatic education classes via a variety of qualitative data collection, and 2) to identify any possible relationships between perceptual changes of their body awareness and eating disorders. In the action research, while we value the first person experience, we also emphasize the social constructions of the body and the normalizing practices which often impose unattainable ideal body images on women. Adopting a typical somatic education class format, and not a conscious-raising group work model, we wanted to be open to any possible arising aspects. What could we learn about a so-called mental illness, from a body awareness perspective? What could an individual bodily practice reveal about the social phenomena of female body objectivation. At a theoretical level, somatic education advocates for subjectivation. Both action research provided empirical support for such a claim and appeared to be an empowering process for some participants. In a short period of time, the action research showed its potential for helping the women to consciously challenge dominant social discourses by engendering concrete changes in the way they perceived themselves. Suggestions will be offered to encourage further similar research to better understand how somatics can be used in places where intimate experience intersects with socially authoritative discourses.

Key words: somatic education, eating disorder, somaesthetics, technology of the self, empowerment

Abstract

Daniele Goldoni, Life styles. Body consciousness and "Improvisation"

Western life is ambivalent towards the "soma": difficulties to recognize it, desire for re-appropriation in various forms. Ambivalence due to the metaphysical distinction between mind and body. In fact, the 'mind' is also somehow physical, being done with words, sounds, images. The metaphysical distinction between mind and body obeyed rather to a difference between 'internal' processes (relatively controllable and repeatable through specific techniques (mnemonics, writings, moral and imaginations exercises)) and external processes, with their 'natural' resistance to the "free will" of the "subject".

The new 'media' unmask the ambiguity: 'virtual' is at once more 'spiritual' – it excludes a large part of the body and the close physical relationships - and material: it is increasingly dependent on machines. The criticism by philosophers as Adorno, Bourdieu, Derrida against not democratic uses of the new media by the political and economical power, does not take sufficient account of the fact that Power gives a certain kind of (narcissistic) pleasure (Benjamin). Philosophy to propose, through practices of body consciousness, more interesting forms of pleasure with new attractive lifestyles.

Music can, by its nature, let vibrate the body, the environment and the ears together, to cross the boundary between inside and outside. In a time when the music is mostly listened in reproduction, the musical practices which request a strong relational interaction in presence, such as improvisation, can produce new body consciousness: not as opposed to the mind, but as a place of relationships and new lifestyles.

Minding the Somatic Surface

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Somaesthetic surface is not only the surface of body as physical object, but also the style of the person because style emerges from the inner self and creates our outer image. Concern with body image can be traced back to ancient cultures (including ancient philosophy) in both East and West, but our contemporary society seems to spend more time and money than ever on attractive somatic appearance and style. Contemporary philosophy has not kept pace with this interest because of the long philosophical denigration of the body. If recent body philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty and Shusterman try to revalorize the body, they are mostly focused on the body's inner dimension and perceptual activity. They give insufficient attention to somaesthetic surface.

This paper considers the meaning of bodily surface within the framework of somaesthetics, including the ontological status of that surface and its relations to somatic consciousness. Philosophical attention to bodily surface and style will provide a better balance to somaesthetics and clarify the connection between body appearance and body consciousness. It can also give us a better understanding of anxieties and pathologies relating to somaesthetic surface. To advance such understanding this paper will also consider the reasons why people work on their somaesthetic surface and worry about it.

Nicola Perullo

Towards a Food Aesthetics: Taste as Embodied Skill

Like sex and sport, food qua *taste* (that is, as an activity regarding pleasure and appreciation) has been widely neglected in the Western philosophical tradition, both as an epistemological and as an aesthetical object (Plato, Kant, Hegel, Croce, etc.). This is largely because of moral and sometimes religious conception according to which we have a duty to regard food only as fuel. The connection between ethical and epistemological assumptions matches the idea that *physical* taste is a *minor* sense.

But taste is not a minor sense; both from a psychological and cultural perspective, it is a highly complex perceptual system, irreducible to its chemestetical component (Gibson). Even from an aesthetic perspective, it can be easily shown that the taste of palate – food taste – is irreducible to “simple” nourishment (Levinas, Korsmeyer). As it concerns body and flesh (and assimilation, metabolism, etc.) tasting it’s one of the ways in which people deal directly with objects (Dewey). In general, the taste-small system let the experience of one’s own body emerge.

Moving from these premises and using some examples (especially from wine tasting), I propose a “theory” of taste as embodied skill (Ingold); a training practice which I believe can be extremely important in the age of aesthetization - which it is often also an anesthetization – of life.

Training this ability is relevant in many ways:

- a) It’s a *physical* training provoking a higher sensibility in appreciation of everyday objects like foods are. Tasting can help self-improvement in perception and can be seen as “art of living” but not in the sense of contemplative aesthetics as it requires personal engagement and experience.
- b) It demonstrates the permanence of ordinary everyday perception (everyone must eat) and refined aesthetical perception: relations between nutrition (biological, natural life) and appreciation and pleasure (cultural life) are steady and strict.
- c) It can also helps increasing critical understanding and ethical awareness: food is also nature and arises environmental questions (aesthetics of nature)
- d) It also helps perspectives of aesthetic economy: training taste requires money to invest. But this does not mean to indulge in “status symbol” life (bourgeois gastronomy); on the contrary, it means to refine critical inquiry about values and prices (eco-gastronomy).
- e) It enhances self-perception and proprioception, for food has great physical effects (weight, size, shape, health, etc.) . It helps reflection upon moderation and excess.

Towards a Phenomenological Poetics of the Body

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What I want to say with the very pretentious title of a ‘phenomenological poetics of the body’, is actually the question *of* the body, in the double sense of the genitive, that is, the question about the body, what the human body means and is, and how it should be considered, but also the question that is posed by the body itself or, better said, the limit that we are confronted with as soon as we start questioning the body itself.

In the conference I try to show the structure of an argument, and to do so, I will try first to outline some precautions as to the questioning about the body itself, in which I will attempt to stress the need of turning back into Heidegger’s way of thinking the body; and then, I will linger by one example coming from the realm of contemporary art that might shed some light on the topic at stake. Particularly, I would like to linger by the experience of defective feelings and experiences (i.e.: anguish, being-towards-Death) in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and in his *Zollikon Seminars*. Examples that shed light on philosophical reflection will be looked after in the realm of contemporary art in Colombia.

What justifies the appeal to Heidegger’s thought? As a token of concern on the side of this thinker, we should mention a very moving, although un-philosophical remark that is testified in the foreword to the protocols to the seminars held at Zollikon, by Dr. Medard Boss, the organizer and host of the seminar:

He [Heidegger] saw the possibility that his philosophical insights would not be confined merely to the philosopher’s quarters but also might benefit many more people, especially people in need of help.

Carlos Eduardo Sanabria B. is associate professor at Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, in Bogotá, Colombia. His work has centered on the study and research of historiography and philosophy of art, particularly from the perspectives of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Aby Warburg, Hans Belting and Georges Didi–Huberman. He has published (as author, editor and translator) the following titles: *Estética. Miradas contemporáneas* (2004), *Estética, fenomenología y hermenéutica* (2008), *Contribuciones de la filosofía del arte a la reflexión artística contemporánea* (2010) y *La experiencia de la arquitectura en el proyecto y en el objeto* (2010). He is a member of the Colombian Society of Philosophy and of the Iberoamerican Society of Heideggerian Studies. He currently directs a research group on cartographies of the body in contemporary art and culture.

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“Watch Your Bank Account of Muscular and Nervous Strength”:

Ordering the Mind-Body-Spirit in Annie Payson Call’s Psycho-Physical Technique

Shock, loss, injury, internally and externally wounded beings – these are some of the key terms commonly associated with the beginning of the 20th century. In this project I want to shift the focus from the physically or mentally split self and ask, Against narratives of sickness and trauma – of the individual body and modernist culture and society in general – does modernism offer narratives of transformation, a healthful way of being in the world? I suggest that one of the most powerful “whole’ing” projects is the period’s preoccupation with the mind-body-spirit connection.

Although a crucial concern in modernism, health achieved through the mind-body-spirit balance is surprisingly understudied in modernism scholarship which has emphasized trauma and inner chaos, “a life cut off from whole being, or connected being-in-the-world,” “a floundering self in a floundering world” (see Clayton, Cooter, Seltzer). Setting my inquiries against the background of the period’s interest in holistic healing, Eastern medicine, New Thought, mind-cure, and ideas of “healthy-mindedness” in philosophy, I turn to the writings of Annie Payson Call (1853-1940), an intriguing thinker overlooked in current accounts. I suggest that Call develops a unique psycho-physical technique that offers an important component to the period’s mind-body medicine and impacts suggestive therapeutic approaches into the 20th century. Call not only provides intriguing definitions of rest, concentration, quietism, authenticity, and bodily and spiritual regeneration – her works both theorize and provide practical models for examining how consciousness is mapped onto the body, how imagery and language impact the mind, and how mind-body control can bring healing qualities to the arts.