

PEDAGOGY OF *LIVING* AND FEELING. THE EDUCATIONAL ACTION OF BODY-THEATRE¹

PEDAGOGIA DEL VIVERE E DEL SENTIRE. L'AGIRE EDUCATIVO DEL CORPO-TEATRO

Maria D'Ambrosio

Suor Orsola Benincasa University
maria.dambrosio@docenti.unisob.na.it

Francesca Berti

Free University of Bolzano/Bozen
francesca.berti@unibz.it

Abstract

This article contributes to the reflection on the body as an active and living subject of theatrical and paratheatrical practice, as observed in the pedagogical research of 'embodied education'. Educational experience, rooted in aesthetic and performative action, is nourished by Dewey's theory of experience (1934, 1938), thereby bringing unity to educational and aesthetic experience. If experience can generally be said to relate to the reciprocal interaction of the individual with nature, punctuated by the rhythm of life itself - the heart beating, the flowing of the tides, the cycle of the seasons – then in the laboratory practice under investigation in this article, 'exercise' and thus aesthetic and performative practice can be considered to assume the form of "body-theatre" (*Corps-théâtre*, Nancy, 2010). Embedded in its potential for experiential knowledge, as awakened through memory and listening, the body becomes the agent of a transformative action towards the unfolding of an encounter with both the self and the other.

Il presente contributo propone una riflessione sul corpo quale soggetto attivo e vivente della pratica teatrale e parateatrale, così come osservato nella ricerca pedagogica di 'embodied education'. Quest'esperienza educativa, radicata nell'azione estetica e performativa, si nutre della teoria dell'esperienza di Dewey (1934, 1938), restituendo unità all'esperienza educativa ed estetica. Se l'esperienza, in generale, riguarda l'interazione reciproca dell'individuo con la natura, scandita dal ritmo proprio della vita stessa - il battito del cuore, la danza della marea, la cadenza delle stagioni – nella pratica laboratoriale in oggetto, 'l'esercizio' e dunque la pratica estetica e performativa si fanno corpo teatro (*Corps-théâtre*, Nancy, 2010). Immerso in una possibilità di conoscenza esperienziale, risvegliato nella memoria e nell'ascolto, il corpo diviene agente di un'azione trasformativa per l'accadere di un incontro con sé e con l'altro.

Keywords: Sensible space; performativity; acoustic spaces; dancing matter

Keywords: Spazio sensibile; performatività; spazi acustici; materia danzante

¹ The paper represents a joint and shared work. Paragraphs 1 and 2 are by Maria D'Ambrosio and paragraphs 3 and 4 by Francesca Berti.

1. In a nutshell. The body-theatre and the main roads of educational research

Everyone knows that it takes practice to see through a microscope or a telescope and to see a landscape the way a geologist sees it. [...] To perceive, the observer must in fact create his own experience (Dewey, 1934, p. 77)

Starting from Dewey's work, the aesthetic dimension, identified as a condition of living and the transformative processes of living itself, has made its way into pedagogical knowledge. In other words, perception has emerged as the sphere activated and exercised by the body, to transform what it feels into experience and creation. By so doing, it qualifies the body as a 'device' whose tactility and kinetics mobilise activities of a physical and symbolic type together, operating on 'reality' and making it a field of experience and artifice. Dewey's aesthetic vitalism provides a sophisticated epistemic framework for reading the vital sense of undergoing, feeling, combined with acting, creating, as they jointly comprise the aesthetic-practical unity of experiencing and knowing. Sensitive activity activated by perception is a transformative operation that is neither mechanical nor predictable in that it requires the act of being present to/in the world in order to open a space of interaction and manipulation that is connoted as performative and, for this very reason, is a space of becoming for a body and an encounter, in a reciprocal and metabolic manifest/theatrical state. The body-device appears on the stage where it begins its e-ducative work operated through such an 'exercise', so-called by Dewey (1934), to bring forth the aesthetic practice necessary to form and nourish the cognitive structure of action/creation and its relational matrix. Aesthetic practice is a condition of experiencing and subtends the training of the receptive, perceptive/e-motive sphere, to be mobilised in 'contact' with 'reality' for the aesthetic and intersubjective quality of existing and knowing to emerge.

Living and existing have become part of a pedagogical lexicon assumed by the living creature (Dewey, 1934) and its transFormative process as an aesthetic and artistic practice that reveals all its consistency and co-existence, bringing the body back to occupy a position of reciprocal exposure and communication/contact that emerges from Jean-Luc Nancy's idea that is grafted on to the paradigmatic vis-à-vis tactile in the territory of contemporary pedagogical thought. The body thus becomes a privileged construct for the knowledge that unites Aesthetics and Art and makes the pedagogical the nature of the process of living, which in turn can be understood as performative insofar as it implies a work and above all an interaction between bodies that can generate something else in the form of thought, action, work. The body and its 'sensibility' constitutes the construct through which pedagogical thought and action have taken on a materiality of their own and have operated the so-called narrative and bio-culturalist turn (Bruner, 1990; Bruner, 1986) in the sciences of education that makes us reconfigure the body itself as a *body theatre* (Nancy, 2010). In keeping with the practical question introduced by Dewey with 'the exercise', the 'figure' of the *body theatre* immersed in and participating in a world and subjectivity, *singular plural*, which is a condition for its existence, brings with it "that perceiving [which] is also acting" (Nancy, 2010, p. 9). The body, restored to its hybrid nature, between sensibility and activity, full surface and hollow depth, is the place and condition of existing and experiencing, where 'experiencing, like breathing, is a rhythmic alternation of input and output' (Dewey, 1934, p. 79). Through movement, in walking, in the rhythmic variation proper to breathing, and in the dual gesture of taking and giving, we grasp *being a body* as an agent whose excitatory state is not enough to decide nor to determine the happening of a performative and transformative nature in which it is involved. What comes into

play is a metabolic dimension that structures and governs living and the neurobiological basis of interpersonal experience (Siegel, 2020). The aesthetic dimension has a tactile and plastic quality that makes the body the very metaphor for rethinking formation as an embodied and situated metamorphic process.

Within this epistemic framework, pedagogical knowledge has opened up to the methodological research in education and legitimised the corporeal, sensorial and performative sphere, rather than exclusively the verbal one, in order to become the 'environment' and condition for transFormative experience. If theatre as a pedagogical practice and as an educational practice (Massa, 2001; D'Ambrosio, 2015; D'Ambrosio, 2013), and training as theatre (Cappa, 2016), have become part of this research, the very reasons lie in that substantial dimension conferred on the subject and its forming process and environment, in which it is 'exercise' that is relevant, and therefore the aesthetic and performative practice, for becoming *body theatre*. This is a practice of being present, of exposing oneself and of ex-being, proper to every subject as a body that also works to develop its own potential co-existence and make itself sensitive to the Other.

"We then find ourselves in the realm of the body and the theatre. The body is what comes, approaches on a stage and the theatre is what gives rise to the approaching body" (Nancy, 2010, p. 18, own translation).

The practice of becoming *body theatre* concerns presence and proximity and is qualified as research into the forms of becoming *body theatre*, of becoming an encounter: it is the form in its plural possibility of the plastic body that is achieved through theatrical performative practice; it is form through which *body theatre* grasps the need to become *dancing* (D'Ambrosio, 2021; D'Ambrosio and Spada, 2021) and to nourish its tactile quality. Accordingly, when we refer to theatrical practice we are indeed moving in a territory that intercepts the tradition of research in the field of theatre and paratheatre with 'masters' such as Jerzy Grotowski and Antonin Artaud and the 'ways' closer to us that we have explored with Rena Mireska and Ewa Benesz but also with Maria Lai and Lucia Latour. I speak of 'master routes' which have been explored through the pedagogical research that has converged in the '*embodied education*' group² - which is now a space where some educational culture leaves room to the body to become a sensitive device for shaping relationships. A research context that made its work on *Forming Spaces* explicit a few years ago, by finding in TheatrumOpera (D'Ambrosio and Buono, 2019) the name for rethinking spaces in a plastic and performative perspective, in close connection with action and encounter. Spaces where the process of enactment and enactment of the participant takes shape, concretely emerging from the closure and finiteness of what is id-entitarian and exploring the more remote and deeper resonances of the Self with the Other, in an interplay. Starting with vocal exercises, one enters an 'environment' where the experience is made of the "relational status of the voice and, therefore, of the word" (Cavarero, 2003, p. 57) and the performance does not merely follow expressive instances but rather those of listening, embodied in the sensitivity of skin and ear, which open up the possibility of acting in resonance with the other. The strength of the vocal practices lies in the recovery of a vibrating/touching state of the body that is produced in variations and sound patterns that broaden the spectrum of playing and resonating and making practicable the critique of metaphysical logocentrism that we understand with Cavarero (2003) as "Dionysus' choribantic flutism" (p. 87). For participants doing vocal exercises, it is a matter of giving body to relationships and of grasping and experiencing the 'softness' and hollowness of the body itself capable of bending and enfolding, in order to be nourished by the other and to gain a new awareness of one's own being and of that with which

² A research group, set up in 2015 by the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples, headed by Maria D'Ambrosio.

one resonates. In singing, one experiences oneself and the other as sound substance, so that the voice itself, even when modulated into words, does not lose its substance of blowing and breathing, which is experienced as a space of prodigious resonant calling. The texture of the voice transformed into a singing is the matrix of a plastic relationship between different bodies that give shape to dance and its generative flow. Indeed, another pedagogical posture is embodied through vocal and dancing exercises: as a sound and plastic environment, the educational stage rediscovers the space to be recognised for "harmonic conjunctions" and the paradigmatic force of tactility, capable of transcending the objective de-finiteness of reason to understand the poetics of meaning.

In a theatrical and paratheatrical practice that nourishes pedagogical research of into 'embodied education' situated in the different contexts in which it is extended and achieved - in the academic training of future educators/educators, in the in-service and advanced training of professionals in education and training, in health and mental health professionals, in organisational contexts, in the urban and social animation and regeneration - the work takes on a social and cultural value because it shifts and opens up the 'doing education' towards becoming *body theatre* and its spacing, towards becoming *TheatrumOpera*. "Spacing is not merely an inert interval. It is exposure [...] it brings together emptiness and place" (Nancy, 2010, p. 21, own translation). To take action, to explore the experience of the encounter, involves moving between fullness and emptiness and allowing new dis-positions of bodies which experience their own being "partes extra partes" (Nancy, 2010, p. 22). Between fullness and emptiness, each one creates and re-creates the self and the world, giving concreteness to the *singular plural being* (Nancy, 1996) and using the specific conditions of the laboratory³ as a poetic space and 'total theatre' capable of producing other partitions, other devices necessary for exploration. The space of the word, no longer sound and vocal substance but just significance made autonomous from matter, is questioned since, in order to create the *TheatrumOpera* and to become *body theatre*, it is necessary to work on the 'state of the art' and thus on the multi-sensorial activation of the body device itself, in order to unite substance and form, depth and surface, internal world and external world, and reveal the intimate consubstantiality of Art and Science as of Life and Form, invoking the Muse to sing as Homer did himself.

2. Non-linear trajectories. In the body.

"At all times and everywhere I have come across people who played an instrument beautifully, or rather, who even composed, in their own way, but who then in life, outside of their music, knew nothing. Isn't this interesting?" (Lukács. 1911, p. 51).

In the mutable and iridescent landscape of the Laboratory Theatre as *Forming Space*, beyond the gravity of a certain defining use of the word subtracted from its lyric, and through, instead, the transformative plasticity of the sensitive body that becomes 'theatre' and 're-sounds', we glimpse and return with Lukács to Rudolf Kassner's question to hear – that one presented by Lukács him self and here re-proposed to make us reflective - it as a reminder of a passage capable of reawakening us, of putting us back into a state of inter-being necessary to knowing and becoming. In the waking discontinuity, the rhythmic and its different trajectories give us a rhizomatic, non-linear mapping of living and the encounters that generate it. Through the plasticity and sensitivity of a resonant and dancing body, legitimacy has been given to a culture of education that reconfigures Care as a shaping gesture, and Education as a transformative process whose direction is neither preordained along a "line" nor predictable as an

³ See par. 3.

"development". The body itself possesses a bio-logical structure that corresponds to a dynamic which in-forms the same structure and its vital possible deconstruction and reconfiguration. The exercises of becoming sensitive are moved and they move us precisely to 'lift off' against gravity and experience what happens in anti-gravity (Carpenzano-D'Ambrosio-Latour, 2016).

The paradigmatic value of the sensory and motor spheres of the body have been waiting for neuroscience to recognise them, but the positivist and neo-behaviourist strand of these studies requires us to pay particular attention, especially now that various issues have emerged as 'evident' and demonstrable. When the theatrical device introduces, beyond a possible script, the Theatre Laboratory - borrowing it first and foremost from Jerzy Grotowskij's - as a practice and 'exercise' on sensitivity and plasticity⁴, it is a question of choosing a specific theatre and thus of carrying out a very sophisticated and complex 'operation' that cannot accept reductionism or other seductive derivations. Moreover, it is a question of continuing to cultivate a tradition of research that flows more and more consciously and explicitly into 'pedagogy', into a pedagogical device that can contaminate in a viral sense education and all other contexts in which education seeks to 'discipline' itself, to give itself a methodology and a practice. This is shaping an epistemic and practical landscape that can be traced back to the "romantic philosophy of existence" (Lukács, 1911) and its vital impulse for action that makes acting an 'art form' resembling poetry. Activating the laboratory and performative dimension, beyond the realm of words that have already been said and are already known, means making space for contact with things and the unfinished of living so that they can be changed into an educational happening where "the educator suspends normal life and establishes the time and space of the educational experience" (Massa, p. 36). Life can take a new form, be re-created, re-transformed (Nancy, 2000), become a work that is never finished and celebrate the natural extraordinariness of the educational work realised through what Riccardo Massa calls an 'affective and cognitive athletics'. The training, the exercise, the practice, are the plastic and aesthetic levels through which the form puts us in profound contact with its origin, with other 'substance', and together they become the space where we encounter and realise the perturbing beauty of education. To transform and mutate is to try making and becoming present of an unseen that seeks its infinite possibilities to make itself visible.

Experiencing the space of the Laboratory Theatre as Grotowskij himself implemented it, and as the embodied education research shows in its shared e-ducational trajectories in the team, means grasping the aesthetic matrix that makes it a 'field of experience' for those who inhabit it in a pedagogical/performative/transformational way, reclaiming the body as an educational device of becoming agent/actor. The body is substance, consistent and coexistent, to be grasped and through which the living can become the existential trace of the actor's own body (agent). In the various contexts in which the phenomenological, critical and existential pedagogical research intervenes - especially in the group of 'embodied education' - its epistemic and methodological nature emerges. It means that this epistemic and methodological framework finds in the mobility and tactility of the body the code of a thought that recognises through action, through situated action, its *modus* and its *conatus*. As such, they intercept the living as the original category to which every gesture of Care is addressed so that living can become incarnate and situated. Rethinking the essence of pedagogical philosophy and educational action as living draws us back to the substance bodies are made of, to the kinetic and tactile quality of that substance, to the dynamic nature of things and their life. The process of living and of taking form/mutating is located in the body, in that area to be transformed into the *body theatre/TheatrumOpera*, where we learn life by crossing its non-linear geographies and geometries: such as those of the bending/moving system of the spinal column, the random ones

⁴ See the online archive containing sections of Grotowskij's training - Grotowskij Institute in Wroclaw <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRyLLTvs00c>

of walking and the multiverse ones of breathing. We could say that in the body we find the origin and the possibility of non-linear acting/thinking: starting from the nervous system and the haptic form and origin of synaptic connections, up to surprising ourselves with the beauty of the animated intracellular life. Here, we can imagine everything as music, just as in a Wagnerian opera, where the totality is the full realisation of its multiple variations and improvisations. The rhythm shifts and in turn deforms its rhythms: of breathing, as well as of the heartbeat, of the step that follows and extends that breath, in a new song or simply in a grimace that transfigures the features and returns them to the poetic gesture of a *re-portray*. Each one in its own way and with the unstable intensity of its oscillations.

3. The laboratory: space for bodies in action

The laboratory dimension places the body at the centre its focus, and its being in action through experience. When the educational contexts take the form of a laboratory, in fact, the body, by being in movement, becomes a vehicle for the use of non-verbal languages, those proper to feeling as well as to a dimension of listening to oneself and to others. Objects and space are functional to stimulate action. The person who leads - teacher, educator, trainer - act(s) as a mere "facilitator" (Dewey, 1938) of an experience in which individuals and the group are both active subjects. The action is not directed from outside, yet it takes place in a well prepared space, and in the interaction between subjects, objects and space itself. Here I focus on the laboratory practice proposed by the actress and trainer Ewa Benesz within the embodied education research group - and, more specifically, to the curricular activities designed to train educational professionals - identifying in such dedicated setting a dimension that, oscillating between theatre and play, enables us to experience moments of transformative encounter with our own selves and with the other.

Ewa Benesz's practice has its roots in Jerzy Grotowski's parateatre, a period of research in which the Polish director devoted himself to the encounter, by exploring a new form of theatre - that is, where action is performed without acting - which led him not only outside mainstream theatre but also beyond the experimental one (Slowiak & Cuesta 2007, p. 40, own translation).

During the early period of his work, indeed, as director of the Teatr Laboratorium (Opole 1959-1965, Breslava 1965-1969), his research on the actor's training - aligned with Stanislavskij's method of physical actions he had encountered during his studies in Russia - led him to consider theatre training as a vehicle of personal transformation. The expression 'laboratory theatre', which he chose, thus, indicated a group dedicated to experimenting and refining various acting techniques aimed at mastering the actor's physical abilities, spatial movements, and vocal range (Chemi, pp. 2-3). In this research, the actor's voice merges with the movement, that is, the voice itself originates in the movement. In 1968, Grotowski published "Towards a Poor Theatre", a text that became a benchmark for the experiences of experimental theatre from the 1970s until today. The text vividly describes the discovery made by the director and his ensemble during the previous ten years, of how, by eliminating everything superfluous, a theatre could still exist, but "without make-up, costumes, sets, stage, lights and sound effects" (Grotowski, 1968, p. 25). Surprisingly, what remained was the essence of theatre, in other words, the possibility of a direct relationship and sharing between actors and audience. A series of pictures, in the book, presented the basic training exercises of the actor, inspired by Stanislavsky's "work on oneself". In the Teatr Laboratorium, in fact, each actor was an expert and trainer in a particular form of voice or body exercises, which touched on two levels: "a basic work on the elements of the craft and a spiritual work on oneself" (Slowiak & Cuesta, 2007, p. 19, own translation). The aim of the exercises was to remove psychological blocks and

not simply to achieve technical skills (Grotowskij, 1968, p. 23). In the same year, director Peter Brook published "The Empty Space" and presented Grotowskij as a 'visionary':

"The theatre, he believes, cannot be an end in itself; like dancing or music in certain dervish orders, the theatre is a vehicle, a means for self-study, self-exploration; a possibility of salvation. The actor has himself as his field of work" (Brook 1968, p. 85).

Brook is among the first to recognise the depth of the Polish director's pedagogical research and in having found in theatre that ancient tool that allows human beings to find their essence, 'in that one drama, which is the drama of existence' (Brook in Benesz 2013). In the first part of the first phase of his research - "Production Theatre", 1959-1969 - Grotowski realised, in fact, that not only could every professional actor/actress rehearse using the exercises that his or her actors/actresses were practising, but that, potentially, everyone could participate in their actions on stage. The step towards the next phase - 'Theatre as a Vehicle', 1970-1999 - was short: once make-up, costumes, lights and stage had disappeared, what remained of the theatre was only the audience. Once the audience was also eliminated, the traditional Aristotelian distinction between the active and the spectator vanished and an unknown art form emerged, which Grotowskii called *parateatre*, a theatre without spectators. If, on the one hand, this phase represented a natural development of the *Teatr Laboratorium* (Benesz, 2002, p. 67), on the other hand, it represented the beginning of a journey from theatre to "the origins of culture, communication and sensory perception" (Slowiak & Cuesta 2007, p. 34).

Benesz is a protagonist of this journey, first as a very young actress in the *Teatr Laboratorium* at the end of the 1960s, then as a collaborator with Rena Mirecka, the first actress of the *Teatr Laboratorium*, with whom she conducted paratheatrical research on the origin of rituals and singing until 1996. In line with Grotowskij, Benesz refers to her practice as 'theatre without spectators', a space in which performance gives way to authentic action that originates in the memory of the body. The body is at the centre of the practice: the plastic exercises from the *Teatr Laboratorium* repertoire invite participants to discover the potential of their own bodies. The voice exercises, borrowed from ancient chanting techniques and mantras, aim to awaken the senses and cleanse perceptions and the mind of automatic habits, slowing down "the flow of the mind's chatter" (Benesz, in interview). Participants are encouraged to discover and *listen* in movement to the relationship between voice, breath and body (Benesz 2013). Attention to the body leads to:

"Reducing oneself to a human being, the essence of being human in itself: without masks, rules, clothes or self-images. This is only possible through the presence of the other" (Benesz 2002, p. 67, own translation).

In the workshop, after the 'exercises' phase, we move on to the 'actions' phase. In a prepared space, facilitated by Benesz and his collaborators, participants move through the space where there is a balance between individuals and a group, as in an ancient Greek theatre *chorus*, in which, from time to time, one element emerges through a solo, while the others remain in attentive, participatory listening. The experience is, therefore, individual, it is about personal discovery, but can only occur through the presence of the group (Slowiak & Cuesta 2007, p. 40). In affirming that "action needs the presence of the other" Benesz, like Grotowskij, refers to Martin Buber's dialogical reflection and the aspect of reciprocity in the encounter with self and other (Benesz, 2013). What unfolds then is that memories, deposited in the body, come to the surface, evoking the songs of childhood, the scars of an old wound, a personal mantra. As recounted by poet and psychotherapist Francois Emmanuel:

"In the course of these improvisations, I experienced moments of a beauty and intensity that life has rarely allowed me to glimpse, I felt there more than anywhere else what unites men in their intimacy, and my outlook, on theatre as on life, was radically transformed" (Emmanuel, 2013, p.142, own translation).

The space of the laboratory becomes a vehicle for authentic improvisations that have as much to do with theatre as they do with life itself. With fiction as with the *real*. This ambiguity, already present in Grotowskij - who exits the theatre to maintain its form - is actually apparent, or rather it is possible because the form of theatre is nothing *other* than one of the forms of play.

1. Bodies at play: the playful dimension of the workshop

As early as 1969, Grotowskij stated that, if theatre is necessary for life, this is true insofar as in its space it is possible "not to lie to oneself" and "to be without hiding": what then makes theatre, he recalled, is not a building, an institution or a profession, but only "a group and a space" (Grotowskij in Slowiak & Cuesta 2007, p. 32). The group, in turn, meets in space with the help of signs and symbols that allow it to go beyond the ordinary, because they belong to a collective memory, a memory awakened first and foremost in movement. "Even before the word, it is movement that creates action, awakens the senses. We meet in action" (Benesz, in interview). Hence, so that everyone, as a "living creature", can "manifest themselves by giving meaning to their existence", the workshop space takes the form of play, celebration, dance (D'Ambrosio, 2015, p. 16).

The playful dimension, a central component of the notion of theatricality (Pontremoli, 2015, p. 6) seems to frame the paratheatrical laboratory. Theatre, in which Grotowskij and Benesz's research originated, belongs to the semantic field of play, or rather, is one of its forms. According to Caillois, all games are a combination of one or two forms of *agon*, *alea*, mimicry, *illinx*, terms that indicate, respectively, the role of competition, chance, mimesis or vertigo, in a game (Caillois 1961). The mimesis of a little girl playing the role of the mother with her doll and the *mimesis* of the actor on stage is the same: at the same time, the little girl *is the mother* and *she is not*. However, an actor does not try to make believe that he is *really* the character he is playing, for example, Napoleon. If he were to do so, the principle of the game, in this case, the game of make-believe, would be distorted and, by exceeding the boundaries of the game, the actor would depart from it. It is clear that in this image, the fiction is *inside* the frame of the game and the *real*, i.e. the actor who has taken off Napoleon's clothes, is *outside*. This is in the play. But in Benesz's work, a kind of reversal takes place, and the *real* takes shape inside the circle. Or rather, the reference to the semantic field of theatre is very much present, and she herself speaks of her own research as a 'theatre *in statu nascendi*'. The theatrical metaphor is retained in Grotowskij as in Benesz to define, a place in which the participants do not perform, rather, they are invited to experience precisely the opposite of *performance*: that is, the happening of an action, in a space of freedom, in which judgement towards oneself or towards others is suspended and social masks can fall.

In the paratheatre laboratory, the space of the *room* delimits a functional and necessary frame for the creative action to take place, a stage where the participants, who are not acting, experience the possibility of self-discovery. Here, reference to the game is strong: if in the paratheatrical research of the theatre *setting* only "the space and the group" remain, as Grotowskij stated, the circle of encounter emerges or re-emerges in its purest form: circle of stories, archaic circle, *magic circle* as the game is often called. In Benesz's hypothesis, the spirit of the work is called the 'joker spirit'. The message transmitted by rigorous yet playful yoga to the joy of the chants and mantras, is that for masks to fall, there is a need for *play*, that

is, a space that carries a certain lightness. "It is easier to enter and touch a chord of our deepest selves through laughter rather than weeping" (Benesz, in interview). In other words, that it is easier to touch an authentic emotion starting from a playful moment: recalling childhood, in itself immersed in play, or entering into an improvisation in a light-hearted manner, letting oneself go, why not, to self-mockery, to a benevolent smile about oneself.

In this passage, we seem to sense Schiller's message when he asserted that 'man is fully man only when he plays' (Schiller, 179, p. 64). In 'The Aesthetic Education of Man', the philosopher argued that life is constantly held in a tense grip between two forces that push in opposite directions: emotion in opposition to reason, passion in opposition to the norm; the heart in opposition to reason, as we would say today. To hold these two opposing impulses together, a third impulse, which Schiller termed the 'impulse to play' (*Spieltrieb*), must, *come into play*. This *play*, this vital movement, lies in the emergence of an impulse capable of transforming an emotion or a thought into a creative gesture. The German term *Spiel*, like the English *play*, encompasses both the meaning of playing and acting. The inevitable contraposition inherent in the dualistic nature of man - proper to Enlightenment thought and reaffirmed by Kant - was not, in fact, shared by Schiller. On the contrary, he was deeply perturbed by the French Revolution, and invoked the need to re-establish the harmony and unity of human nature. In an ideal human being, he argued, there is a third impulse, capable of interacting and uniting 'with vitality but without synthesis two heterogeneous and opposing structural elements' (*Ibid.*, p. 76). Only through the experience of the *Spieltrieb* does the individual find his own completeness, his own fullness insofar as he is able to 'create' a *living form* (the object of play) by unifying *life* (the object of the sensory impulse) with *form* (the object of the formal impulse). Finally, the *living form* is expressed through beauty, which is an aesthetic quality. The object of the impulse to play is the beauty generated when the sensory and rational impulse are unified without one dominating the other or losing its force. In physics such a movement would not exist, rather it would be a hypothesis of unreality. And yet the impulse to play succeeds in the feat tempering two forces, balancing 'the sphere of emotion and the field of law' and making them "contingent to both our formal and material nature together with our perfection and our happiness' (*Ibid.*).

We like to imagine that, Schiller, the playwright, had exactly that play form of theatre in mind when he coined the term *Spieltrieb*. Poetry, art, theatre, play, Schiller seems to suggest, help us transform life into the play of life. Thus, in Benesz's laboratory, the spirit of play helps us to let go and experience the happening of a creative gesture that touches something real in us.

Bibliography

- Benesz, E. (2002), Il vuoto fertile. Sul Parateatro, in La nave di Penelope, a cura di A. Capelli e F. Lorenzoni, Firenze: Giunti Editore.
- Benesz, E. (2013), Nell'atto del creare. Pratiche dai confini del parateatro e dell'antropologia del teatro, in Teatro e Parateatro come pratiche educative. Verso una pedagogia delle arti, a cura di D'Ambrosio, M., Napoli: Liguori.
- Brook, P. (1968), Der Leere Raum, Berlino: Alexander Verlag.
- Bruner, J. (1986), La mente a più dimensioni, tr. it., Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1993.
- Bruner, J. (1990), La ricerca del significato. Per una psicologia culturale, tr. it., Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000.
- Cailliois R. (1961), Man, Play and Games, New York: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Carpenzano, O.-D'Ambrosio, M.-Latour, L. (2016). e-Learning. Electric Extended Embodied, Pisa: ETS.
- Chemi, T. (2018), A theatre laboratory approach to pedagogy and creativity. Odin theatret and Group learning, Londra: Palgrave Macmillan.

- D'Ambrosio M. (2021), Spazio al vivente come danzante. Tracce ed emergenze dalla ricerca pedagogica, in: *Teorie Pedagogiche e Pratiche educative – Bollettino della Fondazione Vito Fazio Allmeyer*, n°1-2 gennaio dicembre 2021.
- D'Ambrosio M. (2015), *Teatro come pratica pedagogica. Ricerca-azione per la formazione al Teatro-Scuola*, Lecce: Pensa Multimedia.
- D'Ambrosio, M. (2013), a cura di, *Teatro e parateatro come pratiche educative. Verso una pedagogia delle arti*, Napoli: Liguori.
- D'Ambrosio M. – Buono M. L. (2019), Spazio al corpo. Proposte per ambienti generativi del 'fare scuola', in: *SIPED, Atti del Convegno Nazionale – Palermo 2019, 30 anni dopo la Convenzione ONU sui diritti dell'infanzia. Quale Pedagogia per i minori?*, Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2020.
- D'Ambrosio, M. - Spada E. (2021), *Abitare la relazione. Pratiche performative per la comunità dei servizi educativi per l'infanzia a Napoli*, in: *Marín-Campos-Sánchez-Garzía, Investigación e innovación educativa frente a los retos para el desarrollo sostenible*, Madrid: Editorial Dykinson.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Arte come esperienza*, tr. it., Palermo: Aesthetica, 2009.
- Dewey, J. (1938), *Esperienza e Educazione*, tr. it., Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2014.
- Emmanuel, F. (2013), *Dalla Polonia alla Sardegna: lungo uno stesso crinale*, in *Teatro e Parateatro come pratiche educative. Verso una pedagogia delle arti*, a cura di M. D'Ambrosio, Napoli: Liguori.
- Grotowskij, J. (1968), *Per un teatro povero*, Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1970.
- Lukács, G. (1911). *L'anima e le forme*, Milano: Sugar editore.
- Massa, R. (2001). *La peste, il teatro, l'educazione*, a cura di Francesca Antonacci e Francesco Cappa, Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Nancy, J.L. (2010). *Corpo teatro*, tr. it., Napoli: Cronopio, 2011.
- Nancy, J.L. (2000), *Il ritratto e il suo sguardo*, tr. it., Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2002.
- Nancy, J. L. (1996), *Essere singolare plurale*, tr. it., Torino: Einaudi, 2001.
- Pontremoli A. (2015). *Elementi di teatro educativo, sociale e di comunità*, Milano: UTET.
- Schiller, F. (1794), *L'Educazione Estetica dell'Uomo*, Milano: Bompiani, 2007.
- Siegel, D. J. (2020), *La mente relazionale. Neurobiologia dell'esperienza interpersonale*, tr. it., Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2021.
- Slowiak J. & Cuesta J. (2007), *Jerzy Grotowskij*, Londra: Routledge Performance Practitioners.

