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Subjectivation and educational processes in the Sacred Circle Dances

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ABSTRACT

We propose to observe possible resonances between the corporal-collective experience installed in the Sacred Circular Dances (SCD) and the subjectivation/educational processes. Therefore, we seek support in the enactive approach to draw compositions with a report involving this practice. The starting point was the following question: how can the relational dynamics of the SCD offer powerful spaces for encountering forces that intensify our experience of the self and mobilize educational processes for the teachers? By placing this question within the scope of the report in focus here, it was observed that the practice of the SCD promotes an intense involvement that demands a perceptive calibration of those who participate in it. Such calibration is evidenced between the dimensions of sensibilities and the sacred, through an ethical and aesthetics perspective that progressively constitutes not only the subjectivation processes, but also the educational movement of the future SCD teachers¹.

KEYWORDS Sacred Circle Dances; Subjectivation; Care of the self; Education; Aesthetics of existence.

¹ The one who not only leads the SCD, but also has the function of "setting and sustaining the focus", that is, of contributing to the intensification of this expressive experience.



Subjectivation and educational processes in the Sacred Circle Dances

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Introduction

We are especially in a time when the body is nothing more than an object: of desire, futile, of sterile aesthetics, of merely utilitarian use, in addition to being fragmented. Either we worship it - and it is worth any sacrifice to keep it in the socially "accepted" standards - or we ignore it as if there was no importance in taking care of itself.

Thus, between ideality and inertia, perceiving this body in its potentiality (physical-affective-mental-energetic-spiritual...) and feeling it as a sacred space and a pulsating life is essential for us to live intensely.

However how to mobilize this intensive dimension of life? It should be noted, since now, that there is no definite answer to this question, considering that the experience that intensifies existence can never be given in advance, as a general rule or universal principle of action. This forces the dispersion of the reflexive effort, pointing to multiplicities, which means to say that the subject is constituted by an experiential multiplicity, since he/she sees himself/herself crossed and populated by multiple flows (HUR, D. U, 2013). Such multiplicities are linked to an action that, in its turn, dynamizes the perceptual framework in the experience of movement, updating, always and each time, the expression of our corporeities.

It is from this place, which can only be located in the experience of movement, that is, in the action of relating oneself to the world and taking care of oneself, that we place the reflections of this work, in order to deal with the practices through which we constitute our ways of being and acting.

To calibrate the attention towards these practices, we seek support, at first, in a clue offered by Artaud.

It is in the human body that the confluence of forces present in the cosmos occurs, it is through the interdependence between micro and macrocosm that the divine manifests itself. There is a

'corporeal exit for the soul' that 'allows this soul to be found in an inverse sense and rediscover the being'. And soul is breath of life, pulsating body, rhythm, breathing (ARTAUD, 1987, apud BRITTO, 2001, p.6 - Our Translation).

Therefore, it is the clue of the body understood as a moving place, through which “the confluence of forces present in the cosmos” passes, that we would like to situate the contours of this article. And to mark the inscription of these contours, we resort to an experience of encounter with the Sacred Circle Dances (SCD) so that, from a concrete practice, we seek evidence of this “confluence of forces”, suggested by Artaud.

The SCD can be presented as an expressive practice danced in a circle, composed of peoples' traditional dances and contemporary dances, created by people from different parts of the world, which are in constant creation and expansion especially in Brazil.

From this universe of the SCD, we are interested in observing how the cultivation, surrender and full disposition together with this practice can offer powerful spaces for meeting this confluence of forces that intensify our experience of the self, in the relationship we establish among our own body, the space and the others in the dynamics of circle dance, and at the same time can enable the mobilization of SCD teachers' educational processes.

To demarcate our discussions within this problematic delimitation situated above, we have started from a SCD teacher's⁴ report presented in the report of his extension project entitled “*Na roda da Dança e Saúde do Trabalhador*” (“In the circle of the worker's Dance and Health”), from the Psychology course at UFSC in partnership with the Institute of

⁴ In this case, Lucas Vaz de Mello, whose mentioned report refers to the period in which he was still an internship student in the 5th semester of the Psychology course at UFSC and a beginner in the SCD practice in 2013.

Psychiatry of the State of Santa Catarina, held between 2014 and 2015.

And to draw compositions with this report, based on the principles of qualitative research, we have sought support in the enactive approach, originally postulated by Varela, Thompson & Rosch (1992), in which cognition is understood as “embodied action, that is, intrinsically connected to the biological realization of an organism” (BAUM and KROEFF, 2018, p. 208 - Our Translation), so that action and perception are inseparable. This approach traces the writing grooves of a researcher who does not see himself/herself outside the universe he/she intends to study. There is an almost inseparability between the phenomenon studied and the perception that perceives it. Here space is given for the action to be guided by the perception that is constantly changing, so that, in this impermanence we change ourselves, as happens with the process of analysis and writing along the way.

The report and its repercussions

Before presenting the report that will support the development of these article reflections, it is important to place it in its context of origin and to mention the impact that this report has had while feeling it in the potency of its writing, on the point of moving us into all this discussion.

The occurrence started during an internship supervision at UFSC (Federal University of Santa Catarina) at the Psychiatry Institute of the State of Santa Catarina, when the psychologist of that Institute asked the students to participate in the SCD circles that were taught by a teacher who coordinated the UFSC Education Center (CED). One of the internship students, who was a student in the 5th semester of the Psychology course at UFSC, decided to participate even though he had no idea what the SCD would be. In his life story, there was a mixture of desire and fear in relation to his


surrender to the dances, and this experience seemed to him to be a possibility to make himself free from the obstacles that prevented him from letting his body flow without fear.

In his report - from his revelation about his nervousness when he arrived for the SCD class to his first impression when entering the room and feeling the harmony between all the women participating in that group, in addition to the center arrangement and initiation ritual - we can feel his sense of being welcome. In his words, "I was hugged and heard three words that have never left my head: You are welcome!" And this feeling, which persists throughout his report, is still felt in other passages: *"I was welcomed by the group (...). I was a cell of a large circular body that opened up and welcomed me as a part of it. (...) And so, the circle dance ended. With a circular hug, thanks, breaths and a new sensation: I have danced!"*

Following, there are some excerpts from the report of this internship student after his first experience with the SCD to compose our reflections.

Dance and education

And it was like that, for the first time in my academic trajectory that after finishing a dance and making mistakes from beginning to end, I was surprised: no one had corrected me! How was it possible?! Where are the traditional corrections and methods of perfecting the movement? The aesthetics so targeted by our society, where was it?! Where had the critical eyes usually directed to those who always make mistakes gone? The singing conversations about the new students?! Where was the academisation of the academy?! And nothing happened! The song ended and we moved on to the next, next, next... and as much as I made mistakes, at no time I was corrected or pointed out as such.



Most of the time, in the academy model in which we are inserted, we learn to see and hear what is shown and said to us without questioning how we feel about it, if that makes sense to us or if we could be and do in a different way. We are held back, and the more adults we become, the more we boycott ourselves without even realizing it. What will you say about working with our body?

In general, in schools we are not introduced to practices that can provide us with moments of body perception, sensitivity, creation, which makes us increasingly passive, inexpressive, disempowered and unhappy people. We are automatons (re)producing what the system conditions us to understand and accept that it is the only way to live, to succeed, to be someone, and to be more concerned with getting it right than with the movement itself, be it from the body or thought.

Dealing with what leaks and intensifies the constitution of our subjectivity, it is important to give visibility to the movements that shape the subjects' ways of being and acting, involving our lives in the educational exercise. And it is in this context that the practices, in which the subjects are involved, will appear as nourishing sources of these pulsating movements that are essential to give vent to and sharpen their perception in the course of their subjectivation and educational processes, since these processes are intertwined one another.


Chaves and Ratto (2018) suggest that the richness of the educational process lies “in the opening to the forces of the event”, in the “exposure to difference” which is “a singular manifestation that does not stick to prefabricated social identities” (p.190 - Our Translation). They bring the importance of the concept of “vulnerability”, according to Deleuze, in this singular constitutive process of subjectivation, where showing our weaknesses and limitations, “we gain in potency what,

apparently, we lose in an idealized image of ourselves” (Ibidem, 2018, p.194 - Our Translation), because it is in the process of disidentification, of opening to the unknown, to the unexpected, to “disorder”, to conflict and in the encounter with otherness that we can invent new paths and live something new intensely.

In fact, we need practices that stimulate the sensitivity and creativity, self-care practices that constitute the subject through his/her experiences, in his/her processes of subjectivation, of self-government, which imply the relationship with himself/herself and with others in a form of ethical and aesthetic existence, which Foucault called “aesthetics of existence” (FOUCAULT, 2004a). In general terms, the “aesthetics of existence” inaugurates a level of composition and analysis about subjectivities, which invites us to think about the labor that we operate on ourselves to become who we want to be. Such labors guide all our effort and attention towards the practices with which we dedicate ourselves and that transform our experience of ourselves⁵ (TAYLOR, 2018; GALLO, 2008; ALVES, 2011).

In this way, it is necessary to “welcome the vulnerability to which we are exposed, and which is constitutive of the

⁵ This "self" refers to a reflexivity, that is, a return, a conversion of oneself onto oneself, and must be understood as a practice, that is, as "a way of relating to oneself in order to constitute oneself, to elaborate" (GROS, 2008, p. 128 - Our translation). In Foucault's reading, this "self" was ongoing in ancient spirituality, hence his genealogical effort in the search for this principle of action. To approach this "self", following the Foucaultian genealogy, it will be necessary to denature that static identity so intimately embedded in us by Christian morality and the logic of modernity. Such a static identity insists on covering, repressing, holding back and shaping our identity in the eyes of the “know thyself”. Thus, under the focus of self-knowledge, to the detriment of care, we renounce ourselves, due to the legitimation of Christian morality and the logic of scientific discourse, as it is carved in modernity. In the domains of "oneself" one breaks with the plots of knowledge due to oneself, in the search for an intensification of presence for oneself, as Gros would say, supported by Foucault. In these terms, the "self" reiterated here would be "... an exercise in concentrating oneself on oneself, not to offer oneself as an object of introspective observation, but so that it is possible to accompany me." (GROS, 2008, p. 130 - Our translation). In this sense, this "self" refers to "remaining fully present to oneself", (...) it refers to "being fully aware of one's own abilities. This self-knowledge does not internally divide the subject according to the thread of knowledge (object that observes/object that is observed); it is, rather, on the order of an effort of surveillance that intensifies immanence to oneself" (GROS, 2008, p. 131 - Our translation).



processes of transformation”, to transgress and acquire “powers for the lines of flight” which, according to Deleuze’s thinking, are “the multiple possibilities what we have to learn”, the “ability to perceive the power that is around us” through encounters (CHAVES and RATTO, 2018, p. 192 - Our translation). However, living the estrangement and experiencing the state of vulnerability is not easy, it is a process of suffering, because it is not predictable, it is in the order of what leaks.

It is importante to understand that knowledge is constantly being built from experience and, therefore, self-knowledge is in an eternal becoming in the relationship with the world and in line with self-care practices. It is a constitutive process of the being in action from educational movements that shape the subjects' ways of being and acting, involving their lives in the subjectivation and educational exercise - understanding here education as a more complex process of the individual's action in relation to his/her own constitution of being. And this path requires labor, an exercise of oneself on oneself, a surrender, with persistence and dedication, a search for an ethical existence in the relationship with oneself and with the other that, instead of renouncing oneself, allows us to transform, to (de)(re)construct possible truths.

Foucault brings to modern times the practices of the self of ancient Greco-Roman culture, because unlike this moment in which we live, knowledge and ethics are not separated there, where knowing is subordinated to the care of itself by a subject of action, ethical, that is built, transformed, as “spiritual exercises” that lead to the elaboration of ways of life, of existence, through the art of living. It's not an easy exercise, it's a difficult achievement. It is an exercise in appealing to vigilance and attention and NOT to deciphering the secret nature (STONE, 2018, p.188 - Our translation).

According to Foucault in an interview:

Among humanity's cultural inventions, there is a treasure trove of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, etc. which cannot be


exactly reactivated, but which at least constitutes or helps to constitute a certain point of view which can be quite useful as a tool for analyzing what is happening today – and for changing it (DREYFUS & RABINOW, 1995, p. 260, 261 - Our translation).

When taking the practices of the self in this Foucaultian perspective, we realize that subjectivity based on models and standards is alienated, and vulnerability is an act of resistance to this alienated subjectivation en masse. Therefore, the authentic subjectivity, to which we refer, carried out by ourselves, is “as that which makes effective the unique way that each of us has to live and/or experience the events of life” (CHAVES E RATTO, 2018, p.190 – Our translation).

Why can't we decide how we want to be, act and lead our own lives? Why haven't we gained space from our early childhood to take care of ourselves and turn ourselves to a closer look individually, even realizing our uncertainties about ourselves, opening "wings" to the new that presents itself, so that we can "metamorphose" ourselves? Why live under the fear of mistakes to the detriment of the courage to dare and venture even if “wandering”? Being a wandering person without fear of making mistakes, what a relief!!!

The magic of the circle


Besides, throughout the circle I felt my hands getting warm every song was danced. I was in touch. In touch with other hands, with looks, with the emotion and energy the dance and the group potentiated at every moment. I started to feel my body more relaxed, but I kept making mistakes until the end. And happy, at that moment I made mistakes and smiled! And the more I made mistakes, the calmer I became. The group welcomed, the group danced, the group laughed, the group was responsible for all the manifestations that took place there. I was a cell of a large circular body that opened up and welcomed me as a part of it.



This encounter with the other, this feeling of unity, of acceptance, of belonging, are events that greatly characterize the Circle Dances movement. Yes, in the circle we do the steps right and also make mistakes, but the “error” does not prevent the circle from flowing. Thus, in this flow of surrender of the bodies intensely involved by the music, dance and the calibration of the energy that makes us feel - as the internship student has said in his report - “a cell of a large circular body”, we are facing a “center of envelopment” (DELEUZE, 2006) in which the magic is made, the sacred manifests itself, obstacles are dissolved, singularities emerge and we open our minds for a bodily dialogue with the other (ALVES, 2011).

This concept that Deleuze (2006) develops of “centers of envelopments” he calls “own values of envelopment in a given system”, which proceed to the internalization of individuating factors (p. 244 – Our translation). By drawing a parallel between Deleuze's analogy of entropy with this concept of “center of envelopment”, in the case of SCD, it would be as if the bodies were affecting and being affected by these values of implication in the circle, which have a singular intensity graduation for each individual on account of the individual factors in an energetic calibration.

In this context, we also assume the SCD as a sacred and meditative space that is created in each one and in the collective (WOSIEN, 2000). Such space necessarily implies the relationship with oneself and with the other in a “dive” into silence, the body listening, and the sensitization by the movements, the music and the whole scenario that can compose the environment of this practice, by the affection that overflows, the pulsation of the circle, the flow of energy, in short, by the magic that happens. “That one who meditates while dancing finds a densification of his/her being in a time that is no longer measurable, in which the magical force of the circle manifests itself” (Ibidem, 2000, p.29 – Our translation).



However, what does sacred mean? What space is sacred? In all times, the sacred has presented itself in the life of Man. According to Eliade (2010), “when the sacred manifests itself” (...) there is the “revelation of an absolute reality, which is opposed to non-reality” (p. 25 – Our translation). Therefore, even for the non-religious man there are “privileged places, qualitatively different from others”, and whatever the event that belongs to these “privileged places”, “they are sacred places (...) as if a non-religious human being had had the revelation of another reality” (Ibidem, 2010, p.28), because “the sacred is the real par excellence, at the same time power, efficiency, source of life and fecundity” (ibid, p. 31 – Our translation).

We understand that, to experience and build a sacred space, we do not necessarily need temples or specific places, nor follow this or that religion. It is not about religion, but about spirituality, an immanent spirituality, understanding spirituality as “the search, practice and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations in himself/herself, in order to obtain access to the truth” (FOUCAULT, 2005^a: 15, apud STONE, 2018 – Our translation). It is about “assuming the creation of the 'world' that one chooses to inhabit” (ELIADE 2010, p.49 – Our translation).

From our perspective, everything that moves (us) is sacred, what affects us and transforms our old ways of being, thinking and acting... It is the place that inhabits us and that we choose to inhabit, that fills itself, empties itself, and at the same time it makes perfect sense. It is sacred what chills us, opens the pores, manifests itself from the encounter between what penetrates us and what overflows us, which is inexplicable, but doesn't even need to be explained because it demands feeling, the living experience of feeling, pulsing of the creative impulse in motion, force and power of life, of

connection between each one of us, everything and nothing. Eternalized place where the event presents itself, the surrender surrenders and the inexplicable happens.

And it is in this place - where we are enraptured and where we choose to inhabit, even if provisionally, where we surrender to events and experience the unpretentious surrender of results - that we can experience our processes of subjectivation in a more authentic way, which, according to Gros, for Foucault would be “a way of relating to oneself in order to construct and elaborate ourselves” (GROS, 2008, p.128 – Our translation).

Afectivity and transformation

And so, the circle ended. With a circular hug, thanks, breaths and a new sensation: I danced!

I left that room and, even before reaching the bus stop to return home, the sound of Bach was still permeating my head. ‘The sun dance’, the first circular dance I had ever performed, marked my heartbeat for a week... And for a week I sang and tried to reproduce the steps without the music in front of friends, at the hospital where I was internship student. And the “back, back, swing, swing, front, front, side together” started to have some meaning beyond a sequence of dancing steps.

From then on, there were many other songs that I started singing and trying to decipher at bus stops, classrooms, kitchens and even in bathrooms. And for a whole year I continued as a dancer in the circles of UFSC, expanding contacts and making good friends in dance. So it was until the project 'On the dance circle and worker's health' was approved by the pro-rectory of extension. Coordinated by the professor Terezinha Maria Cardoso, the project was a partnership with the psychology service of the State Institute of Psychiatry and, at the invitation of the coordinators, I took on the scholarship

as an extension teacher. Over the course of the project, I took many dance courses and classes, and there were a lot of material I studied and many experiences I practiced.

So we ask ourselves: What affects us? What moves us intensely in a certain direction? How do we transform ourselves? We don't have the answers to these questions, but we can say that an answer is presented before us and that makes perfect sense: what is alive inside us, pulsating and generating creative energy! According to GLEIZER (2005), Spinoza, in his theory of affects, tells us that affect is the transition from one state to another in a composition relationship with another body, which can be more or less potent. Joy, for example, frequently experienced in the circles of SCD, is a more potent state, and the more I increase the power of the body to act, the more possibility I have of affecting and being affected. When the dancer reports *"And happy, at that moment I made a mistake and smiled! And the more I made mistakes, the calmer I became. The group welcomed, the group danced, the group laughed, the group was responsible for all the manifestations that took place there"*, he reveals the expansion of his power, which manifests itself in the face of certain affective conditions that are present.

This is the propulsion we need to let events flow so that we can look at them, listen to our body, feel the direction of the wind and dance our own dance. The execution of the steps and the singing of the songs, which are related to us in the excerpt above, do not happen by imposition, but by a movement generated in the interval between the outside and the inside, the other and himself, and which reverberates in the participant, in a way pulsating, a bodily experience installed in the SCD in its intensity and in full multiplicity.

However, the state of affecting and being affected is not something that happens then and then is over. This

reverberates, we take it with us, even if it has already been transformed in our daily lives, in our structures, in our way of seeing life and living it. It is exciting to realize this when he reports: *“the first circular dance I performed in my life marked my heartbeat for a week. (...) And for a whole year I continued as a dancer (...) That was until the project 'On the dance circle and worker's health' was approved by the pro-rectory of extension.* In other words, that internship student who initially went in search of SCD full of fears, has become a SCD teacher!

Final considerations

At the end of his report, the internship student, and now also a SCD teacher, brings a question from Garaudy: “What would happen if, instead of just building our lives, we had the madness or wisdom to dance it?” (Garaudy, apud OSTETTO, 2014, p. 14 – Our translation), from which Ostetto makes her own: “What would happen, I think, if we educators had the audacity and wisdom to dance education?” (OSTETTO, 2014, p.14 – Our translation). And he finally concludes: *“What would happen if we psychologists had the madness, wisdom, audacity, and why not, the sobriety to dance such a mental health?!”*

In this way, the report that has guided our reflections within this article offered powerful clues to help us think of the SCD as a movement of expression that mobilizes the affectivity and the sacred space of the subjects involved, and provides opportunities for the composition of subjectivation and educational processes, which, therefore, invite them to the composition of a certain art of living, a “aesthetics of existence” (Foucault, 2004a). We reinforce here that it is a more complex process of individual action in relation to his/her

own constitution of being and not the “educational process (...) as a process of external, heteronomous subjectivation, constituting subjects for a social machine of production and reproduction” (GALLO, 2008, p. 259 – Our translation).

For that reason, in this constitutive and constant transformation process, we have no other way than the loving and patient self-care of the BEING that shows itself, that relates with and cares for the other as well. The subject's ethical exercise in the world necessarily involves self-care that involves the body in its power (physical-affective-mental-energetic-spiritual...), and that calls for an attentive look at oneself and the other.

By glimpsing this ethical and aesthetic existence in this process of subjectivation through the practice of the SCD, we end up bringing a concept to the ancient Greeks about “telling the truth” that they called parrhesia, which Foucault defines as:

Verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his/her personal relationship with the truth and risks his/her life because he/she recognizes telling the truth as a duty. [...] the speaker uses his/her freedom and chooses frankness over persuasion, truth over falsehood or silence, the risk of death over life and safety, criticism over flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy (2001:12, apud STONE, 2018, p. 190 - Our Translation).

And so, when dancing with these reports of a person whose practice of the SCD was part of his constitutive and transformation process, which has led him to become a SCD teacher, it is possible to feel the strength of this courageous act of saying “the truth”, for being the spokesperson of his own experience. Not the truth that we are taught or that we are urged to say, but the one that does not remain silent in proportion to its drive!

Wouldn't it be much more interesting and fruitful if we could follow our choices, instead of the fixed idea of going in search of success or of cowering before the fear of making

mistakes, by "dancing" along the paths that presented themselves, regardless of the destination, but feeling the route?

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