80 - THE CULT OF THE BODY AND THE ART OF EXISTENCE

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INTRODUCTION

The central theme of this article is the problematics of the definition of today's body, its construction and its dynamics, as well as its dimension as an agent of social and cultural relations.

The issue at hand is thought of from the insertion of the body as a signifier and signified in the context of physical education.

What I intend is to show is that there is an open space to discuss the phylosophical, historical and cultural ideas of the body, especially today, because the regulation of our profession is happening at the same time that several "alternative" ways to work the body are becoming more and more popular. The most popular ones are the eastern systems of exercise - especially yoga - as well as many other body techniques (Antigymnastics, the Alexander technique, eutony, holistic exercise programs, etc.), all in the realm of the so-called global body techniques.

Firstly, I will work with the ideas of the body's health and beauty - values inspired in the Greek ideals. Then I will trace the line of physical education in Brazil in the twentieth century so as to define the limits of the body in view of the ideal body, as well as reality. Furthermore, I will question the worth of the body in view of Nietzsche's values. Finally, I will point out the possibility of a discussion of what I call *the cult of the body and the art of existence.*

BODY/PHYSICAL EDUCATION: between the ideal and reality

Today, the great concern with the health and beauty of the body is publicly known. One can say that this idea was recovered in the nineteenth century by the Earl of Coubertain with the creation of the modern Olympic Games, whose obejectives have restored the Greek ideals. Therefore, in trying to recover those ideals, the ideas of training and taking care of the body have become more and more important in our society, not only from the aesthetic, but also from the ethical point of view.

After some time, care of the body changed according to the social and cultural changes which took place and the new technologies which emerged. The impacts of those technologies must be thoroughly discussed. That being the case, it is essential that the several fields of knowledge reflect critically on their values and bases.

In this sense, I believe that the discussions which have been polarized by physical education since the mid-sixties on the epistemiological issues, as well as their social and cultural roles are attempts to meet the demands of our time. We know of the need to change the current paradigm, for the castesian model, in which the pratice is based, cannot account for the technological and social changes consolidated throughout the twentieth century.

We can see in the large intellectual production of the area that not only their methods and efficiency have been criticized, but also - and specially - the nature of their objectives: the promotion of health and morale, the training of soldiers, either for war of for work, or even its disciplinary function in regards to leisure.

Historically, it is necessary to remember that Modern Physical Education, which came into existence in the later eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, sponsored by mechaniscism and utilitarism, brought to the concept of an "ideal body," a vision of utility and docility related to the production and reproduction of capital. Thus, what is understood as an efficient body is a disciplined body, including the physical education needs to educate it by means of movement in this direction.

With that, one can say that what the interest of the physical education will be, the technical development achieved especially by means of the repetition and classification of different kinds of exercise, and not the action (praxis), because,

the course of study (...) is a technique of distribuition of individuals through the insertion of the bodies in a personalized, classified and combined space (...) Its subject is the control of time. That is, it establishes the objective of producing maximum quickness and eficiency. (...) And this careful control of the body's operations - the course of study - is made by means of the temporal creation of the act, of the correlation of a specific gesture with the body that produces it.

This course of study is also present in the of training the body for the games (sports) whose utmost expression is in the competitions and, in particular, in the Olympic games. The latter, once conceived in a modern version of the Greek games, have brought to the present time an idea of beautiful bodies which could be built by means of conditioning and training.

On the other hand, as Moreira shows, this disciplining function also appears as a fundamental presupposition in different conceptions of Brazilian physical education: the *Hygienist* concept (until 1930), which, besides good health, aimed at good moral; and the *Militarist* concept (1930 - 1945), whose objectives were behaviors directed towards war and combat, also being ascetic in the sense of the practice of exclusion of the physically disabled (natural selection). From 1945 on, with the coming of the *Pedagogicist* conception - a more liberal trend, and, therefore, a little less centered on the biological component - contemplates not only good health but also discipline and the *individual aspects* of the body's movements. This characteristic resulted in a psycholization of the movement in an attempt to systematize what was called "educational value of physical education," i.e., the capacity (by means of the movement) to participate in the "Comprehensive Education". After 1964, there was the *Competitive* trend. Its value relied on high performance in competition and individual overcoming. The objective of this trend, an American influence, was, as we know, the sportification (I'm not sure if that's a real word either..) of physical education.

In spite of the current model, many criticisms have been made. There has been an advancement of ideas that the body has revolted against the kind of knowledge produced so far and in which the value criteria would be denying the subjective aspect of the man, his singularity, motivations and interests.

Certainly, the modern man should neither be what the anatomy and the physiology say, nor even a fact, which after the maximum control of the possible variables, becomes perfectly quantifiable. Man, subject and object of knowledge, as Michel Foucault shows in his work entitled *Words and Things*, while a typically modern phenomenon, is at the same time, empirical and transcendental, which leads us to the search of a space for and in favor of man from his inner realtionships, from understanding him, his meaning and values.

It is in the midst of all this that I see the emergence of Manoel Sérgio's proposal, which, among others, brings the idea of looking for an autonomous science to answer the questions concerning "human motricity." The Science of Human Motricity is justified by him as so: "the body is the materialization of human complexity. (...) the body is not physical in the Cartesian sense of the term, (...) but the core of my existence and of my own subjectivity."

The author denounces:

Physical education makes man a simple machine in the tridimensional space of Euclidian geometry. (...) In fact, body

idolatry is nothing but a particularly scandalous vicissitude of Cartesianism in effect.

Defending "P*hysical Education that we have and the one we want"*, the new *Transforming Physical Education* started to be disseminated. Its values are the understanding of the individual as a coherent whole, a being which has a place in the world as well as a social and cultural role. According to this trend, which was influenced by the phenomenological approach, it was in the twentieth century that man rediscovered the body in an attempt to overcome the historical dual paradigm of body/mind. There is, permeated in these ideas, the man/world dialectics, for "as a being of needs, which does not survive without the world, man opens it up, and in his praxis, transforms it into a human world - a world for man."

However, in spite of all this effort to understand the "moving being" and the specificity of this course of study, a new challenge has arisen in this beginning of this century, and once again, physical education is affected by social and cultural changes.

The crisis of physical education is confirmed, for instance, by the French author Parlebas, who sees it not only in the technical plane, in the fields of intervention, formation and investigation, but, and above all, in the great diversity of new practices favored by the technological evolution, which makes us use new gadgets more and more frequently.

Every new year adds new sports to the existing ones: windsurfing, hang gliding, bicycle motocross, underwater hockey, monopatim, acrobatic skiing. New heteroclitic methods overlay and interwine (...). Amidst this proliferation of techniques, of methods and of practices, physical education fragments itself infinitely, becoming a prisoner of ephemeral fashions and losing all its unity.

All this diversity of practices, which feeds the sale of sporting goods, leads us to Kerckhove's ideas. He accurately defines *Technofetichism* as the technologies of consumption that "finally integrated into our lives can generate a kind of fetishistic obsession in the users". We must not forget to cite the example of the gyms, which cannot exist without the exercise machines and the many portable pieces of equipment for exercising. Not even dance is immune to the technological processes of construction of bodies whose new forms can allow for something that joins dancing and acrobatics and that, favored by cutting edge lighting and sound, looks like illusion.

Nevertheless, more than mere confirmations are necessary as the problems with the virtuality and the meaning of body have become new themes. After all, how can one contextualize the object of study of physical education today considering the intensification of the globalization process, of the social relations, and therefore, of appropriation and power relationships? What is this body that we want to build as the techno-culture pops up everywhere in a domineering way? Would it be through other practices like the ones called *gentle physical activities*, in the sense Yara Lacerda used, a way or an opening for the acquisition of a new dimension of the concept and of the dynamics of the body in physical education?

IN SEARCH OF TODAY'S BODY: a way

Reflecting on the *body* category and trying to understand the dynamics of its construction in our time make us reflect upon the main aspects of our culture.

The world today is considered a semi-open system in permanent construction and the possibility that man has of intervening in the domains, for instance, of the nervous system, of reproduction and of heredity, places us before a man who is coming and going - a possibility; a man different from the modern one. One whose wholeness was clear and whose truths would be supported by the conditions which make him a human being.

In this sense, I would like to point out that Nietzsche's (184 4 - 1900) thoughts are an important contribution for the discussion of issues raised here, for with his critical philosophy, he can be understood as an opening to what is called Post Modernism today, the space which permeates our object of study: today's body.

We know that the Nietzschean philosophy of values is precisely the basis of modernity. Nietzsche questions the possibility of knowledge reaching the truth. To the German philosopher, man wrongly believes that truth is transcendental, for it is just a human creation, "a moving troop of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, (...) illusions (...) - metaphors which have become used up and which lack sensitive force." What exists is, according to Nietzsche, a *feeling of truth,* which by force of habit, will lead to a social pact that agrees with the position which is useful to the truth and is, therefore, "rational".

Nietzsche thinks that the philosophers have a *hereditary defect*, for

they will not learn that man has become, that the faculty of cognition has become; there are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths.

It will be the revaluation of what will come, of the multiplicity and of chance that will facilitate the evaluation of a whole gamut of values coming from an infinitely possible world which meets human interests and needs. The world is, therefore, a process, something to come, ìn which the world of being is inadmissible. "The thing-in-itself is worthy of Homeric laughter: it appeared to be so much, indeed everything, and is actually empty, that is to say devoid of meaning."

There will be, then, an opening toward praxis and man will be responsible for giving life a meaning and for creating values. Man becomes the agent capable of overcoming the world of nature, thus entering the space of history and culture.

The existence dislocates, then, from the *existence of "the (human) being"* into the *existence of being*, one in which human sensitivity and body as well as earthly authenticity are not opposed to reason, but are part of it. To Nietzsche, "the body is a big sagacity, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd. (...) your body is your great reason: that does not say 'I' but does 'I'."

And it is this praxic aspect of the Nietzschean philosophy that, as a revitalizer of human action in the world of what is to come, makes it possible for us to question the cornerstones and structures which allow for the construction of today's body.

Returning to the context of physical education, one can say that if on the one hand, the return of the modern Olympic games is an excuse to recapture the ideals of the Greeks, (especially in the way to work and train the body), represented the Greek idea of construction of the body as a need to *have* a body to *be* a man. On the other hand, modern times, submitted to technoculture, dilute these ideals in the relations of capital, turning the bodies into mere goods.

The *Cult of the Body* today, therefore, seems to show the crisis of today's body. Thus, differently from classical thought, the construction of today's body is permeated by the need to *have* a particular body to *stop being*. Here, the reference is the myth of post-modernity (whatever it is), the absence of closed forms, and the opening to praxis in the Nietzcshean sense, which makes the permanent reconstruction of the body in its conceptual form possible.

In this light, I understand that the liveliness of the re-construction of the body is in the *Art of the Existence*, an expression I borrow from Michel Foucault who, in his work entitled *The History of Sexuality*, especially the chapter called *In the Care of the Self,* dedicates himself to the analysis of the Greek body. He says: "It was [the] theme of the care of oneself, consecrated by Socrates, that later philosophy took up again and ultimately placed at the center of that "art of existence".

Our final stop is, in fact, a starting point, for I believe that thinking about the *Cult of the Body* and the *Art of the Existence* in search of revealing today's body can be a good start to understanding the ways to be followed by physical education in this new

century.

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THE CULT OF THE BODY AND THE ART OF EXISTENCE

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the conception of today's body, its construction and dynamics, as well as its dimension as an agent of social and cultural relationships. The issue is thought from the insertion of the body as signifier and signified in the context of physical education. What we intend is to show that there is an open space to discuss the phylosophical, historical and cultural idea of the body, especially today, when there are many “alternative” ways to work the body - like the Yoga - and many other body techniques which see the body as a whole. The ideas concerning the body's health and beauty are values inspired in the Greek ideals. We trace the line of the physical education in Brazil in the twentieth century so as to define the limits of the body in view of the ideal body as well as reality. Proceeding, we question the worthiness of the body in view of Nietzsche's values. Finally, we point out the possibility of a discussion of what I call *the cult of the body and the art of existence.* Our reflections point to the *Cult of the Body*, which seems to show the crisis of today's body. Differently from the classical thought, the construction of today's body is permeated by the need to *have* a kind of body to *stop being*. Here, the reference is the myth of the post-modernity, which in the Nietzcshean sense, makes the permanent reconstruction of the body in its conceptual form possible. Under this light, we understand that the liveliness of the re-construction of the body is in the *Are of the Existence*, an expression borrowed from Michel Foucault who, in his work entitled *The History of Sexuality*, says: “It was [the] theme of the care of oneself, consecrated by Socrates, that later philosophy took up again and ultimately placed at the center of that "art of existence”.

KEY-WORDS: body, Physical Education, Philosophy

LE CULTE DU CORPS ET L'ART DE L'EXISTENCE

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite de la conception du corps contemporain, sa construction e sa dynamique, ainsi que sa dimension comme agent des rapports socioculturels regardés à partir de l'insertion du corps, le signifiant et le signifié, dans le cadre de l'Éducation Physique. On a cherché à montrer qu'il y a un espace de discussion ouvert en ce qui concerne la conception philosophique-historique-culturel de la compréhension de corps, au moment actuel, où les formes « alternatives » du travail corporel ont aussi de notoriété, telles que le yoga et plusieurs techniques, soit disant des techniques corporelles globalistiques. Les idées de santé et beauté du corps sont des valeurs inspirées sur les idéaux grecs - en traçant une trajectoire de l'Éducation Physique Brésilienne dans le XX ème siècle, de façon à marquer les limites du corps d'après son idéation et la réalité, pour ensuite questionner sa valorisation d'après la philosophie des valeurs de Nitzsche, pointant, enfin, à la possibilité d'une discussion à partir de ce que l'on appelle le *culte du corps et l'art de l'existence*. Les réflexions pointent, dans un sens, Le Culte du Corps, tant qu'un révélateur d'une crise, la crise du corps contemporain. De façon variée, l'idée d'une pensée classique, la construction du corps contemporain est parsemée par le besoin d'*avoir* un corps déterminé pour *cesser d'être*. Là la référence est un mythe de post-modernité qui, dans le sens de Nitzsche, rend possible la reconstruction permanente du corps, en sa forme conceptuelle. Sous cet aspect, on comprend que le dynamisme de re-construction du corps se fait dans l'Art de l'Existence, terme que j'emprunte de Michel Foucault, qui dans son oeuvre L'Histoire de la Sexualité dit : « or, c'est ce thème de soin de soi, consacré par Socrates, que la philosophie a repris, et qu'elle a fini par situer dans le cerne de cet « art d'existence ».

MOTS-CLEFS: corps, Éducation Physique, Philosophie

EL CULTO DEL CUERPO Y EL ARTE DE LA EXISTENCIA

RESUMEN

Este articulo trata de la concepción del cuerpo contemporáneo, su construcción y su dinámica bien como su dimensión en cuanto agente de las relaciones socioculturales pensadas a partir de la inserción del cuerpo significante y significado, en el contexto de la Educación Física. Buscamos demostrar que hay un espacio de discusión abierto en lo que toca a la concepción filosófico-histórico-cultural de comprensión del cuerpo, en el momento actual, en que las varias formas “alternativas” de trabajo corporal tienen tanta notoriedad, tales como el Yoga y las varias técnicas, dichas técnicas corporales globalísticas. Las ideas de salud y de belleza del cuerpo son valores inspirados en los ideales griegos - trazando una trayectoria de la Educación Física Brasileña en el siglo XX, de forma a marcar los límites del cuerpo por medio de su ideación y de la realidad, para luego cuestionar su valoración mediante la filosofía de los valores de Nietzsche, apuntando, por fin, a la posibilidad de una discusión a partir de lo que denominamos como el culto del cuerpo y del arte de la existencia. Las reflexiones apuntan en un sentido El culto del Cuerpo, como revelador de una crisis, la crisis del cuerpo contemporáneo. De forma diversa a la idea del pensamiento clásico, la construcción del cuerpo contemporáneo es permeada por la necesidad de que se tenga un determinado cuerpo para que se deje de ser. Aquí la referencia es el mito de la posmodernidad que, en el sentido

nietzcsheneano, posibilita la reconstrucción permanente del cuerpo, en su forma conceptual. Bajo esa óptica, entendemos que el dinamismo de reconstrucción del cuerpo se constituye en el Arte de la Existencia, termino que tomó de préstamo de Michel Foucault, que en su obra La historia de la sexualidad dice “ora, es ese tema del trato de sí, consagrado por Sócrates que la filosofía ulterior retomó, y que ella acabó situando en el cerne de esa arte de la existencia”.

PALABRAS CLAVE: cuerpo, Educación Física, Filosofía

O CULTO DO CORPO E A ARTE DA EXISTÊNCIA

RESUMO

Este artigo trata da concepção do corpo contemporâneo, sua construção e sua dinâmica, bem como sua dimensão enquanto agente das relações sócioculturais pensada a partir da inserção do corpo, significante e significado, no contexto da Educação Física. Procuramos demonstrar que há um espaço de discussão aberto no que diz respeito à concepção filosófico-histórico-cultural da compreensão de corpo, no momento atual, em que há tanta notoriedade as várias formas “alternativas” de trabalho corporal, tais como o Yoga e várias técnicas, ditas técnicas corporais globalísticas. As idéias de saúde e beleza do corpo são valores inspirados nos ideais gregos - traçando uma trajetória da Educação Física Brasileira no séc XX, de forma a marcar os limites do corpo mediante sua ideação e a realidade, para em seguida questionar sua valoração mediante a filosofia dos valores de Nietzsche, apontando, por fim, a possibilidade de uma discussão a partir daquilo que denominamos como *o culto do corpo e da arte da existência*. As reflexões apontam num sentido O *Culto do Corpo,* enquanto revelador de uma crise, a crise do corpo contemporâneo. De forma diversa à idéia do pensamento clássico, a construção do corpo contemporâneo é permeada pela necessidade de se *ter* um determinado corpo para se *deixar de ser*. Aqui a referência é o mito da pós-modernidade que, no sentido nietzcsheneano, possibilita a reconstrução permanente do corpo, em sua forma conceitual. Sob essa ótica, entendemos que o dinamismo da re-construção do corpo constitui-se na *Arte da Existência*, termo que tomo emprestado de Michel Foucault, que em sua obra *A história da sexualidade* diz: “ora, é esse tema do cuidado de si , consagrado por Sócrates que a filosofia ulterior retomou, e que ela acabou situando no cerne dessa “arte da existência”.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: corpo, Educação Física, Filosofia.