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rev.presenca@gmail.com

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do
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del Mármol, Mariana

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Body between Dualisms: speeches and experiences on the body during theatrical formation

Mariana del Mármol

Universidad Nacional de La Plata, La Plata – Argentina

ABSTRACT – Body between Dualisms: speeches and experiences on the body during theatrical formation – This article examines the emphasis which, in certain contexts in the formation of actors and the practice of acting in the city of La Plata, Argentina, is placed on the centrality of the body in theatre. The purpose of this article is to examine how the centrality of body in theatre is highlighted in certain contexts of learning and practice of acting in the city of La Plata. In order to do this, the body is placed in a network of relationships through which corporality is confronted and, at the same time, articulated with other terms representing that *other* territory of the human realm in face of which the value of corporality is highlighted: those relationships established between body and text or body and word; those established between body and mind or body and thinking; and those that put the body in relation to a number of references we have gathered under the concept of subjectivity.

Keywords: **Theatre. Body. Text. Thought. Subjectivity.**

RÉSUMÉ – Corps entre Dualismes: discours et expériences sur le corps dans l'apprentissage du théâtre – Cet article propose d'examiner comment la centralité du corps dans le théâtre est mise en évidence dans certains contextes d'apprentissage et la pratique du jeu d'acteur dans la ville de La Plata. Pour cela, le corps est placé dans un réseau de relations à travers lequel corporéité est confronté et, en même temps, articulée avec d'autres termes représentant cet *autre* territoire constitutif de l'humain la valeur de la corporalité est mise en évidence: celles qui sont établies entre le corps et le texte ou le mot; celles qui sont établies entre le corps et l'esprit ou le pensé; et ils ont mis le corps par rapport à un certain nombre de références se sont réunis sous le concept de subjectivité.

Mots-clés: **Théâtre. Corps. Texte. Pensée. Subjectivité.**

RESUMEN – Cuerpo entre Dualismos: discursos y experiencias sobre el cuerpo en el aprendizaje de la actuación – Este artículo examina el modo en que la centralidad del cuerpo en el teatro es resaltada en ciertos contextos de aprendizaje y práctica de la actuación en la ciudad de La Plata. Para esto, se ubica al cuerpo en una red de relaciones por medio de las cuales la corporalidad es confrontada y, al mismo tiempo, articulada con otros términos que representan aquel *otro* territorio de lo humano frente al cual se pretende enfatizar el valor de la corporalidad: las que se establecen entre cuerpo y texto o cuerpo y palabra; las que se establecen entre cuerpo y mente o cuerpo y pensamiento; y las que ponen al cuerpo en relación con una serie de referencias que hemos reunido bajo el concepto de subjetividad. Palabras-clave: **Teatro. Cuerpo. Texto. Pensamiento. Subjetividad.**



Introduction

The 1980s in the Argentinean theatre are marked by the beginning of a series of tendencies towards a renewed appreciation of the expressive use of the body in acting. This is in opposition to the theatrical tradition recognized as prevalent up to that time and noted for being intellectual and literary, as well as for subordinating performance to the narrative logic proposed by the dramatic text and to the intention of using that text to convey a message. These new tendencies coincide in affirming the independence of the theatre with respect to literature and in granting a central role to the corporal dimension, something which is found to be fundamental to theatre.

These changes give rise to a progressive and resounding displacement in the hegemonic construction of discourses about the body in theatre, one which comes in certain contexts to be in contrast with or in total opposition to the dominant tendencies of the preceding period. While in the past – a past which, in the opinion of some people in theatre, dates back several decades but which, for others, extends throughout the history of theatrical language – theatre seems to have been identified with text and the task of the actor to have been seen as intellectual, in this new period, everyone appears to agree (and needs to repeat tirelessly) that theatre is body, body and not text, or at least, body first and then text and thought.

Hence, beyond the great differences that distinguish the multiplicity of theoretical and methodological proposals for theatre that are interwoven into its contemporary practice in La Plata, the emphasis on the intrinsically corporal nature of the actor's work at the expense of its merely rational, intellectual, or linguistic character would appear to be a point they all have in common and one which admits of no dispute, thus constituting a hegemonic discourse on theatre and acting in the present day.

This renewed interest in the body in theatre and the affirmation of its value relative to that *other* constitutive dimension of the human being that is represented by the word, by intellectuality and by rationality, not only corresponds to changes within the field of theatre itself, but can also be observed in the light of certain, more general tendencies in contemporary society (Turner, 1989), changes that have generated a growing interest on the body in diverse areas that, besides art, philosophy, and the social sciences, include diverse

spheres of everyday life and are testimony of what some have defined as a true change in the status of the body in contemporary times (Lipovetsky, 1986).

In this context, that is as didactic as it is epochal, the recognition of the value of the body and the necessity of calling attention to its centrality is generally found linked to an attempt to overcome the dualism that is identified as dominant in the tradition of western thought and considered the main cause of the obfuscation of that centrality which it is proposed to bring back to light. However, it frequently occurs that the intention of emphasizing the value of corporality is expressed so strongly that it gives rise to an inversion of the relative values of the terms that make up the dualism rather than overcoming their inequality.

In this article, I propose to examine the way in which this emphasis on pointing out the centrality of the body in theatre in certain contexts comes into play in the formation and practice of acting in the independent theatrical circuit of the city of La Plata; how it places the body in a network of relations by means of which corporality is contrasted (and, at the same time, articulated) with other terms which represent distinct facets of that other constitutive dimension of humanity before which the value of corporality is emphasized. For analytical purposes, I have grouped these references into three categories of relationships: those that are established between the body and the text, or the body and the word; those between the body and the mind, the body and thought, or the body and intellectuality; and those which position the body in a relationship with itself, with its own history and with a series of terms which we have grouped under the concept of *subjectivity*. Related pairs which, as can be seen at length in this article, it has been useful to separate for the following analysis but that have an important continuity and contribute together to the same problematic nucleus.

The materials which form the basis for this analysis have been taken from an ethnographic investigation undertaken in 2011 as part of a doctoral study (del Mármol, 2016) in which the objective was to carry out a socio-anthropological analysis of the discourses, representations, and experiences concerning the body and theatrical practice that come into play in the formation of actors and actresses in the independent theatrical circuit of the city of La Plata, the

capital of the province of Buenos Aires in Argentina. Within the framework of this study, I made observations which were based on my own participation in such diverse activities within that circuit as theatre seminars and workshops, creative processes, rehearsals, cycles, festivals, functions, scheduled meetings, and the organization of events, physical spaces and facilities, among other activities, in addition to numerous in-depth interviews with theatre professionals with distinct career histories.

One particular type of participatory observation will be of special relevance in this study, and it, instead of parting from a theoretical and methodological position that proposes to focus on a study *of the* body, advances towards approaches taken *from* the body. That is, the body is not only to be the subject-object of investigation, but also a tool and source of knowledge (Crossley, 1995; Wacquant, 2006), something which led me to participate as a student in a theatre workshop and thus initiate me into an activity that until that time I had never participated in.

Based as much on this type of experience as on textual materials from other observational contexts and on transcripts of interviews and literature produced from within the field of theatre, the results and concerns expressed in this article are the product of a constant dialogue between my own reflections and observations made over the course of an ongoing conversation with persons active in theatre who, from the standpoint of their particular interests and disciplines, find themselves thinking about these same topics.

The words of those theatre professionals in La Plata that I cite and with which I maintain a dialogue in this project are from two types of sources: records of observations of classes and records of interviews. In the case of the observational records, the texts used here are basically transcripts, indications, and reflections voiced by the teachers (acting coaches) of four different workshops. As for the interviews, these were in-depth dialogues in which the life history of the person interviewed and his/her view of the current theatre scene in La Plata functioned as the main triggers for the exchange of opinions and reflections on the topics under investigation.

Both the workshops chosen for observation and the persons interviewed (teachers and students in these same workshops) represent what could be understood as different schools or methodologies of

acting within the theatre in La Plata¹. The selection in the materials used in this article was based on a generational criterion: the teachers of the classes observed and the individuals whose interviews have been used are between twenty-five and fifty years of age and began their formation starting in the 1990s, that is, after the appearance of the emphasis on the body that I have described in the first paragraphs of this introduction.

The procedure used for the analysis of these materials starts with a recompilation of those text fragments (from the diverse types of records already mentioned)² in which the persons referred explicitly to the body in theatre together with its posterior classification, grouping them by affinity, giving rise to the three types of relations already stated: those between the body and the text or the body and the word; between the body and mind, the body and thought or the body and intellectuality; and those that put the body into a relation with itself, with its own history and a series of ideas gathered together under the concept of *subjectivity*.

The reason for the analytical journey I present here was my perception of the distance between my own experiences as a beginner in acting workshops and the dichotomic character of so many of the affirmations and opinions of those individuals in theatre with whom I spoke about the connections established between the body and such terms as *word*, *mind*, and *thought*.

Hence, the narrative style and the argument developed along this article are constructed on the basis of an interaction between, on the one hand, material that was the product of instances of observation that were participatory in a lesser degree and, on the other, of other instances of reflection on and analysis of, and from the perspective of, my own experience which, given its personal nature, might be called self-ethnographic (Feliu, 2007; del Mármol et al., 2008; Mora; del Mármol; Saez, 2012), understanding this as a dimension that, to a greater or lesser degree, forms a part of all ethnography.

Parting from this interplay, the analysis proposed in the following pages will focus on each of the three relations previously stated by means of a dialogue between those textual materials consisting of what persons active in the theatre have said and my own questions and reflections concerning my experience of the first two years of socialization as an acting novice. The analytical journey made in each

one of the sections that follow will show how the gap that initially seemed to exist between the discourses voiced by my teachers and by other people in the theatre field and my initial formative experiences in acting begins to narrow with the observation of the practice of this discipline, making it apparent that the ways of articulating the relations between the body and the word, the body and thought, and the body and subjectivity that come into play in these contexts, rather than falling into a dichotomy in which one of the two terms remains subordinate to the other, allow for a broadening of the idea of the body such that it includes those same dimensions which at first sight appear to be opposed to it.

Body and Text

Notwithstanding the fact that culture is universally corporal, it is not an error but rather a paradoxical truth to say that theatre is the most corporal of cultural creations. [...] Because it is the body-actor (man), in front of other bodies (other men), and in a situation of representation, that constitutes theatre. What remains and is documented, like playwriting, for example, is nothing more than one of its codes and is not theatre until it is materialized in the acting body, in a precise place and time (Gené, 2010, p. 19).

Text has always had an ideological supremacy over form and the body, and the belief has been crystallizing that the textual story is the story of the scenic events and that the scenic events have nothing to do with the textual story because the situation in question is of another order. Above all, a situation of organic character. There are bodies, corporal organicity, blood, musculature, chemistry, energies of contact that are going to be put into motion. The other, the text, is an excuse for this (Bartis, 2003, p. 13).

The relations between theatre and the word are profound, diverse, and complex, and the history of theatre ranges from one extreme to the other as so to establish its connections with other arts and with other types of knowledge. Though it is not our intention to decrease this complexity, we can still discern two great tendencies which make up the universe of what is commonly denominated text in the world of theatre: the written text, (be this *a priori*, with the objective of being put on the stage, or *a posteriori*, as a lasting record of a performance) and text as utilization of the word in a theatrical work, exercise, or improvisation. As we will see later, albeit in different

ways, the relations between body and text have been the subject of study in recent years as much in one as in another of these tendencies.

Quite often, as can be seen in the excerpts used to initiate this section, the argument about the centrality of the body in theatrical practice rests on an examination of the specificity of this discipline, based on the questioning of the status traditionally granted to the text in virtue of its being considered the raw material of this art. This questioning of the traditional supremacy of text over the other elements that constitute the phenomenon of theatre and the concomitant reappraisal of the body as the constitutive subject and substance, thereof comes together with the redefinition of the specificity of theatre as art in response to certain tendencies which place it in a subordinate position with respect to such other arts as cinema and literature. In the words of Casper Uncal:

[...] there comes a moment in which theatre is defined as an art that has its own language, that is not literature, that is not cinema...In theatre the body is the only thing there, in cinema what is there is not the body, it is the image, nor is theatre just someone standing there and talking, no, that is spoken literature...for a long time theatre was what in literature could be seen on stage, there it was and in this way you could tell a story live and direct, period. Now cinema comes along and upsets everything, because what you could tell with the theatre could be done much better in the cinema ...so then theatre says well, what do we do, guys, this is the moment in which we define what we are or we continue being the prostitute of all the arts...and that's when contemporary theatre begins to say, no, theatre is this, it is what can be told in a different way, suggesting more than showing and more than anything else, with what? With the body (Uncal; del Mármol, 2011, p. 13).

In this fragment we see confirmed theatre's own affirmation that it is a live spectacle (Helbo, 2012) or a living cultural event (Dubatti, 2008), that being the result of the physical presence of bodies on stage; its distinguishing characteristic is that it is ephemeral or impossible to reproduce, differing substantially from those arts which, like cinema and literature, are lasting products that can be duplicated.

In the course of this process of searching for and affirming the specificity of the phenomenon of theatre with respect to the other arts, there has been, in the last few decades, a broadening of the concepts of playwriting and dramatic scriptwriting together with an

increase in their complexity, and this development has been the occasion for a prolific examination of the connections between theatre and literature. In his own discussion of this topic, Jorge Dubatti has written that “a dramatic text is not only that theatrical piece which possesses literary autonomy and was written by an ‘author,’ but rather any text that has potential for the stage” (Dubatti, 2008, p. 8). He argues that literature only contains the potential for theatricality and proposes making a basic distinction between live playwriting on stage by the actor, by the director, or by the group, and playwriting by an author who works independently of the stage, *in vitro*. Thus, in these debates, playwriting is no longer seen as a closed process which precedes the stage, and literary texts belonging to the genre come to be considered as either stimulus when they exist previous to the stage or as the verbal record of a work of theatre already performed³.

In harmony with these concerns, the first relational pair of the body in theatre that was manifest in my observations and interviews was that of text. In my interviews, it was common to hear references to what had been said in one or another class: “[...] what they are looking for is a great ability to use the body; the word or the text is not so important, but rather what the body says” (Sibretti; del Mármol, 2012, p. 1); or, in a workshop: “[...] the first year concentrates on working with the body and afterwards they work with the text, but all this is on the basis of the work with the body” (Lausada; del Mármol, 2012, p. 1). At the same time, there were moments in the classes observed when such proposals appeared as “[...] to work without any kind of text, only with the state from the body and the gesture” (Barresi; Pinarello; del Mármol, 2013, p. 6); or instructions like “[...] they have to put the body, the gestures and then the text” (Mantiñán; Thomas; del Mármol, 2012, p. 2), or “[...] try not to use the text unless it is vitally necessary” (Lausada; del Mármol; 2013, p. 3). Thus, the text emerges in a way as antagonistic to the body, and it would appear necessary to moderate, control, or at least postpone its use until first guaranteeing an important foundation of *work with the body*.

However, in the process of observing classes and also in my own experience as a student in some of these classes, I could see that, far from being defined within strict limits or reduced, the use of text in instances of formation and training was abundant and constituted a fundamental element, while the ability to produce or use text on

stage was one of the most important skills to be acquired in these processes. Thus, the interventions of teachers did not appear to aim so much at the elimination of the utilization of text, but rather at limiting its literal or explicatory use, attempting to reduce or avoid its use only in those cases in which it was redundant or unnecessary, and inviting us to explore a use which multiplied but did not strengthen the sense proposed by the rest of the stage construct. This can be observed in the following words of René Mantiñán:

[...] what often happens is that they want the movement or what happens to the body to be consistent with the text and then it becomes redundant. It is much more interesting if what they do with the body goes in one direction and the text in another. [...] There are texts which make the action redundant, texts which complete the action and texts which contradict it. It is good to use texts that complete it and even to see what happens when they contradict it [...] (Mantiñán; Thomas; del Mármol, 2012, p. 3, 12).

Hence, training for the use of text as much as training that makes it possible to distinguish and develop the particular ways in which text can or must be used constitute fundamental formative processes in the practice of theatre as manifested in the contexts I have observed. This learning process with respect to text on stage is intimately linked to corporality.

When I began to take theatre classes, I had an experiential point of reference for my investigation into working with the body, thanks to a period in my life when I studied contemporary dance. Given that traditionally dance has tended not to include the use of the word on stage, my training with respect to the word was null, or even negative, that is to say that my body on stage was a non-speaking body. Thus, for a long time the use of text on stage was extremely contrived and difficult for me. At the same time, the use of my body in this context did not turn out to be as fluid as I hoped it would.

Since the difficulty of including the use of the word on the stage (or, at least, of including it in the specific ways in which it was proposed to do so) turned out to be shared by the great majority of those of us who were being initiated into the practice of theatre, the teachers of the workshops in which I was a student proposed, at a certain time, to help us with a series of exercises oriented towards the exploration of the multiple possibilities available for using text in

their theatrical proposal. This training (which in my particular case implied, to a great degree, the willingness to use part of my social and academic way of speaking, which had been constructed over the course of my formation as an anthropologist), had the effect of enormously opening up the possibilities of using text on stage and these multiplied not only for me but also for my fellow students. What is interesting about this experience is that, for many of us, this opening saw a multiplication of the possibilities with respect to our bodies, since text and fundamentally the use of the voice as an essential element of the materiality of the body in theatre turned out to be an extremely important support for the states and bodily affectations that we might go through.

Thus, as much with respect to written texts, be they a priori or a posteriori to their utilization on stage, as with respect to the use of the word, in the practical instances of the processes of learning and training, the connections with the text are not so much weakened as they are redefined, changing the way in which this is considered and the ways in which it is used, but without its ceasing to be a fundamental element. We can observe that a great part of this redefinition of the uses of text in theatre aim, in some way, at the rejection of the supremacy of the linear, narrative and logocentric logic which is dominant in western thought, and seeks to approach or capacitate other logics which are interwoven in diverse ways with the remaining elements of theatrical construction, among which the body occupies a central place of privilege. Thus, we find ourselves with that type of inversion which I have already referred to here with respect to the differential appraisal of the terms which constitute the dualisms that involve the body in our society, such that if this was traditionally an underappreciated term in each one of these dichotomies, today it has been reappraised and placed in a central position at the expense of the opposing terms in these dichotomies. This is to say that these inversions of value tend more to sustain the dualism than overcome it.

Finally, I would like to briefly refer to the extensive connections between theatre and the word that are found outside of instances on stage, that is, all the literature (spoken and written) dedicated to reflection on the practice of theatre. It is very probable that theatre, because of the close and complex relation it has always had with text and the word, is, perhaps, the stage art with the strongest tradition

of literature dedicated to reflection on its practice and, in addition, which has generated the greatest number of meetings dedicated to sharing and exchanging these reflections. For these same reasons, reflection (both oral and written) is generally encouraged in the careers, courses, and workshops through which theatre professionals effect their formation. Given that the investigation in this article is focused on the ways in which the dimensions considered come into play in the process of learning and training for the theatre, we will take time to look at those cases in which this reflective use of the word takes place in the classes I observed and analyze the way in which this use of the word is tied to the body by means of its relations with thought.

Body and Thought

[...] at first it seemed to me that I relaxed in my dance classes, liberated my mind, I did something distinct from what I did in my usual practice, and that was more speaking, reading, reflecting, and that in theatre classes I had to think, I had to speak sometimes, and that exhausted me mentally, many times I left class with my head on the point of exploding [...] (del Mármol; Thomas, 2012, p. 10).

Ivan: The key for you is to lower your mind to your body, to the action; you have to reduce your mental activity to fifty percent.

Mariana: What if...but I don't have the least idea of how to do it...

Ivan: Don't look for it by thinking; I can tell when you are thinking, and almost what you are thinking, too, so then you stop reading physical activity and a block appears (Haidar; del Mármol, 2011, p. 1).

These two extracts from dialogues are from my own experience and show part of the complexity of the relations between the body and thought that I am interested in discussing here. As in many other corporal practices, it is frequent in theatre classes to hear the idea that when acting or training to act, it is necessary to suspend thought and *let the body perform*. For a long time, however, this idea of theatrical practice as something centered mainly on the body seemed to me to completely contradict my own experience. Thanks to my personal history of dance classes, I had a concrete point of reference for what, from my perspective, a corporal experience was and in which,

for moments, thought was relegated to a secondary level. On the other hand, even though in my theatre classes there were moments of great physical effort, my mind never stopped. Unlike my dance classes, my experience in theatre was not at that time physical, but rather intellectual and additionally it implied (simultaneously but not secondarily) a bodily commitment. This was strengthened by the fact that the workshop which I attended provided a good deal of time for reflection on the construction of theatre; in all classes there were moments in which the teachers shared their way of thinking about theatre, production, communication between the actors and with the spectators, the creation of languages and diverse questions inherent in the practice of theatre. These were questions that they not only proposed we understand and experience through games and exercises, but which they also invited us to think about and give our opinions about with observations of ourselves and our companions.

As I began to make observations in other workshops, I could see that the time dedicated – be it short or long – to discussion and reflection on the practice of theatre always constituted an important part of the learning and training processes, and in all of these cases, those instances of an exchange of ideas were found to be intimately related to specific moments of training. That is, not only were these discussions dedicated to an analysis of what had occurred during the acting exercises, but also, students were expected and encouraged to remember and apply the contents of these discussions. Yet, at the same time, I was surprised to observe that there were recurring references in these classes to the necessity of *not thinking* or of *thinking less* when acting or doing an exercise. Did a contradiction exist, then, between these two proposals which converged in the classes? How could it be that the students doing these exercises were invited to observe questions that had been the topics of commentaries and discussions, while at the same time it was suggested that they avoid thinking?

With time, and perhaps as a result of having succeeded in beginning to resolve these tensions in my own theatrical practice, I came to understand that, in reality, it was not a matter of suspending or extinguishing thought while acting and then reactivating it after finishing the exercise or the scene, but rather of implementing a distinct way of thinking in each case. While during the discussions

a reflective type of thought was implemented, at the hour of acting it was necessary to use another type of thinking, a practical thinking, that is, a thinking which did not stop the action but rather which functioned within the action.

I should emphasize not only the necessity of developing and implementing a corporal and practical thinking that neither blocks nor interrupts the action, but also, that this thinking is constructed on a permanent dialogue with that other type of thinking that I have denominated reflective. As I mentioned earlier, in all the theatre classes that I have observed, as well as others in which I have participated, there were numerous instances of reflection and dialogue about what the class was working on, instances in which the group was invited to conceptualize and analyze what each person had experienced and observed in his companions, with the proposal of repeating the exercise or scene but armed with these new conceptual tools constructed through previous dialogue and reflection.

Part of my understanding of the potentiality of this interplay between reflection and action arose once again from the observation of my own experience upon discovering that, curiously, at the moment when I began to intensify and systematize my field work, increasing my observations of classes and rehearsals, I began to feel more comfortable, with more tools at my disposal, in my own acting. As if by having taken a certain distance and assuming an outside position by more clearly adopting the role of ethnographer, I had allowed myself to penetrate much more deeply into the practice itself, capitalizing, in my body and for the action, on the tools obtained from the previous instances of observation and reflection.

I believe that everything I observed (and observe) enriches me a lot and fills me with information that later I want to try out in my own body, and the class is a space that allows me to do this. It is as if in some way all this information that I absorb and accumulate in my work were being processed much faster and much more fluidly in my body and in my acting experiences than in the classes, than in the academic writings and reflections that I have to begin (del Mármol, 2013, p. 5).

At first, the sensation that my efforts to understand in intellectual terms what I observed in the field were being diverted towards my body in the theatre, instead of being realized in the projects and articles that I had to begin writing some time ago, at the same

time caused, though in a pleasurable way, feelings of anxiety and disconcerted me because my strategies for developing a conceptual approach to the place of the body in theatrical practice seemed to be carrying me in the wrong direction. Later, during that first distancing from the discipline in which I managed to write an initial version of many of the reflections which today make up this article, and reaffirming my methodological positioning with respect to the importance of corporal participation by the ethnographer in the practice under study, I began to think that perhaps this discovery of the impact of my exercises in observation and reflection on my tools for acting could constitute, in and of itself, not so much a type of side effect of my field work as it could be data on the ways in which observation and reflection intertwine and feedback into the most corporal and practical instances of theatre performance. Thus, I began to understand much more profoundly the frequent advice of teachers to their students about the importance of stepping outside of oneself in order to observe, about the importance of the active nature of looking, and about the importance of how much is learned about theatre by looking at it. Understanding that such observation is never passive but rather that, on the contrary, it is an extremely active process in which, by means of an intense reflective exercise that is consolidated and generally continued in talks and discussions, many of the tools are constructed and the body in action will bring into play, and that will allow the development of the type of practical thinking that acting requires.

I began to suspect, then, that that the two forms of thinking that I have distinguished in this section (reflective thinking, in which the body is relatively still, and which is accomplished at times of observation and conversation, and thinking without stopping the action, with the body in performance, which is required during warm-ups, training, and acting), far from being opposites or contrary to each other, are instances that can only be developed if they occur in the form of a dialogue and as complements, since a great part of what is observed and thought when looking can only be thought and observed because there is a corporal and practical point of reference for what is being seen. At the same time, the possibility of putting determined resources or tools into action at the training or acting level by means of a bodily flow that is not blocked or stopped by

the introduction of reflective thought, will only be possible if these resources or tools that are tested in the body and in action are already available for the group, the student, or the actor, to the degree identified during moments of observation and reflection.

I think that, in a certain way, the relations between practical and reflective thought probably function this way in any type of practice. However, perhaps this does not occur in all disciplines in such a systematic way as in theatre, where the moments dedicated to sharing observations and reflections are fundamental in the planning of any instance of learning. I believe that this could be connected to the profound tradition in theatre of academic and reflective thinking, and that this tradition is, in turn, connected to the relation of this art with the use of the word, which we have already referred to in the previous section.

Finally, and by way of constructing a bridge to the following section, I must mention a specific use of thought in acting that has become manifest in my observations on theatrical practice, a use of thought which we might understand in a sense that is even more specifically instrumental than those which we have already enumerated. This consists of the deliberate evocation of certain images or ideas with the objective of translating them into gestures or bodily states, as manifested in such indications as “[...] don’t go to the gesture first, thought is first; [...] I look at the public and I have devious thoughts, don’t worry about the gesture, the gesture comes as a consequence of thinking” (Mantiñán; Thomas; del Mármol, 2012, p. 75), or in the recommendation to students that they recur to *saying something to themselves* so that thought will lead them to a certain expression. This recourse to thinking to generate gestures and bodily states brings us to a type of doubling of the acting subject, who, in the words of Ricardo Bartis (2003, p. 25) “does not execute but rather is executed,” being subject and object, puppeteer and puppet, interpreter and object of interpretation, all at the same time.

Body and Subjectivity

In the course of the process in which one seeks to be, a being, intermixed in all one’s potential, combine with, and manifest oneself in that new existence which makes one a theatrical subject. How to understand oneself in this process of transformation, if not as a revelation, then as an

encounter with one's past, almost an apparition before a mirror that is too transparent to be observed again; like some time, perhaps, or for the first time in that form-body-state. Everything begins with the acceptance of what one is, with one's body in that time-space, from what is most simple...That is I. Now a change. Where the first action takes me, where it leaves me, that would be another, another possibility [...] (Haidar, 2012, p. 1).

The third range of relations through which we will look at the ways in which corporality comes into play in the learning and training processes in theatrical practice is the one established with the self, one's own history and a series of references which we will group under the concept of subjectivity, understood as

[...] the collection of forms of perception, affection, thought, desire, fear etc., which motivates acting subjects, including also the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and generate certain "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1977) and the give and take that is established between those cultural formations and the internal states of the acting subjects (Ortner, 2005, p. 25).

Thus, notwithstanding the fact that this section will discuss that sort of doubling or stepping out of oneself by means of which the actor, on the basis of his corporality, connects with himself, we coincide with Paula Cabrera and her team (2012) when we say that this self to which we are referring does not consist exclusively of an individual, intimate, and personal dimension, but rather is constructed socially, together with others, in relation and in interaction with them.

With respect to the links between the body and subjectivity, I understand that this has to do with two dimensions of the human phenomenon that is only possible to separate for analytical purposes. In this sense, I believe that it is equally valid, in accordance with the demands of the type of analysis we are carrying out here, to understand corporality as a constitutive dimension of subjectivity, or to understand subjectivity as a constitutive dimension of corporality, given that I see this type of analytical organization as nothing more than a resource that we investigators use in an instrumental ways as to further our understanding of the phenomenon that we find ourselves investigating, but which always implies artificially limiting a reality whose complexity cannot be contained within the analytical categories that we ourselves have created. What I am interested

in doing here with the notion of subjectivity will imply placing it, over the course of my argument, in distinct positions with respect to corporality, which positions will go from one of opposition in which the body-subjectivity pair will be another embodiment of the body-mind/consciousness/spirit dualism, with the body occupying the place of the substance/object, and with subjectivity – excuse the redundancy – the place of the subject, to the point of a relation of co-implication in which subjectivity cannot be understood apart from corporality and vice versa.

The learning and practice of theatre constitute important instances of the construction of subjectivity in the sense that, through these, modes of doing, thinking, and feeling are learned which will influence the ways of being in the world of those who go beyond their experiences in environments specifically linked to the theatre. We will not, however, pause here to consider the way in which subjectivities that are constructed in theatrical practice have an impact on the life of subjects beyond theatre, but rather on the passage that takes place in the reverse sense, that is, how ways of being, doing, thinking, feeling, and connecting with others that have gradually accumulated and anchored themselves in the body of each one of the actors, actresses, and students of acting over the course of their particular personal histories (which, of course, includes what is lived and learned as much outside as inside theatre) come into play in theatrical practice.

We will return now to material and data obtained in the field in order to approach the question of relations that in the learning and practice of theatre are established between body and those aspects which we have grouped under the idea of subjectivity. It is frequent to hear in theatre classes the phrase *come out to observe oneself*, to see oneself from outside and work with oneself and with one's own body as if doing so with another:

Create a possible photo where your face is seen, where you have your hands in a position that you all can recognize, the legs in a position that you can recognize and keep that standing pose in space...Think, seek, explore, a possible but conscious pose. Where do I have the eyes, where do they look? The expression of the face... And I try not to load the expression with any type of emotion or state in particular, I have a neutral, serious expression, I try to see myself from without, to think myself [...] (Barresi; Pinarello; del Mármol, 2013, p. 10).

This recourse of stepping outside of oneself, of situating oneself in a reflective consciousness and somehow coming out of one's own body on stage, in order to observe, direct, and manipulate it, is one of the most important technical resources available for actors. The subject using it would appear to situate himself in that reflective consciousness which can come out to observe his own bodily image, while the body itself would undergo, in a certain way, a process of objectification upon being understood as something that can be manipulated or, in the words of one of our interviewees, "puppeted" (Maldini, 2012, p. 1).

Now, if we ask ourselves about the point of origin of these possible gestures, movements, affectations, sonorities, and texts through which the poetic body of the actor is formed, a body which he himself can "puppet" from the standpoint of his reflective consciousness, we find that all these materials arise from that sum of experiences present in the history of each actor and anchored in his or her body, that is, the particular ways of doing, thinking, and feeling that each one has incorporated over life and that constitute that person's subjectivity. We can thus carry out a second reading of this coming out of oneself in which the (previously objectified) body becomes subjective again. This new reading allows us then to understand this coming or stepping outside of oneself as a dialogue with oneself, being present on stage and in the experiential background found deposited in the body. This second reading of coming outside oneself also constitutes an acting resource which consists of identifying and making accessible all that knowledge (knowledge of how to do, of how to say, of how to feel) learned over one's own history within and without theatre in order to construct, on the basis of that corporality and that subjectivity belonging to oneself, other corporalities and other subjectivities inherent in theatrical creation.

Once more, it was through my experience as a student in theatre classes that I began to understand this:

JP: [...] when I began to act I wanted to be intelligent, I wanted to be cerebral, I wanted to belong to a certain elite look... Do you understand me? And later... I talked about it a lot with Valência and she told me 'No, you have something much more physical and more masculine, something from the country, horses... That is what we have to do, and not you acting sophisticated, looking for an intelligent style... Because that isn't you'. Then, when I went into this being more street smart, more devious, I enjoyed acting

much, much more, I understood it much more, because I could be there and not be...

M: Two years ago I was in the children's workshop and I feel that just a few months ago I began to understand what this was all about...I began to get it and I believe that the children also began to be able to work with what you are talking about, with using what you have, and I felt that I began to work with the material that I had.

JP: Yeah, for sure.

M: And what bothered me so much, the way I thought and spoke and constructed narratives and this academic thing that I wanted to leave behind, the guys made me bring it back, you know? Like, 'Ok, do it, be the anthropologist and let's see', like sort of playing with that.

JP: Yes, yes, accepting what one has.

M: And that's where I began... As you say, that you accepted the country type and you went with that and not with something else, something similar happened to me, you know, I don't know, I wanted to go and invent a thing that doesn't exist and, no, you work with your own material.

JP: Totally.

M: You begin with what you are and with what you have and from there it's good to be able to create other things but it is always on the basis of your own material...

(del Mármol; Thomas, 2012, p. 10-11).

What I tell the interviewee in this dialogue is part of the same process that I refer to in the section on the body and text, through which, under the guidance of the teachers of the workshop in which I was a student, I succeeded at putting my social and academic way of speaking, constructed over the course of my formation as an anthropologist, at the disposition of theatre, and jointly with this, many other ways of doing things – making, being, feeling – constructed throughout my life history, thus multiplying my opportunities and resources for improvisation and creation during my exploration of the stage.

On the other hand, my reflections near the end of the above excerpt show the passage from that first coming out which I have referred to at the beginning of this section (the coming out of oneself to contemplate himself as an embodiment of subjectivity or, in other words, the actor on stage contemplating his own background of experiences, gestures, emotional states, and affectations available for a performance), and a new stepping outside of oneself by means of which, on the basis of one's own being, one can construct another being (or character) and transform oneself on the basis of one's own self.

This second type of coming out, perhaps what has been most discussed and even used as an emblem of theatre, allows once again for an important resource which, like the first, appeals to the strategy of entering and coming out. In the words of one of the persons interviewed, “[...] to come out of oneself, to relax or break out; to stop doing what I am doing, to come out of the character, to connect with oneself, to cut loose” (Maldini, 2012, p. 1). Thus, in this case, the technical resource has to do with working from points of departure that are closer to oneself (to come out, to let oneself be seen there, an actor or actress on stage, to work with the truth of being there) or further away from oneself (to internalize oneself in the character, hiding or leaving the actor behind).

Thus, the coming into play of these self-objectifications allows us to comprehend the ways in which the body of the actor is at the same time made to be both objective and subjective. Objective insofar as one can come out of it and observe it and manipulate it or “puppet” it from outside, and subjective, if we understand that the body which is observed, manipulated and “puppeted” is a body informed by the history and social relations through which the ways of being, making, thinking and feeling that make up subjectivity are constituted. In the words of the Argentinean theatre director Ricardo Bartís (2006, p. 26):

The actor is the subject and the object of the performance. [...] He/she is the substance and the performance, the job. That is, the actor: that history, that collection of memories, fantasies, associations, muscles, and injuries. [...] Now, the job would be exactly the execution, how I, from what I am, produce a movement that makes me disappear so that the other appears, the character. Disappear in an apparent sense because, on the other hand, I am never more present than when I am acting.

Body between Dualisms

As can be observed over the course of our journey, the approaches I have used in trying to analyze the place of the body in theatre have led me to observe the network of relations within which corporality comes into play in theatrical practice. In a give and take that is initiated with the *racconto* and the classification of those discourses which refer to the body and are present in the record of my observations and interviews, the same as in literature produced from within the theatre itself, the self-ethnographic approach led

me to observe the ways in which those relations present in these textual materials were tied to each other inside of me, permeating and configuring my own corporality. Thus, many of my responses and reflections revolving around the questions that are formulated here are found to be heavily influenced by the ways in which the links between the body and the word, the body and thought, and the body and subjectivity are interwoven with each other in my own construction of a body for the theatre.

By making these processes visible, the analytical journey carried out in every section of this article shows how the initial distance noted between the discourses by my teachers and companions in theatre and my first experiences in the practice of acting began to narrow, allowing an understanding of those discourses that is not necessarily dissonant with my observations and experiences. This allowed me to begin conceiving ways of articulating the body and the word, the body and thought, the body and subjectivity that did not necessarily fall within a dichotomy in which one of the two terms of each relation was subordinate.

Every section is initiated by presenting the way in which discourses from within the theatre and my experiences appeared to fall into one or another side of a dualistic way of understanding, thereby causing the puzzled look on my face that characterized me at the beginning of my immersion in the practice. These discourses presented theatre as a clearly corporal practice at the cost of denying or subordinating the importance of word and thought. At the opposite extreme, acting was, in my experience, presented as a predominately intellectual practice, in which the presence of the body remained subordinate. Thus, the requirement of my teachers to *think less and be more in the body* was inconceivable to me when, at the same time, I was told to use the word, to construct a sense, or represent an imaginary construct (all of these activities which, at that time, I could not execute if not through a type of reflective thought that was impossible for me to put into practice without a certain degree of hesitation). That requirement and that demand seemed to me to be so incompatible that I could only understand their confluence in class directives as an important contradiction that limited my ability to let myself be guided by those directives.

Over time, this resistance began to give way and my body, that is, I myself, began to understand. I could begin to hear other

nuances in those discourses, to open myself up to other experiences and to give attention to other dimensions which these experiences contained. That initial gap, then, began to narrow.

This idea about a type of comprehension that is more corporal, originating in a greater openness to the practice of theatre and acting, came to complement and increase the complexity of the analysis which corresponded to my first steps in the field and allowed me to make relative the almost inevitably dualistic conclusions that were the result. It bears a certain kinship with the proposal of Michael Lambeck (2011 [1998]) for the monism versus dualism debate. With the intention of analyzing the idea that “[...] the mind/body dualism is peculiarly western and we can turn to other cultures to solve our ‘mind-body problem’” (Lambeck, 2011 [1998], p. 107). Lambeck posits that despite not reaching the same proportions nor involving the same categories, the type of distinctions that lead to dualist thinking are probably universal, adding that “[...] the mind/body dualism is, at the same time and in all places, transcended in practice, but even so, it is present in one way or another in thought” (Lambeck, 2011 [1998], p. 107). He proposes we give attention to the differential way in which the relations between the body and the mind are present in every level of human experience, since “from the perspective of the mind, body and mind are incommensurable, while from the perspective of the body they are integrally related” (Lambeck, 2011 [1998], p. 116).

Taking this proposal as an interpretative framework, many of the contradictions that I perceived during the first period of my field work can be considered to have emerged from an approximation of that work as more mental than corporal. That is, that however much I, as a student, found myself attending theatre classes, my way of observing and analyzing was, in those days, primordially intellectual. My body was, of course, involved (there was probably no way that it couldn't have been) but in a position of resistance. Anchored into my character of outsider, (an anchor necessary for the initial demarcation of my identity as an ethnographer), my access as much to the discourses as to experience was characterized by distance. My immersion into that practice was not total; much less did I allow myself to be penetrated and shaped by it. When this happened, when I began to open myself to the effects of theatre training in my own body (which implied, intrinsically, changes in the way in

which relations between the body and the word, between the body and thought, and between the body and subjectivity were established within me), I could begin to have a more corporal understanding of how these links and ties were created in the practice that I found myself investigating, no longer understanding them as incompatible, contradictory, or “incommensurable” but rather beginning to perceive them as “integrally related” (Lambeck, 2011 [1998], p.116).

I thus began to understand that what my teachers meant to do was not nullifying the word and thought, but rather corporalizing them, embodying them, anchoring them in the body. Not only manage to put the word and thought into play without interrupting the action, but also to stimulate them with movement and bodily action. To understand them, in the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1957 [1945], p. 200) “as style, as emotional value, as existential mime, more than as conceptual utterance”, and “the word as one of the possible uses of [our] body [ies]”. (Merleau-Ponty, 1957 [1945], p.198). Not to deny the conceptual signification of words, nor the way in which this type of signification constructs sense, but rather to seek that “[...] the sense of words be, in the end, induced by the words themselves, or more precisely, that their conceptual signification be formed like a relief over a gestural signification that is inherent in the word” (Merleau-Ponty, 1957 [1945], p. 196). What is sought after is to learn to recognize this gestural signification, anchored in the material character of the word, and learn to work with it and with the modes of construction of sense that emerge from there. It is presumed in this way to achieve modes of understanding (of the climate, of the scene, of what is being told) that do not come from an intellectuality disconnected from the materiality produced in the interaction of the bodies, but rather from an intellectuality that is found anchored in it.

At this point the problem of the text, thought, and the self in so much reflective consciousness becomes one and the same problem, since, as I clarified at the beginning of this article, the three groups of relations that we distinguished were separated for analytical purposes but maintain great continuity. To continue with Merleau-Ponty (1957 [1945], p. 182),

It can be said that the body is ‘the concealed form of being oneself’, or reciprocally, that personal existence is the



reassuming and the manifestation of a given being in a situation. If we decide, then, that the body always expresses existence, we must understand this in the sense in which the word always expresses thought. [...] It is necessary, as we will see, to recognize a primordial operation of signification in which what is expressed does not exist apart from the expression and in which the signs themselves induce their sense from within. In this way, the body expresses total existence, not as an exterior accompaniment, but rather as that in which this existence is realized. This embodied sense is the central phenomenon of which body and spirit, sign and signification are abstract moments.

If in light of the ethnographic journey described in these pages we use the ideas of Merleau-Ponty (1957 [1945], p. 196) to understand the body as the “meaningful nucleus” in which the consciousness and the self are anchored, in which thoughts are generated, and which serves as the basis for the materialization of words and for the construction of senses, the recurring idea that in theatre the body is everything takes on a new meaning.

Notes

1 This is because in the research that originated this article I've been more concerned to describe the independent circuit of La Plata theatre in its generality as fully integrated, than in analyzing the peculiarities of each of the different sectors that can be distinguished within it. The training paths of individuals that make up this circuit are often characterized more by crosses and hybridizations than segregation in relation to particular methodologies or schools.

2 Observation records, records of interviews and literature produced from the theatre field and published in books and magazines.

3 It is interesting, in this sense, the classification of dramatic texts offered by Jorge Dubatti. Based on the temporal relationship to the texts with the scene, he distinguishes between: pre-stage first-degree dramatic texts: written before and independently of the scene; scenic dramatic texts: present at any stage discursive practice; post-stage dramatic texts: that arise from notation and text transformation stage and nonverbal actions produced in the scene; pre-stage second-degree dramatic texts: from literary re-working of scenic or post-theatrical texts (Dubatti, 2008).

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Mariana del Mármol is licensed in Anthropology from Universidad Nacional de La Plata, holds a PhD in Anthropology from Universidad de Buenos Aires, has a post-doctoral grant from CONICET (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas in Argentina), is a member of the *Grupo de Estudio sobre Cuerpo*, CICES-IdIHCS-UNLP/CONICET 2008, and does collective research on corporeality in the performing arts articulating art, social sciences and philosophy.

E-mail: marianadelmarmol@gmail.com

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