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Normativity of cooperation in theater classes¹

André Luiz Lopes Magela²

Abstract

This article proposes the distinction and pedagogical treatment of elements of normativity acting in the practice of theatrical exercises and games in the planning and conduction of theater classes in schools, particularly in situations where joint attention and cooperation operate. The initial intentions of this approach are to increase the investigative quality of these classes, with the consequent improvement in the specification of the contents worked on, and the constitution of resistance actions and concrete answers to some argumentative elements present in politically reactionary proposals in Brazil, more active since the year of 2016 and consolidated in the 2018 elections.

Keywords: Theater education. Politics. Normativity. Cooperation. Joint attention.

Normatividade da cooperação em aulas de teatro

Resumo

Este artigo propõe a distinção e tratamento pedagógico, no planejamento e condução de aulas de teatro em escolas, de elementos de normatividade atuantes nas práticas de exercícios e jogos teatrais, particularmente nas situações em que a cooperação e a atenção conjunta operam. As intenções iniciais desta abordagem são o incremento da qualidade investigativa destas aulas, com consequente melhoria na especificação dos conteúdos trabalhados, e a constituição de ações de resistência e respostas concretas para alguns argumentos presentes em propostas politicamente reacionárias no Brasil, mais atuantes a partir do ano de 2016 e consolidadas nas eleições de 2018.

Palavras-chave: Educação teatral. Política. Normatividade. Cooperação. Atenção conjunta.

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Normatividad de la cooperación em clases de teatro

Resumen

Este artículo propone la distinción y tratamiento pedagógico, en la planificación y conducción de clases de teatro en escuelas, de elementos de normatividad activos en la práctica de ejercicios y juegos teatrales, particularmente en situaciones donde operan la cooperación y la atención conjunta. Las intenciones iniciales de este enfoque son incrementar la calidad investigativa de estas clases, con la consecuente mejora en la especificación de los contenidos trabajados, y la constitución de acciones de resistencia y respuestas concretas a algunos argumentos presentes en propuestas políticamente reaccionarias en Brasil, más activas a partir del año 2016 y consolidadas en las elecciones de 2018.

Palabras clave: Educación teatral. Política. Normatividad. Cooperación. Atención conjunta.

Order is progress

Michel Temer

Folha de São Paulo, March 1, 2018

Context

When Michel Temer took office as Brazil's president in April 2016, it came as the result of a number of political processes, from the reaction to administrations led by the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT) to the rising escalation of deeply rooted social influences in the nation. Jair Bolsonaro's 2018 election, with unexpected 55% of valid votes (discounting null and blank ballots, which can be seen as a symptom of non-disapproval of his proposals) consolidates these forces and a reactionary aspect in terms of political preferences from the majority of the Brazilian population.

This context is somewhat complex, and the focus of this article is not to pore over it. Regarding the issue, there are some analyses that revise the previous models of interpreting the nation's politics. Vladimir Safatle (2015) (2016) (2018), philosopher and professor at the Universidade de São Paulo – USP, in both a pressing and creative way, has described this moment as a clash between conflicting and excluding forms of living and feeling. It is not conventional logic that will help us deal with these events, and much less solve the consequences thereof.

Paradoxically, with this definition, Safatle solves our astonishment towards the fact that so many people adhered, at least through their vote, to indefensible positions such as racism, homophobia, the defense of torture, and easy access to weapons. What really matters is that his statement raises the questions of which is the battlefield for our combative efforts – affects and not argumentation. The micropolitics enacted by those who debated politics while offering coffee and cake on the streets, days before the runoff elections, fully implemented this type of struggle. It is auspicious to bring up the fact that Safatle also indirectly indicates how the arts, and art classes, can be the kernel of political action at this time, since they happen to deal with what is, in effect, at play: the realm of the sensible

and not of the strictly rational.

Nevertheless, at the same time, arguments are a form of facing the current situation, a way of offering resistance, especially if they deconstruct the allegations that are used by reactionary forces to justify their actions.

The fight against the corruption the Workers' Party was accused of was the reason defended by the majority who rejected voting for Fernando Haddad (PT) as an alternative that could defeat Bolsonaro in the presidential race in the runoff elections, though they did not explicitly adopt the deplorable values of the 2018 winning campaign. However, if we extend our gaze towards the sphere of corruption, we can notice that, even before 2016, the most common arguments used by the social actors in this process were attuned to the promises of austerity, order and safety.

These values are still defended in terms of right-wing or left-wing positions, even if these conceptual borders are considered blurred. In this imaginary, the Right has sided with work and what is correct, ordered, and rigorous. In a public letter, Joesley Batista ends his apology with auto-idolatry when he states, "we will face this difficult moment with humbleness, and we will overcome it by waking up early and working hard." (Batista, 2017).^{TN}

The reference to the "bums" and "bolognas"^{TN2}, and the mistaken connection between the professional success of the wealthy with hard work and personal merit (Pluchino, Biondo, Rapisarda, 2018) are other aspects of this idea.

Counter to this, the Left, and the social areas to which it is associated (the Humanities and the Arts), is correlated with disorder, chaos, insecurity, and laziness. The repeated legislative ideas of Thiago Turetti (Brasil, 2018), one of Bolsonaro's most active militants on the internet, that Schools of the Humanities be extinguished in public universities to "direct investments to more serious areas

^{TN} Joesley Batista is a Brazilian businessman responsible for the expansion and internationalization process of JBS S.A, the largest meat-packing company in the world, and one of the main agribusiness companies in Brazil. In 2017, on Batista's own initiative, a corruption case in which he was involved came to public. For more information, go to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joesley_Batista

^{TN2} Individuals on the Left were referred to by these monikers, while those on the Right were the "coxinhas" or, chicken dumplings.

such as Medicine or Engineering”, as well as actions carried out by the Bolsonaro administration regarding Education and Culture, corroborate this statement.

Perhaps, more than a political or ideological option, the adherence to the values that are no longer covert since 2016 in the Brazilian political scenario (as well as worldwide) occurs due to the belief that the promise of order trumpeted by reactionaries is real, that life would have more guarantees and would thrive fully if the values of the Right were adopted. These are promises of order and harmony if life is lived according to strict obedience to the established laws, norms and rules; of safety if you walk the line; and if you follow what is previously defined as acceptable, with no questions.

Real politics

The formula referred to above is called “police” by Jacques Rancière (2010): obedience and maintenance of the current order of perceiving and sharing the world. “Police” is differentiated from what Rancière defines as “politics”:

Art and politics each define a form of dissensus, a dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible. If there is such thing as an 'aesthetics of politics', it lies in a re-configuration of the distribution of the common through political processes of subjectivation. Correspondingly, if there is a politics of aesthetics, it lies in the practices and modes of visibility of art that re-configure the fabric of sensory experience. (Rancière, 2010, p.140).

The ideological content of the “police” is concealed, overshadowed by its previously instituted facet (the only one shown), since its politics, its forms of sharing the sensitive, have previously been established. The appropriation of truth by the natural and exact sciences and the naturalization of capitalistic forms of relations (ROLNIK, 2018, p. 103) are proof of this omission: both purports to be apolitical and non-ideological. What occurs, however, is that their politics (their processes of configuration) are set apart from our domain of perception and intervention.

This “police” mode is entrusted with the power to respond to the so-called concrete needs of life – housing, food, protection. Its power to gain acceptance – especially in a moment of crisis – is mostly due to this, to the exclusion of other forms of relating to the world (the artistic and philosophical, for example). In sum, the major argument we have been hearing is that only these police modes of relating to and perceiving the world are important, and that arts and the humanities are superfluous.

This has historically been the greatest argument against the practice and teaching of the Humanities and Arts in schools: their uselessness and the disturbance caused to order. Lately, however, facts have confirmed what was possibly already known: nothing is further from the truth. The peculiar incompetence that was already foreseen as a characteristic of the current administration³ is proof of this, but the analysis can be extended to all the forms of superficial austerity found in life. The promise of the Right does not follow through in at least two aspects.

Firstly, this conventional form of conservatism is not a guarantee of a better life and, in the long run, it may merely be a guarantee of “death in life” (Kastrup, 2008, p. 62). All its side effects (social inequality, an impoverishment of subjectivity in the name of promoting “human capital”, the irresponsible use of recourses) would be enough for one to question this conventional perspective. But the crux of the matter is that adopting these “police” values, primarily restricted to obedience and safety, is a misguided political option in that it denies what may be most valuable for life: the construction of a beautiful life, the development of an “aesthetics of existence” (Foucault, 2005). It is for beauty, for a theatrically beautiful life (Magela, 2018, p. 304-305), and not for food and shelter, that we must live.

The second instance in which the promise of the Right in guaranteeing order does not follow through is in the thought that questioning the prevailing status, i.e.,

³ We call attention to Jair Bolsonaro’s blatant demonstration of ignorance regarding basic State administrative issues, as well as the flagrantly ideological designations of those responsible for important offices in the current federal administration.

the practice of philosophy and art, is not the cause of anomy and social chaos. In like manner, the “police” regime does not necessarily produce order. It merely maintains – usually in an unsustainable way – an order that was previously defined. Steering now towards our field of work in educational aesthetics, we know that in artistic creation, whether pedagogical or not, rigor, rules, and even honest austerity are essential conditions for what is most important – effective politics partnered with the construction of ways of life shared worldwide.

When referring to *Lips of Thomas*, created and performed by Marina Abramovic in 1975, Erika Fischer-Lichte notes how this performance disturbed the conformity and established norms for the audience’s behavior in “What rules should apply here?” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 12). In her observations about this work and others, Fischer-Lichte states that art, when it is compelling, questions what is established for the new to arise. And if art is not doing that, if it does not instigate - at times painfully - the creation of rules, this is a problem (Schechner, 2012).

The idea defended here – and below concrete examples will be provided – is that the teaching of art prepares us for political life and the battles implied therein, and not only to obey.

The strategy proposed in this paper, especially regarding the teaching of theater in schools, is to engage the realm of need and norms with the aesthetic experience. This entails bringing together art and daily life, what Alain Kerlan, a philosopher of aesthetic education, says is the fundamental task of a process of cultural democratization: “to restore the continuity between the aesthetic experience and the normal processes of existence.” (Kerlan, 2015, p. 276).

Epistemological strategy

To counter actions that wish to discredit art classes (and the consequent homogenization of subjectivity and politics), I propose a resistance, in the sense of making use of the same weapons used by reactionary forces. To the argument that art does not promote order, we can rebut by saying that, not only does it

promote order, but it is the very foundation of creation and dynamic support for orders, norms, and rules. As Rancière – and all those who practice and teach art – shows, art is extremely rigorous, though not in police fashion. Its practice involves and perfects politics. It teaches us to deal with norms by inventing them as well:

What we need is rigor. Yes, rigor: the strangest of all passions, that which burns and constructs. No true construction was built without the amazing cruelty of the artist who turns against him or herself until the plasticity that brings forth all form is produced from his or her own desires. Only true discipline and not the repression or submission of my will to that of another, but truly exerting oneself, discipline that is the production of a revolution of sensibility, can save. The discipline of the artist. This is what is missing in our politics. (Safatle, 2016, p. 29).

There are many recent studies that observe the need to justify the teaching of arts in schools, such as Forreau (2018), Bamford (2009) and Choquet & Kerlan (2016). Nevertheless, there are still understandably unevenness in the research and approach to this issue. One of these difficulties lies in the type of benefit that art classes can offer participants. Contrary to what common sense professes (here included are artists and arts teachers), I defend that we show society that teaching arts is associated to what is most pressing for survival, much beyond the occasional accessory benefits. Art affects the way we deal with the configuration of daily perception, by dynamically constructing rigor and norms, as well as allowing one to fully perceive the established norms we must negotiate at every second.

Normativity is the condition for the occurrence of all our actions. It is the object of research in several fields of knowledge, as in the concept of “frame” or “framing” (Bateson, 1954) (Goffman, 1974), which is used differently by the linguist George Lakoff (2004) and the philosopher Judith Butler (2010), for example. Beyond being a corpus of rules and norms, normativity consists of dynamic and inventive processes that must be considered as such, contrary to notions that consider norms as static, that need to be obeyed. If we adopt contemporary and philosophically elucidated approaches in education, this will allow us to see normativity as a tool for the construction of improved relations in society:

My point, though, is not to paralyze judgment or to undermine normative claims, but to insist that we must devise new constellations for thinking about normativity if we are to proceed in intellectually open and comprehensive ways to grasp and evaluate our world. (Butler, 2009, 144-145).

Normativity, in the terms used in the present article, can be considered as instituting situations, among individuals, of shared levels of knowledge and a dynamic treatment of what is established. Or, in broader terms,

Normativity refers to our capacity to discriminate between appropriate and non-appropriate responses to stimuli and to the capacity to critically appraise and revise the patterns that regulate those forms of conduct in which we express this sense of appropriateness. But it refers also to our capacity to act in accordance with such appraisals, and in particular to act in ways that address directly the normative orders which govern our lives. (Frega, 2015, p. 1).

By articulating what is known with the new, and the static with what is mutable, normativity offers intersubjective mediation in creating new ways of life, the sphere in which art and philosophy take a central role. If, on the one hand, art depends on what is established so that it can be built, in its quality of being a “monument”, “a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves and that provide the event with the compound that celebrates it” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 167-168), on the other hand, it destabilizes what has been established. The same can be said of philosophy.

In his approach to the importance of normativity in the arts (and art as integral to the normativity of everyday life), and his observation that the “individual no longer considers him or herself merely subjected to norms, but also as a source of norms”, Alain Kerlan asks, “how are creativity and normativity articulated?” (Kerlan, 2015, p. 278). One of art’s actions is to reconfigure the normativity that is already present in life, not only in representative terms, but mainly by creating its own normativities and autonomous lives, which broaden, cut out, question, and enrich reality. This reconfiguration does not take place only in spaces that are previously reserved for professional artistic action (museums, theaters, etc); it can and should take place in daily life, from the more practical actions to more

sophisticated moments – at any time that perception, with its aesthetic quality, is in play.

Exquisite basics

Let us take cooperation as a privileged example to support this statement. Cooperation, an intersubjective instance which is the most solid substrate of the networks that enables life, is essentially made up of elements of attention that are aesthetically organized. It is one of the fundamental elements of life when it comes to plain survival, on the one hand, and to the production of strong or exceptional moments and ways of living, on the other.

Michael Tomasello (2016) posits that cooperation is a crucial instance of our existence; he meticulously discerns the cognitive operations involved in this eminently human activity, and a key element in the construction of culture. According to research carried out in the last forty years by Tomasello (1999) (2019), which resonates with other works such as those by the economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (2011), the capacity to cooperate is what most distinctly differentiates us from other primates. It is what allowed humanity to reach the knowledge and abilities that an individual alone could not have reached, since culture is made up of cognitive networks that, as a whole, form a process of social coordination.

These thinking acts are formed by simple, elementary communicative situations such as “perspectivation”⁴, “knowledge of one’s own role (function) and the roles of others” and “perceiving the relevance” of facts for others, as well as inverting roles and simulating how others evaluate their partners (Tomasello, 2016, p.144). Of all these elements, “joint attention” – perceiving that another person is perceiving something that I perceive – is the fundamental cognitive capacity needed for all others to occur. Interwoven with normativity dimensions, joint

⁴ The terms in quotations in these paragraphs are elements analyzed by Tomasello and taken from the works quoted. They are located sparsely in many of the pages of these works and brought together in a minimally organized form in the present article.

attention can be linked to “joint commitment” (Carassa et al., 2008), which is also dealt with in studies on cognition and learning:

[...] it is a configuration for the relationship among people, defined by the fact that the interactants must mutually – though not necessarily equally – establish obligations and rights that regulate the relations they contracted with each other. Collective compromise is constructed in a specific context and develops through objectives that are also specific, in such a way that, in dealing with it, we shall necessarily reach its nature, one that, besides being normative, is also well situated. (Gerhardt, 2014, 892).

Joint attention allows there to be a “common ground” (situations that are tacitly known or established by those involved). It is the perception that we are being evaluated by others, and the “self-monitoring” that makes **we** greater than **I**, forming a “cooperative rationality”, “in the sense that each partner freely relinquished some personal control over his actions to the joint agent of which he was a constitutive part” (Tomasello, 2016, p.145). These components result in a “group mentality” that lead to collective accomplishments, in codependence, with each participant seeing “other’s concerns as equal to their own” (ibidem, p.147).

These cognitive acts are especially present in theater classes. The main argument of this article is the importance of recognizing this characteristic as a part of theater classes, so as to clarify and enhance its power in broadening cooperation in the intersubjective interactions students have in their everyday lives.

Said approach proposes its effectiveness politically – or at least as a resistance, first, because it is situated in the battlefield Vladimir Safatle identifies as that of affects and ways of feeling. Secondly, it shifts the frames of evaluation and significance of theater education to a field that has been occupied by hegemonic political forces – that of order, the norm, the rule, the production of ways of life that handle our essential needs (the beauty of living necessarily included in this category).

Practices in collective attention

I will illustrate this conceptual articulation with three very concrete examples. Three well-known and commonly used exercises in theater classes will be analyzed, and the presence of cognitive elements highlighted in the present article will be identified. Pedagogical and political implications that may occur in the targeted conduction and practice of these exercises will be proposed through this perspective.

An activity commonly used in the beginning of theater workshops – where participants present themselves – will be examined first. Everybody stands in a circle. The teacher-leader sets out the rules of the game: one states her name, looks at someone and slowly walks towards where this person is. This person now must do the same – state his name, look at someone and occupy that person's place, moving before his place is taken. This “imaginary ball” (the transmission of action through the *name-look-displacement* sequence) is played until all have stated their names several times. The teacher interrupts the “ball”, instructing that now each person will say the name of the person whose place she will occupy. The activity is carried out with this change until all names are also stated several times. After that, new instructions eliminate speech. It is at this moment that the exercise becomes more interesting, from the point of view of the present article.

While everyone is silent in the circle, the leader quickly stares at someone and walks towards that place (the exchange of communicative signals or gestures are not allowed – if someone stares at me, it is only because he will unequivocally take my place). This person will quickly, though not abruptly (time and rhythm are the fabric of the game, as of life) look at another person and take her place. In this way, the ball will go from person to person.

When this mute process is consolidated, the leader will create another “ball”, without interrupting the activity, by looking at someone and taking her place while there is already another ball (only the leader – the teacher or some student designated as leader – may begin or end balls). In a group of fifteen people, five balls may be active, if exchanges are successful. It is important to say that when

there is one ball, everyone knows where to look, but when there's more than one, all must be very observant since, at any given moment, someone may be looking at you, wanting your place and summoning you to work.

This work is initially quite normative in the conventional sense: you will only do what the rule determines with no leeway for creation. However, when there are several balls, some problem-solving strategies must be created, such as the change of person in the middle of a trajectory.

What I would like to call attention to in this exercise is how it involves, in a simple way, the articulation of protocols and ethics of cooperative relationships – cooperation policies. The most visible aspect is the modulation of attention: if with one ball there are no excuses for not noticing that someone has looked at you, when these balls multiply, paying attention becomes more complicated for all. The clarity of what is done among people also becomes more complex, but should be as unmistakable as possible: if someone looks at me to take my place, that should be made clear (remembering that the exchange of signals are not desirable. It is the rhythm that matters, action carried out in the dynamic time frames and not through explicit communication). Thus, I must quickly do my job, searching for someone. I do not need to look at the person coming my way any longer – she will do her job while I do mine. When something goes wrong – for example, I walk towards someone who has not seen me or has been triggered by someone else to walk - I must solve the issue, respecting the collective forms of action that I notice are taking place.

A **common ground** is established, and the rhythm of actions is the bodily enactment of these relations of trust that, to be honored, depend on very precise and dynamic technical details. The “common ground” – shared objectives and attention in a situation where one participant resourcefully infers what the other infers about him in terms of mutual knowledge (Tomasello, 2014, p.38) – is the most basic and frequent situation for our cooperative action with others. It is also the basis of dramatic exercises.

In games and exercises that have straightforward rules – Viola Spolin (2020

[1963]) being one of the greatest organizers of this type of activity in the Western world – this is pedagogically established exactly in order to consolidate the need and disposition to act according to these terms. Other more variable exercises, even theatrical improvisations, articulate the novelty and the dynamics of relationships with previously set and implicit rules or – more intricately – that are created dynamically during the work session.

Common ground is also related to something very dear to all of us who live in society: to unite, composing a world with the other, to be a partner. This is both a moral and practical issue.

This is, in fact, a basic resource in theatrical acting, an important element among actors in their work, and between actors and the audience. More emphatically, being able to create a common ground with the other is a *sine qua non* condition in theater and in the contact established with the audience, when an alignment of references is created with the least possible clarification. For example, the “plot” is perceived, but complies with all the unnamable and innumerable layers of perception that are a part of the aesthetic experience, the games between the known and the unknown, with fellow actors and the spectator.

If the teacher merely focuses on learning the names for a presentation in this exercise, the exercise can become extremely limited pedagogically. Introductions are made, people may have fun and unwind (the more superficial criteria of evaluation: if the students enjoyed themselves, the class was good) but the benefit of the activity as a learning process and the expansion of perception and the power⁵ of a theatrical life becomes a matter of chance.

If the teacher is a little more mindful of discipline and the rules *per se*, the organization maintained may activate a different kind of attention among students.

However, if the teacher knows that presentations are needed, but she is focused on the contents that the class should include (and that the class should develop these contents from the beginning, already during the warm-up), he or she will carry out the needed presentations – the knowing of names – in a basic

⁵ The term refers to *potentia* in Baruch Spinoza's philosophy.

way, or even superficially. She will always be vigilant to what really matters, so that the exercise can be carried out in such a way that significant cognitive operations are fulfilled. Her perspective for the students' actions will focus on bodily thought, active at every moment. Furthermore, at the end of the class, when there is usually a moment for evaluation, these are the contents that will be questioned, so as to create a more conscious form of knowledge that will connect to more rational cognition by the students. The contents are the deployment of theatrical attention; theatrical thinking (Magela, 2018) deployed in the situations instigated by what was proposed in class. This theatrical thinking is entwined with the capacity to create normativity and cooperative actions.

Needless to say, – and similarly to what Vladimir Safatle advocates – the battlefield lies in the affects dimension; the pedagogical process in theater classes occurs in a somatic sphere (Magela, 2017a). The transformations that take place in students' awareness – these contents – are intensive, operational. The case here is not dealing with cooperation as a theme; it is approached technically in its constituent elements: in effective bodily experiences of cooperation.

Cooperative games can be performed without any cooperative operation taking place in the somatic sense (which is what matters pedagogically), for instance. It's the operational that becomes somatic; the ways of being, not the messages. It's about reconfiguring ways of life. This is the significant personal transformation of theater classes, their most specific and elemental education.

Another pedagogical situation can also provide more direct and visible concepts to the reader: a transformed “musical chairs”, similar to the exchange of looks, though more complex. In this exercise, the leader of the activity proposes that everybody remain seated in chairs in the middle of the room, with about 1.5 meters between them, and at different angles. There is the same number of chairs as people. One of the people gets up, leaving the chair empty, and is taken away by the leader. This person's task is to try to sit on an empty chair, while everyone else must prevent this person from sitting on that chair or anybody else's. The way they can do that is by occupying the chairs.

This means people will be getting up and sitting down, leaving several chairs empty dynamically everywhere. In time, the person will be able to sit, and the person who remains standing (or, if the game stops, the one who caused the interruption) is the next one to try to sit while others stop him.

If the leader proposes only these simple instructions (trying to stop another person from sitting by occupying the chair), without including more rules or defining the work in more detail, it is likely that nothing will happen in terms of attention and learning. What usually happens is that the participants take on a competitive stance, in which the only interest is not to let the person sit under any circumstances on any chair. People will run, talk, laugh, shove, give out verbal and rational orders on what to do, treating the person who is standing as the “fool”.

However, the game changes significantly if some complementary rules are observed, by defining an improved pre-framing of normativity: no one can run, or move quickly. Everybody must walk and sit at an average or slow pace. There should be no touching among participants, which avoids competition upon sitting. Another rule should be that participants cannot speak, exchange gestures or looks, or have any kind of communication. What connects everybody is only the dynamic occupation of the chairs. This is the main aspect to be noticed here, whether it be regarding channels of intersubjective contact, or the encouragement of cognitions other than the rational. A final rule could be that, as soon as someone gets up, she cannot sit down in the same chair.

Experience shows that when the activity is carried out with these rules, participants have the resources⁶ to gradually and consistently establish a very specific form of collectively occupying space, composing time and instituting other forms of sharing the mission of occupying chairs as one body (competition and exclusion virtually disappear). A real modulation of time, space and behavior takes

⁶ It's necessary to observe that the word “condição” (used in the Brazilian version of this article) has both the meaning of “condition” and “resource” - conflicting meanings at a first glance. It may refer to recourses for something to happen. It may also refer to the limitations imposed upon an action. If we take drama classes and life as processes of subjectivation (Revel, 2008), in which being an active subject is entwined with subjecting oneself, the issues of normativity are taken to a more complex level, one in which people recognize and invent norms in a complex, dynamic way. This issue is addressed in “Theater education as subjectivity production”, an article of mine available in <https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/conce/issue/view/1643>.

place. All are attentive and committed in an intricate and very sophisticated dynamics. The person wishing to sit can be replaced without interrupting the game; if she manages to sit, everybody else now refers to the person that is left out, or that hesitated, in the flow of the game. This exchange is very astute. What before was a simple competition has now become a dance, an event in which everyone creates a spacetime through the active perceptions of temporality, movement, intentions, the quality of bodies and the articulations between norms and dynamics.

At many moments it becomes unclear to the teacher (as an external gaze, not as involved in that cognition) if there is only one person who is hampered from sitting down (because many are standing at the same time, cooperating without previous arrangement) and even less who that person is. The collective body has assembled the situation with an often-indecipherable intelligence to the observer, one that is created mainly through bodily logics of how, when and who leaves or occupies a certain chair.

According to the rules and the confrontation of those who interact with the rules, an evident theatrical cognitive field is produced – an articulation between the explicit and previous norms as “common ground” and the creation of other temporary and local norms and logics (*whose responsibility is it to occupy a chair in this specific situation? How many will need to move at this moment and how?*). Actions – even if indecipherable at times – happen in visible joint awareness and cooperation, forming the internal dynamics of the game. Learning and expanding it all cannot be resolved by the teacher’s words, but through the theatrical pedagogical experience of the process.

The pedagogical focus

Perhaps an evaluation of the actions of these participants would bring forth the idea of affordance, “the fit between an animal’s capabilities and the environmental supports and opportunities (both good and bad) that make possible a given activity” (Gibson & Pick, 2000, 15), since the flow of actions gradually fits

into what is going on in this collectivity. To a certain extent, we can identify successive affordances in our actions with others. We interact with joint awareness (I and others perceiving space and all actions), constantly negotiating our actions within the multiple layers of possibilities of what is happening, in complementarity with our surroundings. Virginia Kastrup, in her account on learning and cognition, in which beings, relations and surroundings always co-engage each other, states that one who learns reinvents himself (Kastrup, 2007, 173). These classes expand the creative capacity of inventing new ways of collective action.

When considering a very simple and straightforward example in the exercise, in which we can clearly notice participants leaving a chair counting on someone else taking it, what stands out is the way the exercise deploys decision-making processes based on subtle perceptions of what is going on - and where there are no guarantees. What I do as an actant is always based on what I think others are thinking and on the previous and dynamic knowledge between the parties - once again, the common ground referred to by Michael Tomasello. A series of suppositions of what the other person wants and is thinking is associated to evaluating and taking on several risks in acting with the other, with the supposedly needed precautions.

The search for other forms of living does not necessarily threaten life in a destructive manner. On the contrary, risks are necessary if life is to thrive. And the prudence needed to experiment these risks demands dynamic caution:

[...] being cautious does not mean following a mere practical rule whose use can be generalized and extended to any type of situation. Being cautious is adopting a strategic attitude when dealing with other bodies. It means learning to be in composition with them, obtaining a way to manage our own power to affect and be affected and, consequently, the power for action by the affective fluctuations brought about. (Silva, 2012, p.460.

I do not act and only later evaluate; both occur at the same time, in different orders of information and suppositions, with uninterrupted adjustments, articulating prudence and boldness.

The difference between the chair activity before and after the rules are in place, observing aspects related to normativity, is an example of the insight proposed here between a theater class in the intensive or operative sense of theater and one that isn't; if that class deploys theatrical elements cognitively and somatically, or not.

These classes approach constitutive actions of cooperation – not as a theme, but by adopting, in a technical way, aesthetic elements of cooperation. Cooperation is a form of feeling and sharing reality: thus, that which is political. It means observing if the exercise activates or not theatrical cognition, composed eminently by joint attention, which is significant. The idea is that this can trigger the growth of a student's power and autonomy in the theatrical dimensions that are found in everyone's daily life. It is the joining (sometimes blending) of class and life, survival and the aesthetic.

Ethics in educational theater practice

Art produces and investigates other forms of dealing with rules and norms (whether implicit or explicit, pre-existing or created). It fosters the invention and singularity that may arise in these forms. In our case, with exercises that predominantly avoid (or do away with?) the support of speech, there is the questioning of openings and conclusions, decisions, refusals and acceptances, which can be carried out with no communication or predefinitions, but according to rules and forms that are produced by the power relations created by all, and in connection with the flow of these forces:

[...] inventing ways of existing, through optional rules, that can both resist power and elude knowledge, even if knowledge tries to penetrate them and power to appropriate them. But ways of existing or possibilities of life are constantly being recreated, new ones emerge [...]. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 92).

The ethics of the scene are transposed to the ethics of thought, to a specific awareness, a perception, actions: “[...] ethics is a set of optional rules that assess

what we do, what we say, in relation to the ways of existing involved” (Deleuze; 1995, p.100). Again, I must highlight that, once actions are executed within a perception and decision-making process that escapes what is communicationally hegemonic and rational, actant students can dissolve previous conventions of agreements and behaviors, reconfiguring the dimension of decision-making processes.

Looking back at the survival aspect, one must see that the rules proposed initially and created in these exercises are not the “if you do this, you win” type, but the “if you don’t do this, you die” type. As with the looking exercise, if the norms are not suitable, all lose. What matters here is to learn ways to recognize the reality of power and current forces (at times too intricate to observers) and produce a singular subjectivity. Dominating this instance in a game aims less at working on obedience to police domain than teaching students how to do politics – encouraging the creation of collective forms that are viable, that can survive, be functional and existentially interesting. It is a practical response to the fallacy that the formula for austerity and prosperity is to be reactionary.

Other exercises can mobilize the art of deciding dynamically and collectively, as in an adaptation of the “Colombian hypnosis” exercise (Boal, 2002, 51), in which one actant leads the other person’s face with his hand. In this activity, we can have a series of variations that become gradually more complex, without interruptions, but with the exchange of pairs. Initially, the hand leads the partner’s face precisely and rigorously (you maintain a distance and a parallelism between hand and face). This is the “classic” exercise, as seen in books.

After doing the exercise for a while, from the hand leading the face, the hand leading the chest follows, then the chest leading the other’s chest, and the whole body (shoulders, torso and pelvis) then leading the other person’s whole body, being careful not to fall into a mirror exercise (MAGELA, 2017b, p. 55).

At this stage, after introducing both people leading and being led with their entire body, and simultaneously, the situation becomes quite complex. Precision must be strictly maintained and, once this is covered, the voids and impossibilities

of both leading and being led at the same time – with the obligation of keeping this complex channel of contact which started out as only hand to face, with no exchange of looks, gestures or words – brings about issues of normativity, the constitution of a singular logic, adjustments without communication, etc., being worked out. The impossibility of a satisfactory obedience to the rule, with the obligation of committing to it, creates the need for a normative production that meets the specific provisional relations developed by both students, between them.

If the leader proposes an improvisation with no speech immediately after, corporal interactions will be more present and active, approaching cognitive theatrical issues associated to tailoring and building singular and dynamic normativities that are not verbalized (Magela, 2017b, p.55). Improvisations, especially minimalist ones with no speech, can be a deep exercise of joint attention. However, it is important that the teacher not be tempted to focus on and feed the more immediate and conventional creativity of students. Focusing on how students are able to compose cooperative attention, as well as episodes of joint attention (as important for immediate material survival as for the composition of aesthetic fields) with classmates should be the target. Hence, the class can deploy perception and invention of rules, forms, and other relations of power, that deal with the forces and forms in action in the theatrical aspects of life.

The account of these principles and concepts, articulated with examples, intends to demonstrate how the perspectives developed here are viable in schools. An effort should be made to foster an investigative attitude on the part of the teacher so that she can evaluate to what extent her principles and criteria – be it through adopting pre-existing systems and exercises or the invention of new ones – touch elements of normativity in cooperative situations. Going back to what was said before, and greatly summarizing all these considerations: carrying out the exercise with or without care for the presence of a theatrical thinking may determine if the activity will foster an effective theatrical education or not, and if it will broaden the student's attention to the theatrical dimensions of life, which are absolutely necessary for the survival of all, at all levels. (Magela, 2018).

Some theatrical exercises can develop qualified forms of dealing with these rules, forces, and powers; as well as modes of behavior, operated in the classroom, that are transposed to the student's life. It can help build a stronger body for the invention of theatrical mindsets that deal with theatrical strata established in society. The most important aspect of these classes is that social issues are not explained, but lived and experienced affectively and intensively, spilling over into the students' lives. It is a pedagogical practice aiming to enable the student to act, solve and invent with others, in a gradually more sophisticated form, in a way that is valuable for relations among all, and for politics as well.

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