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**ACTING CLASSROOM AND THE GROTOWSKIAN
NOTION OF CONTACT:
connecting with life flows in a neoliberal world**

SALA DE AULA DE ATUAÇÃO E A NOÇÃO GROTOWSKIANA DE CONTATO:
vincular-se aos fluxos de vida em um mundo neoliberal

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**Acting classroom and the Grotowskian notion of contact:
connecting with life flows in a neoliberal world**

Abstract: This essay seeks to reflect on how, in a “collaborative work across time”, certain theatrical traditions have the possibility of inviting us to experience other ways of living, different from those—neoliberal ones—that are making us sick. This reflection is developed by presenting some studies carried out in acting classrooms and laboratories, with an emphasis on the Grotowskian notion of “contact”. This notion, experienced as a “practiced word”, investigated and invented in teaching/learning processes, offers a kind of antidote to the “neoliberal individual mode”. It allows us to rebuild bonds and experience in an embodied manner, ways of conviviality, coexistence and co-participation in flows of life.

Keywords: contact; perception; teaching-learning processes; art and neoliberalism; Grotowski.

**Sala de aula de atuação e a noção grotowskiana de contato:
vincular-se aos fluxos de vida em um mundo neoliberal**

Resumo: Nesse ensaio, busca-se refletir como, em um “trabalho colaborativo no tempo,” determinadas tradições teatrais têm a possibilidade de nos convidar a experimentar outros modos de viver, diversos daqueles—neoliberais - que nos estão adoecendo. Desenvolve-se essa reflexão apresentando algumas pesquisas realizadas em sala de aula de atuação e em laboratórios, com ênfase na noção grotowskiana de “contato.” Essa noção, vivenciada como uma “palavra praticada,” investigada e inventada em processos de ensino/aprendizagem, oferece uma espécie de antídoto ao “modo indivíduo neoliberal,” permitindo que se refaçam vínculos e se experienciem de maneira corporificada modos de convivência, de coexistência e de co-participação nos fluxos de vida

Palavras-chave: contato; percepção; processos de ensino-aprendizagem; arte e neoliberalismo; Grotowski.



1 Introduction

In 2018, I finished an article in which I reflected on the concept of action in the context of the work of actors and actresses, writing as follows: “Do we still believe in individual, strong, active, voluntary actions in which we—as subjects of our doing—operate on objects (even if these objects are other subjects and, often, ourselves)? Has this type of action not already shown its insufficiency or, more than that, its violence? Is this action that we want to be actors of? Is it to and for it that we still want to act?”

I thus ended the article by explaining that the performing arts and their crafts were—and are—a terrain in which ways of life are in dispute for me. More than that, a terrain in which I believe it is possible to invent and experience other ways of living that have not yet been outlined. What we call theater and scene may be space-times that are constantly reinvented and reinterpreted—especially in classrooms and laboratories, without demands and requirements of the professional world—just as everyday life can be reinvented from and through theaters and their scenes.

In this article, I want to share some of my experience in acting laboratories and classrooms, these tiny greenhouses that have the possibility of never tiring of imagining other—and why not say, better—ways of making the world.

1.1 Acting classrooms in a neoliberal world: a brief diagnosis

The contagion between the acting classroom and everyday life has always interested me, and currently it seems even more necessary, as many students who come to the University of Theater are ‘sick of neoliberalism and digital media’.

I increasingly observe how the neoliberal and digital experience is shaping the corporeality and affections of young students in acting classrooms, influencing their subjectivation. Much of their suffering stems from the dominant ways of living in our society, which have undoubtedly intensified since I began teaching in the 1990s, partly due to the exponential growth of the digital experience. I see that they suffer from attentional, mental, and emotional exhaustion. We also struggle with the lack of lasting time to integrate or process what we have experienced. We suffer from competitiveness, difficulty in making choices, concentrating, and other related issues.

When individuals do not recognize these sufferings as socially driven and generated by neoliberalism, they tend to internalize individual guilt for what they perceive as their own impotence, incapacity, procrastination, laziness, slowness, and weakness in meeting the world’s demands. This guilt leads them to seek neoliberal solutions for their distress, such as increased exposure, more activities, networking, productivity, and performance. Moreover, responding to social demands is



both physically and mentally exhausting, prompting people to seek advice, strategies, and procedures that promise greater efficiency and ‘healthier’ outcomes. It becomes a search for a better, less painful version of themselves—a kind of ‘sustainable’ high performance in a never-ending cycle.

I believe that acting classrooms, laboratories, and research groups in the arts provide valuable cross-fertilization between practices developed in creative-formative spaces and everyday life. These practices offer alternative ways of seeing and responding to the anxieties of our world.

However, to begin visualizing the potential for this cross-fertilization, we must first distance ourselves from any idealization of art, artists, teachers, and acting classrooms. Studying theater, performing a play, forming a group, or being an artist does not automatically ‘save’ us from being subjugated to—or sometimes immersed in—neoliberal ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Art is not a magical or protected space where we are separated from the social mechanisms or the competitive, fast-paced, noisy, and individualistic modes of subjectivation that shape us. A minimally critical perspective reveals that what we call art can also reproduce shallow ways of thinking about the subject, thereby reinforcing—and even promoting—the status quo.

When we look at the work of actors and actresses and consider their training as artists, this becomes even more evident. In the field of acting, it is the subjects themselves—their bodies, voices, emotions, intellects, etc.—that are positioned to experience (and transform) both themselves and the world while ‘learning’ to act. This may not apply to all approaches to the acting experience, but it is how acting is understood within the Stanislavski-Grotowski lineage I follow.

I have been speaking with students, half-jokingly but also seriously, on the need to change how we face our suffering. We can recognize that we suffer from neoliberalism—this is the name of the disease—and our responses must be collective. Alternatively, we could begin to suffer from—or care for—many other things that are often overlooked, such as our attention and affection regimes. In doing so, we might discover more creative, unique, rebellious, and collective solutions for the world we cohabit

1.2 Acting classrooms and theatrical traditions: collaborative work across time

On the one hand, being artists does not “save” us and can even blind us by the processes of celebritization linked to our profession. On the other hand, the art, work and training of actors and actresses can be a place for social, cultural, collective and attentional experiences through many of their crafts, which they invent both performative scenes (and formations) and everyday ways of living. Such experiences should reveal diverse ways of conviviality distinct from those that are making us sick.

Much of this knowledge and crafts can be found in theatrical traditions. We can undertake “collaborative work across time” (Quilici, 2015, p. 181) with those who came before us, through



their research and experiences, helping to formulate questions other than those that could be blinding us for a variety of reasons, such as an excess of contemporaneity. In any case, as the relationship with this knowledge relates to the investigation of other ways of perceiving and living life, they must always be tested, and not applied, in a true work of collaboration across time.

This knowledge, born from questions, experiences and research, invites us to a broader perception of subjects and the world. It can also be helpful in loosening the individualistic, self-centered and even anthropocentric identities to which we are accustomed. Such knowledge directs our attention—and, with luck, our curiosity—to an artistic investigation that rebuilds connections and investigates, in an embodied manner, ways of conviviality, coexistence and co-participation in the flow of life.

Returning to contemporary diseases, I remember that the indigenous thinker and leader Ailton Krenak (2019, 2022) stated he finds it hard to believe that some of us can remain whole and healthy by starting with the *self*. And, in the 295th week of Fridays for Future, young people hold up signs that read: “Wake up” and “Stop burning our future.” In the micro political set of the acting classroom and its crafts, I have been researching the following question with my students. What could be an action in which the starting point is not this self that disintegrates and makes us sick, but an action that wakes us up from this amount of scattered, noisy and (self)destructive activities, something that calls us to invent (or would it be to remember?) (im)possible futures?

2 Contact: a practiced word

Perhaps the word I have practiced the longest in my acting classroom is the Grotowskian notion of contact. To say that contact is a practiced word (Motta Lima, 2012) means many things. The first is that, in my collaborative work with Grotowski across time, I do not seek to explain or apply the notion of contact to my students. This is because my reading of Grotowski’s texts, the experiences I had with his collaborators, and my own 30-year investigation in classrooms led me to two points. 1) To remove Grotowski from any mythification, seeing him as a researcher (with no doubt a brilliant one) and thus understand that the notions in his texts were linked to different practices. Such practices gained different accents over time and answered different questions. 2) To discuss with my students his notions—specifically contact—as if I were someone who recognizes a certain field of investigation but is unaware of what might still come from it. This notion offers some references, but does not restrict the investigative space, quite the opposite. The investigation to which I dedicate myself interests me in (and for) the time in which I live (and for the time to come, if we manage to stop burning the future). This investigation involves the students with whom I work and, precisely for this reason, it refers to the Grotowskian tradition and to so many other people who are dead or alive.



2.1 The notion of contact in Grotowski's investigation

I conduct much of my research in classrooms around the notion of contact and its possible developments. I believe that, for the purposes of this text, it is necessary to present, in general terms and in a somewhat targeted way, how the notion of contact first appeared in Grotowski's texts from the theatrical period and what practices it was linked to.

The notion only began to emerge in the artist's texts in the second half of the 1960s, undoubtedly related to the experiences linked to the show "The Constant Prince" and the director's work with actor Ryszard Cieslak. Grotowski said that the notion of contact emerged based on an objective and technical problem. The actor ran the risk of understanding that work of self-penetration—a notion that appears in the artist's texts in the early 1960s—as a kind of concentration on his individuality, "on the personal element as a kind of treasure" (...), as if he were "looking for the richness of his emotions." According to Grotowski, it would be "an actor who would artificially stimulate the internal process, an actor immersed in a kind of narcissism" (Grotowski, 1987, p. 191). On the contrary, in contact, the works of the actors and actresses on themselves was one performed within, through and for the sake of a relationship. Grotowski stated that for an actor to become realized, he should not work for himself, but "by penetrating his relationship with others, studying elements of contact, the actor would discover what is in him" (Grotowski, 1987, p. 202).

To better apprehend this statement, it is necessary to understand that the notion of contact was closely related to another Grotowskian notion, also linked to Cieslak's experience in "The Constant Prince." This is organicity or organic consciousness. The notion of organicity transformed the status of the body and the subject in the Laboratory Theater. It is linked to an experience in which the body—in its instinctive, erotic, biological, tangible dimensions—comes to be seen as a possible runway for spiritual, ancestral, impersonal, mnemonic, archetypal, singular dimensions of being. When referring to Cieslak's action in the performance, Grotowski was talking about the realization of a carnal prayer. I will not be able to recover the entire process involved in the transformation of the notion of self-penetration into that of a total act (linked to contact and organicity). This is one of the main tasks I conducted in the first part of the book *Palavras Práticas: o percurso artístico de Jerzy Grotowski* [Practiced words: Jerzy Grotowski's artistic journey]. In short, it can be said that, before "The Constant Prince," the body in the Laboratory Theater was seen as a kind of hindrance to the psychic-animic-spiritual process, but from that moment on, it was re-signified. It is the body-memory, the body-life, the body of organic consciousness, a place in which life circulates, modulates, and vectorizes itself; in which virtual ancestral times/spaces are updated.

As we can see, for Grotowski it was not about physical theater at all. Conversely, from the mid-1960s onwards, Grotowski made a series of criticisms and self-criticisms concerning the



concentration of actors' attention on their bodies or voices. This attention would be the enemy of organicity, as its interest would be in judging, correcting or, before that, controlling the body, training it to certain demands or continually perfecting it. The body, operated according to this model, would lose its value as matter immersed in the flows of life. It would become an instrument operated by the acting subject (or what Grotowski called the mental of each of us). Grotowski went further, saying that an excessive emphasis on body and vocal techniques revealed a kind of distrust of the body, an uncomfortableness with life itself (Grotowski, 2007, p. 175).

Just as one should not artificially stimulate the psyche (in search of psychic treasures), one should not manipulate the body/voice in the interest of exploring it in order to perfect, control and train it. That would be to think/operate the body in a way that would distance it from its vital, mystical, erotic, affectionate, cosmic, ancestral, undomesticated, mysterious, opaque power; that would distance it from its unknown or forgotten powers.

Contact appears in the texts from the second half of the 1960s as a pair of organicity: contact is a condition for the emergence of the body-life, of organicity. It was not, therefore, a matter of any voluntary or well-intentioned decision by the actor to establish relationships, as the word contact might suggest. The individual body only exists immersed in the body of relationships, in the body of the world. To be in contact is to open to perceive and carry out actions within these pre-existing relationships (hence, body-memory, body-life).

The Grotowskian notion of contact is installed inside the search for creative processes that, in this lineage, are organic processes, based on trust in nature. However, we must not confuse this trust with ease or comfort. Most of the time, it takes continuous and rigorous craftsmanship to encourage organic processes and awaken dormant energies blocked by our more flattened and mechanical ways of living. It takes refined work to "give up not doing." That is why Grotowski proposed a negative path: recognizing and eradicating actors' blockages to organicity, which is almost the opposite of making them learn a collection of techniques.

During the artist's trajectory, the notion of contact unfolds into many others, such as encounter and communion, which make the aspect that I present here clearer. A notion of extended corporeality is established, placing us in relation to the space-body of the world with extended temporality, in which we can remember our 'childhood roots' as well as our ancestry, including non-human beings.

However, even without advancing through the other phases of Grotowski's journey, in a fragment of text from 1969, he said: "If the body-life wishes to guide us in a direction, we can be the space, the beings, the landscape that resides inside us, the sun, the light, the absence of light, the open or closed space; without any calculation. Everything begins to be body-life" (Grotowski, 2007, p. 177).



2.2 Impulse, contact and modes of subjectivation

I would like to give a more concrete example - perhaps more artisanal - of what I have been developing so far through the notion of impulse. What is - or can be - the notion of impulse in Grotowski's journey? I believe that this is a good example both to bring us closer to organicity, this inseparable pair of contact, and also so that we realize the errors in reading, thinking and practice that we can make if, in seeking Grotowski's collaboration, we continue to be linked to - and identified with - a certain mode of subjectivation.

Grotowski says that impulse is what emerges when the organism's resistance - and the time lapse that this resistance imposes - to an organic process is eliminated. In this case, impulse and action would be concomitant, since the blockages to organic life would give way. It is to this extent that he says, "our path is a negative path, not a collection of techniques, but the eradication of blockages." He also states:

The process itself, although dependent to a certain extent on concentration, trust, surrender and almost total absorption in theatrical technique, is not voluntary. The necessary state of mind is a passive disposition to perform active work, not a state whereby "we want to do it" but "we give up not doing it" (Grotowski, 1987, p. 15).

First of all, let us see that we are faced with a very different way of both conceptualizing and carrying out an action: it, the action, occurs when the subject gives in, allows; when he gives up on not doing something and not when he wants to do something. Thus, even if something is done - since giving up on not doing is the same as doing it - it is an action that requires (or brings to light) another subjectivity, one that is in accordance with the organic processes. We could, therefore, think of impulse as the name of this new action that, when carried out, inaugurates a mode of (de) subjectivation: its agent finds himself immersed in the organic processes, in the flows of life and responds by understanding himself based on this immersion, conviviality and fraternity.

Readers and experimenters in this lineage, we are called to realize that this is another mode of existence, another way of perceiving one's own corporeality in an expanded way, as a kind of participation in—and incarnation of—vital flows.

That is why Grotowski said:

Because we do not need to be aware of our body, but to not be separated from it. And we do not need *savoir-faire*, but to know how not to hesitate when faced with the call, when it comes to doing the unknown and doing it while leaving the "means" (as much as possible) to our own nature (Grotowski, 1973, p. 48).

On the other hand, I have seen countless times the notion of impulse presented—whether or not these words were used—with impulsiveness, reactivity or "not thinking," precisely because the reading or practice of the concept did not take into account that it involves other ways of conceiving



one's own existence. Impulse is confused—in these readings, which I believe are mistaken—with the search for a quick and impulsive reaction. It is almost always one that is shaped by our most habitual modes of perception and reaction and accesses already known attentional and affective circuits. Moreover, if we look around, we will see that these recurring circuits have not led us to very healthy places from an emotional and relational point of view. In general, the circuits accessed in this way are projective, not very subtle, convivial and sensitive, and confuse lucidity with speed.

In reality, working in collaboration with Grotowski on impulse, contact, action, is to confront another, much broader perception of the subject and to invite actors in training to this “othering” that, while being singular, at the same time is a participant in the flows of life. In this sense, and this is one of the reasons for my ongoing interest in the trajectory of Grotowski and his collaborators, art can be a form of knowledge different from those we have accessed more frequently; a way of investigating that can open paths to new ways of life, on stage and in everyday life.

2.3 (Grotowskian) contact in the Brazilian classroom: research and invention

I would now like to return to asking how, in a Brazilian classroom in the second decade of the 21st century, this collaborative process across time is experienced. In what ways does the Grotowskian tradition collaborate with a classroom that disputes, in a micropolitical manner, ways of life; seeking to confront a way of living that is literally burning our future.

Since it is not possible to talk about all the stages of my research, I have focused on some investigations of the last decade: how I perceive contact both as a kind of antidote to the experiences of neoliberal subjectivation, and as a place for the creation of multiple—diverse, unthinkable, wild—ways of life. In addition to acting classroom, research has taken place in the collectives *Hanimais Hestranhos* (HH) and *Laboratório d'Inutilizas*, formed mostly by students and former students of UNIRIO.

I cannot say when I first understood—not only theoretically, but also practically—that it was necessary for the research I was carrying out in the acting classroom to put issues related to the actors' modes of subjectivation at the forefront. I was aware that, otherwise, any craft notions, techniques or exercises I was investigating with the students would run the risk of being read - and swallowed up - by the “individual mode,” the most habitual and mechanical way for actors to experience themselves.

The question ‘what blocks and what liberates life - organicity - within a structure’ was thus met with, as the most obvious barrier, a kind of armour produced by the ‘individual mode’. Looking at experiences from this perspective, the student would find it difficult to understand, even intellectually, certain notions of work, such as contact for example. Therefore, all the processes and practices related to that notion would be limited.



Asking ourselves what contact might be, made us understand different modes of existence, both from a theoretical and experiential point of view. We saw that when we thought/practiced contact from the more common idea of the individual, the experience was reduced to a kind of action and reaction, of dialog, of give and take between two individuals who were, in a way, already constituted. Even if these individuals exchange words, conduct actions and adjust here and there, or get emotional with each other, they are still experiencing a weak subjective experience, in the manner of exchanges, of contracts in which transformations and adaptations take place on a superficial or reactive level (to which I referred when I analyzed the notion of impulse).

2.3.1 Contact and individual mode: cliché and blockage

In the workroom experience, the individual mode seemed to me as one of the great clichés of our time and a blocker of organic and creative processes. In the neoliberal regime, in which power is presented in a productive (and not just repressive) way, and there are fewer prohibitions and more incitements, this individual mode mix with what we perceive as our intimacy, our own or natural ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Our subjectivities are linked to this mode of existence, and this makes us more adherent to capitalism and its ways of consuming life and the planet.

In this dominant and saying the least, limited way of living, relationships, perceptions, affections and actions are conformed to a certain imaginary: Places are presented as a backdrop for human presence and intervention, things and other human and non-human beings are objectified for use or disposal. Action is seen as the prerogative or expression of subjects who are active, pioneering and creative in their ability to undo and remake the world with the best - or worst - of intentions. Often, theater ends up as a kind of reproducer of these conventional ways of life.

Continuously investigating the notion of contact in the acting classroom has made me realize that actors can encounter - and make visible - modes of subjectivation that are very different from those operating in the individual mode. This is how, together with my students and participants in my collectives and laboratories, we realized and believed that art is capable of inventing, (re) discovering and remembering worlds of which we human beings are part of, participants and passers-by. We are in conviviality in these worlds, coexisting with other beings and things; in which the notion of space takes on a vibrational, energetic and immersive dimension. Our investigation on contact glimpsed and inhabited these worlds.



2.3.2 *The Hanimais Hestranhos¹: contact, presence and vacancy:*

The research carried out between 2016 and 2019 with the HH collective was one of the highlights of this investigation. The collective was born as a continuation of numerous workshops that I had been teaching since 2012. In the workshop - and also in the HH - we worked on texts by Samuel Beckett and Fernando Pessoa, mainly taken from “The Unnamable” and “Book of disquiet.” The name of the workshop reproduced a phrase from Beckett’s novel: “As for me, it will be joyful that it has not been possible to establish with the slightest degree of precision what I am.” We were interested in asking: who is this self that acts? Who does it act with? For what purpose does it act? Or, to put it another way, how can acting be about encountering different modes of subjectivation? We dedicate ourselves to practical-theoretical investigations around the notion of presence. We used the notion of vacancy in order to problematize an individualistic, self-centered, voluntarist, “ready-made” dimension of the subject that is sometimes linked to the notion of presence. Vacancy brought with it a dimension of emptiness and silence and a *quantum* of the subject’s not knowing about himself (the one revealed in Beckett’s phrase) that greatly increased both the notion of presence and that of contact.

We sought to make theoretical-practical crossings between these terms of performance—presence/vacancy—and a certain philosophical strand that reflects on the production of different modes of subjectivation, understanding the work of actors and their artisanal choices as processes of (de)subjectivation. In this context, the texts by Samuel Beckett and Fernando Pessoa were read, worked on and staged as possible producers of an (anti)method for training actors and actresses that took into account that acting was imagining/experiencing not just characters, but other modes of existence.

2.3.3 *The Hanimais Hestranhos: broadening perception and contact*

There were many points to work on, but one of the most important was the possibility of broadening our perception beyond what we were quick to perceive. In addition, we were interested in the fact that even what was already perceived could be removed from the triad of perception/

1 The collective, directed by Tatiana Motta Lima, is composed of Bruna Trindade, Jefferson Lyrio, Leonardo Samarino, and Renata Asato. It also initially included the participation of Matheus Gomes da Costa initially also participated in the beginning of the collective. It conducts practical research on acting and modes of (dis)subjectivation, having as literary references, in the first phase, the works “*The Unnamable*” by Samuel Beckett and “*The Book of Disquiet*” by Fernando Pessoa. The group performed the scenic experiment “Hentre Hos Hanimais Hestranhos Heu Hescolho Hos Humanos” (2016/17), which participated in numerous academic events and festivals, always as an exercise in continuous and open research. They also produced the play “*A mulher que virou planta*” (2019), in collaboration with Lacuna and Ritornelo, with direction by Vitá. In 2017, the collective organized the “*Unnamable Marathon*” at UNIRIO, a non-stop reading of “*The Unnamable*” by Samuel Beckett, and the “*Seminar in the Company of Samuel Beckett*” at the Sérgio Porto Municipal Cultural Space.



naming/significance. In investigating with the HH, and undoubtedly supported by the texts of “The Unnameable” and “The Book of Disquiet,” we wanted to avoid any narratives that directed our bodies towards a previous story or meaning; we doubted the actions that, in some way, were already moving towards their realization or completion. We thought - and experimented in this field by observing children playing in a park or imitating them in their actions - about children’s games that are transformed at every moment, either by meeting a new partner or object, or by following the desires that present themselves in (and through) the body/voice when dealing with the beings around them.

We worked both with pauses in the middle of the movements—to feel their flavor—and with a kind of hypersensitization of the actors to the present moment: what impressions do I get from each movement I make? A body gets up. A body moves. I hear the sound of shoes as I walk. A shoulder tenses unintentionally. A shoulder relaxes on purpose. A thought crosses my mind. This was all of interest to us. It was all something to be perceived, received, sensitized to, adjusted to.

Along with this, of course, there was an acute interest in what on stage was not me. Therefore, we never rushed the objects, using them for our own intentions. On the contrary, we allowed other temporalities and durations to become known in the company of objects, other than the so-called useful ones, which would - as we are used to hearing and saying - make the scene have rhythm, interest the spectators.

What happened in the space with objects and other beings—human or not—was perceived by the actors in the same way as their emotions, sensations, movements and thoughts. The other beings were not subject to the will of the actors and actresses. When in operation, or in conviviality with such actors, the objects showed themselves with their own life made up of form, weight, temporality, texture, etc.

2.3.4 Contact: affection and conviviality

To perceive was thus to be sensitive to a wider environment, clearly outside of myself. This perception –the impression we had—blurred time and produced a certain kind of silence in the workroom. It did not take us away from ourselves, it just seemed to be another way of experiencing ourselves, a wider way too. And the ways of feeling also seemed to widen.

Although this is not a speech by the HH actors or actresses, I would like to exemplify this widening with some words sent to me by Pedro Danilo Santos, my monitor in Acting IV, by e-mail after a meeting in the acting class. Here, he talks about another way of perceiving emotion, a way he considers “strange,” unknown to him and experienced during “moments, sparks” in an improvisation with two other colleagues:



Tati, it was truly emotional. I do not mean emotion in the sense of anger or sadness or joy or anything like that, but in the sense of being affectively engaged. Perhaps for the first time I felt what the double arrow² is like. I left the scene in a different state of attention and perception. *It felt as if some important part of me had left my body and played with the boys, making my body available for them to play with too.* It was a strange sensation at times... Of course, it was not all flowers either, what I said were moments, sparks, it did not last the whole experiment (personal archive, emphasis added).

I think Pedro is trying to find words for a certain type of emotion that is quite different from the well-known ones like “anger, sadness, joy or something like that.” In fact, I believe that he mentions these emotional states precisely to explain to me that the affections he speaks of are not those that exist in the familiar first-person singular. However, what did he mean by “affectively engaged”? He explained that an important part of him came out of his body to play with others—and he was not afraid to offer it up for play—and that his body was also offered up - donated - as a place for his colleagues to play. Perhaps we can say that Pedro accessed a regime in which affection itself—and its energy—circulates in the event, not belonging exactly to anyone, but being able to be experienced, if there is openness, by everyone. At that moment, we were working precisely with a new broadening of perception, bringing into contact in the same scene three experiences that had previously been investigated individually (although always in contact with other visible and invisible partners). We are a long way from the individualized, self-absorbed and often blind, passionate and reactive emotions and reactions that we experience more and more often on social networks, for example. There is a certain distance that is clearly affectionate between the self and the feeling. It is about affections born in/from a certain quality of attention and relationship, an affective availability to be with. I’m reminded of Novarina when she said that “theater is only interesting when you see the normal body of the one who (tense, parked, defended) undo itself and the other body come out playing mischievously, wanting to play what?” (Novarina, 1999, p. 23).

In HH, by betting on the widening of perception (which also concerned micro-perceptions), hypersensitization and delays or stops in relation to the so-called naming, completion or meaning of the action, we learn to last in time. We perceived life running in us/outside us when we were not, so to speak, running away from it. A world of convivialities that is already present and at the same time forgotten, veiled, has opened to us in a sensitive and embodied way; the world of which we are a part.

There was, as in Beckett’s texts, a possibility of humor and strangeness: seeing oneself functioning together with others—things, spaces, human and non-human beings. However, this

² Double arrow is a term I use with the students in the classroom, and it refers to being able to perceive the resonance within ourselves of what we have just done, allowing what we have accomplished to return to us like a unique flavor or an echo. It is the same arrow with two points: one directed outward, towards the space, and the other toward the agent themselves (but, in the end, are they really two?). It also refers to being able to receive the resonance of what has just been done as an otherness with which we continue to be in contact.



excluded the attempt to bring all the pieces together into a unified whole from the point of view of a self. Thus, it was outside the individual mode and its projections.

2.3.5 Contact: silence and conviviality

Silence was one of the elements that we discovered was fundamental to our research. In finding ways of perceiving that would help us move away from the rapid flow of thoughts/judgments, from the subject's mental speech to himself, which generates so many symptoms in relationships—speech that is, in reality, one of the factors preventing contact—we found silence. Rather, it was silence what helped us find these other ways of perceiving?

The most important thing is that, after the silence presented itself, we began to appreciate it. We tried to silence our eagerness to act or react immediately, our eagerness to manipulate the moment and others. More than that: in this silence, we learned something about how to be with non-human beings: their ability to remain and/or adjust to the environment, for example. In the scene we were inventing—or remembering—the actor was like a participant in an ever-moving landscape, of which his so-called moving interiority was also a part. To perceive oneself as—and in—the landscape was, once again, to renounce projections, individual narratives that run towards a given goal, transforming the environment through their intentions; it was to avoid so-called useful, utilitarian actions.

In such a perception, the actions of HH's actors and actresses appeared less like voluntary actions and more like personifications of “visions” or “auditions”. It was as if, when perceiving oneself as part of an expanded “scene”, it was the event itself that invited the actors to act, in this way or another, in this or that direction.

Moreover, when we were able to achieve this silence on stage through the expansion/displacement of our perception, we realized that the spectators' attention often began to widen as well, without it being an act of will. The scene itself could lead them to let the sounds of the outside world, of nature, of people, of cars, participate in it - without any kind of accentuation.

The widening of the actor's perception in these moments provided the spectator with a more extended regime of visibility and sensitivity in time and space. A kind of contemplation of what is almost never contemplated, a “waste of time” in the interest of offal and insignificance. A scene “for nothing,” as Beckett might have liked to say. There was nothing to interpret in the scene and the scene itself did not make it easy to capture a single or main meaning.

On this stage of micro-perceptions and hypersensitization, contact ended up being called conviviality or coexistence. Contact took on an immersive dimension, as if we were all in the same sea - And was not the air an invisible sea? In addition, things were transforming each other because they were immersed in the same element and not because of voluntary actions. Each small



transformation in a body had an impact on that sea or air, which in turn had an impact on the bodies immersed in it. The scene we were making was primarily a place to contemplate this space of conviviality—which is often forgotten—and this time that lasts, precisely because its passage is not experienced as a race forward in search of resolutions.

Perhaps it is necessary to say that we often worked resisting a kind of conventional “stage time” which, as professionals, seemed to be almost like a second skin. We clearly realized that we had a theatrical metronome that had nothing to do with events, but rather with the rhythm of contemporary productive life, which led us to worry about the spectator’s possible tiredness or boredom. We perceived this movement with a certain humor and sought to rely on a metronome that was increasingly linked to the organic, in the sense of a corporeality that participates in the flows of life.

One of the other precautions we had to take was not to transform into an aesthetic or language what should remain in research, even after the scene had been worked on countless times. Because everything was lost when the actors and actresses reproduced the symptoms of the conviviality they are used to in the scene. Then, by imitating the processes, they ended up holding back time, slowing it down; they ended up producing a sacralized silence, demonstrating their perception, instead of being attentive to the micro-differences that they always point out at every moment.

In this investigation, the extent of contact proved to be dependent on the extent of our perceptive and affective capacity, because we can only be in contact - in the sense of unblocking the current of impulses - with what we can perceive and which can affect us (I mean perceive/affect and not name, calculate or identify separately). Furthermore, by emphasizing perception, we remove from the command of experience—and from the life-body as the locus of experience—what Grotowski called our “mental computer,” which “is so prepared to cut us off from experience that we are actually already perceiving ideas and thoughts, not facts” (Grotowski, p. 3).

2.3.6 Contact: perception and life forces

Broadening and subtilizing perception—entering its possible flows and qualities—offers us the possibility of walking in spaces and times that are different from the more usual ones and opening up cracks to other ways of living (other worlds?).

Since the mid-2000s, I have dedicated myself to reading and studying the Theater of Sources, one of the phases of Grotowski’s work. A fragment of a text from this period is particularly important to my research into the relationship between perception, contact and creative life. The Polish artist spoke of two walls that would oppress human beings: a wall placed on perceptions, on the human senses - incapable of perceiving anything other than what they were already accustomed



to - and another placed on the forces, the energies that inhabit nature and men and from which we would be cut off. Grotowski, after separating them didactically, said that they were one and the same wall (Grotowski, 2016, p. 228).

Thus, broadening our perception - so that we perceive beyond what we have been perceiving and get out of our small perceptual circle is— for Grotowski, is being able to get in touch with the forces and energies of life, to get closer—by removing the walls - to these forces that run through everything (and through us).

In the HH, by focusing the investigation on this quality of perception, on these relational experiences, one experience presented itself and drew my attention as a professor-researcher. It was then that contact was established, so to speak, in its fullness - along with a floating attention, a continuous and delicate adjustment of actions, a release of the bodily-affective-relational blockages of the students involved. What prevailed was less individuality and more a rhythmic, vibrational, almost sonorous and, in a way, impersonal flow that I named, true to the Grotowskian lineage, the flow of life. In this kind of immersion (Coccia, 2018) in which actors and actresses seemed to move, relationships, actions and affections appeared to be modified in relation to the more frequent ways in which we experience our individualities, both in the theater and in life.

3 Conclusion

In the HH, we explored different ways of understanding ourselves and relating to others, which led us to further investigating the notion of contact through this perceptual and attentional expansion. Thus, the investigation of contact has been, and continues to be connected to a process of (re)discovery and invention of who we are or could be. Working on contact has involved discovering a foundational joy—both stemming from and rooted in—(inter)(dis) subjective transformations.

In recent years, I no longer start my research solely from questions related to the ways of (un) making the subject that we experimented with at the beginning of the HH, though, of course, there is where my origins lie. My research—both with the HH and another collective, the Laboratório d' Inutilizas³ — has shifted from an investigation primarily focused on the work of actors and actresses, on issues related to their modes of subjectivation, toward an interest in investigations stemming from a more convivial and perhaps less anthropocentric perspective.

By maintaining the notion of contact as a question, a field of investigation, I arrived at the concepts of attentional environment, conviviality, coexistence, and immersion. Here, an ecological

³ The Laboratório d'Inutilizas is a collective coordinated by Tatiana Motta Lima that works preferably outdoors, focusing on issues related to perception and coexistence between living and non-living beings, researching them as forces of scenic creation. The work of the Laboratório d'Inutilizas is inspired by the poems from the book "Invented memories" by Manoel de Barros.



dimension of art revealed itself, one that has begun to deeply interest me: the human being—and thus actors—as beings immersed in a world that flows through them.

In this moment of intense capture of our subjectivities by the neoliberal model—individualistic, competitive, and productivist—and amid a climate crisis born from the objectification and exploitation of nature, artistic experiences, however limited or fragile, may bring us closer to that ‘more of less self.’ Byung-Chul Han (2015, p. 72) identifies this in a particular kind of fatigue that, by loosening the bonds of identity, fosters a deep connection among beings. What scenes and worlds could we invent (or recall) from this space?

There are moments-events in which movement, affection, and action are neither properties, expressions, nor feelings of a given individual, but rather reveal our participation in the flow of life (and of the scene). In these moments, we perceive ourselves as been involved in relationships friendship and fraternity with ourselves, with other beings, and with things. In these moments, we resume that fraternal connection with the world and remember our childhood roots.

This artistic and subjective calling required—and still requires—something quite different from the demands of daily life. It invites us to move as participants in and with the forces of life. Moreover, it understands the scene as a space-time of coexistence among different beings—actors included—all participating in various temporalities and spatialities that only appear as (and in) experience.

This way of investigating requires time, silence, duration, pause, rumination, openness, and vulnerability. It demands a kind of maturing into emptiness, a rigor tied to that stepping outside oneself or, as we saw in Grotowski, tied to that “giving up not doing” instead of “doing” (Grotowski, 1987, p. 15).

By tying our subjectivity to the idea of individuals, we accept, as Ailton Krenak (2019, 2022) said, a reduction in the meaning of life in ontological terms, when there are many worlds to experience and an abundance of life. The acting classroom can be yet another space for investigation—and perhaps for contagion—towards this abundance. And the (Grotowskian) word contact, when practiced, can be of help here.



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