

BODY AND MATTER

A Reflection on the Thematic Showing
Performance Act Series of Casa Hoffmann –
International Center for Movement Studies, 2003

OLGA NENEVĚ

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The Thematic Showing [Mostra Temática] was conceived during research developed by the actor Eduardo Giacomini and me about the creative processes of several artists, focused on both the stimuli that prompted new ideas and the body as support for conveying the ideas. The curiosity of following the same paths as the creators from a common start point—a theme—attracted us. We assumed that the results would vary as much as the amount of artists. And it was actually surprising. There were two editions of the Thematic Show, and six artists developed works about the theme ‘Body and Matter’ specifically for the event: Nara Heemann (performer), Rosemeri Rocha (dancer/choreographer), Luiz Rogério Lucena (actor), Sávio de Luna (dancer), Cíntia Nápoli (dancer), and Tania Bloomfield (visual artist).

The performances somehow touched and broadened the range of research by the artists who watched them and joined in the discussions about these performances and their creators’ experiences; they also prompted emotions for the casual the audience. According to Damasio, in his book *O mistério da consciência* [The mystery of consciousness], “emotions are an aspect of our innate biological regulating mechanisms that allow for our survival” (2000, p.77). Thus, the creative process generates a healthy life style. After a discussion with the visual artist Tânia Bloomfield, at one of Casa Hoffmann’s porches, we got to the conclusion that people are invited to take control of their bodies as soon as they are born, through breathing, screaming, and getting in touch with other people. We enter life with the same kind of identification we have as we die: DNA, the mysterious information of each human being. “We are living files of ourselves”, concluded Tânia, who presented a work called *Só é seu aquilo que você dá* [Only what you give away is yours]. The work was about the relationship between the idea of having something and the ephemeral human body.

According to Nanako Kurihara, in her workshop (August 2003), Hijikata had already thought of that idea as he

stated ‘the body is the remotest thing of the universe’. He said that because he believed in body intelligence, and he suffered because he realized what would be the consequences of this automatic society of ours over the understanding of the body and also over people’s lives. Tania understands the human body nowadays as an ephemeral object in time/space, for the average life expectation is about 70 years. An object that is difficult to manipulate, for it is as mysterious as Nature itself. The body exists as an object and holds complex information, but nowadays it is manipulated automatically, as if it were a machine with the sole task of owning things. This awkward way of getting in touch with life, of treating the body, which is both content and container of life, is a recurrent theme that has been addressed by Hijikata and revisited by Tania Bloomfield in a very sensitive way.

Nara Heemann presented a performance called *Adubo* [Manure] which started the Thematic Showing and approached woman’s aging process. In the performance used a pumpkin preserve that was made by her grandmother. Her grandmother had spread fertilizer over her back yard and sown pumpkins. She also transformed the pumpkin into pumpkin preserve, which got rotten and all infested by fungi at Nara’s place. So Nara used this process in her work by focusing on the depth and subtlety of the human body, which is degenerating matter, too. Both the microscopically moving body of the artist and the rotting pumpkin preserve revealed the same thing: we are continually moving, from before our conception to way after death, and this idea is somehow ‘written’ in the body. The audience could see a connection between the performance and the butoh’s idea of a ‘dead body’, through a language close to the laws of the Universe. There was a correspondence between the performer’s living body and the rotting pumpkin preserve which was also moving, like a human corpse does, for instance, when hair and nails keep on growing even after the brain has stopped:¹ “The dead body works in a particular Universe, and doesn’t deny its laws, for it knows all of them. The dead body uses invisible processes which also exist in our bodies but don’t come up clearly” (GREINER, 1998, p.89).

Rosemeri Rocha discussed fluid disperse matter in her

^[1] The information that based this conclusion was obtained in the reflection between the artists and the audience who engaged in the dialogue about the works, following their presentation.

performance *Foz* [River mouth]. In fact, both Rosemeri Rocha's and Cíntia Nápoli's performances were very similar, for both were about intimacy. Cíntia Nápoli's *Corpo Recipiente* [Container Body] also pursues depth through the liquid surface. Reviewing Heemann's, Rocha's, and Nápoli's works I realize that there is a dialogue between time and our theme, "Body and Matter". The human body is ephemeral, for life has an end. On the other hand, it is also eternal, since it is not destroyed after death, but merely transformed. This ambiguity is totally representative of the whole "Body and Matter" idea. Time is for body and matter as food is for the digestion process.

Many artists try to comprehend the dynamics of their minds and bodies, as well as the process of creating something and sharing with others. But is it possible to understand something that happens at an unknown place, without a steady reference. Something inherent to body and soul, something spread all over the skin, muscles, bones, brain cells, emotions, ancient and recent memories combined with fictions. There is no answer for this question, although it's possible to open people's minds for mapping some signs, for artistic investigation is somewhat similar to science: one should go through uncertainty and disturbance.

This process of producing unexpected situations through physical experiences, reasonings, and questionings (all of them ephemeral) leads to the development of a new code. It suggests there is a confluence of these subjects, where one can individually find current artistic paths. Sávio de Luna seems to deal with that idea in his performance *Fluidance with low base*. His work is about movement, sky-oriented but also clinging to earth, bringing about the softness and beauty of a live, vigorous, dancing body.

Gradually, one comprehends their identities, and seeks self-government in communicating external/internal movements. By getting in touch with their motivations and daily lives, people enter a more complex path leading to self-development. As a consequence, one observes the importance of the progress of artistic works. By paying attention to the progress itself, one realizes that all of the aspects involved are equally important, even the simple presence of the performing artist. This presence is an artist living in a visible body, exposing social, cultural and particular information, in a concrete form, but also flexibly.

The actor Luiz Rogério Lucena, a versatile artist, also

brought his progress into the scene, demonstrating the human daily life, relationships, humor, attempts, and retreats.

An artist works in pursuit of information and of surprising him/herself with life, just as a newborn baby is surprised to meet the external world. An artist who is open to work with information, with content, transforms something original, personal, into something that communicates with many people, yet does not abandon its source, the self and his/her voices. For the audience, it is clear that the body conveys his/her own history. The code comes true in the relationships between this body's history and its physical aspect, other objects, and the surrounding space. The code of a body that expresses itself is the outcome of the assemblage of information.

The contemporary artist, the youngest child of History, of big discoveries, of layers of superimposed information, of the neuroscience age, and of genetic maneuvers is the most urgent and agonizing tentacle of our times. He/she may not afford to ignore the achievements of the past, nor of his/her own time or of the possibilities and limitations of such time. If communication is precarious, then flexibility may take the conversation further because it may develop a fresh perspective, one that is simpler, more flexible to complex relationships and open to dialogue.

The artist, who has also been shaped by commonplaces, behavioral patterns and education, may deal with his/her restlessness when he/she reflects reality by means of a hybrid construct, a medium for the flow of information contained and dispersed by his/her body. The body expands way beyond skin limitations, as soon as one develops new concepts. It realizes that is more than matter with featured dimensions: inside, outside; mind, body, past, present... It undergoes development and conveys the first information, the major issues, the universal matter, other people's matter. Though it seems incredible, it is the DNA—the most individual information—that enables science to bring humankind closer to other animals. Artists, who are tamed but aware animals, seek links to other areas of knowledge so as to express their greatest agonies, to moan and scream, to look for answers, for a clue to understand who they are and what sort of mysterious matter has shaped them. ♦

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(untitled), Lucianne Figueiredo
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