Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific Issue 47, July 2022

Of Bodies, Flesh and Pedagogy: Bodily Crossings in Present Day Education

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Body politics of the flesh

There is no doubt that too often we limit ourselves to thinking and understanding the body as flesh, as something that only has and only offers an anatomical dimension. To remain in the flesh's dimension is somewhat easy, but reminds us of the fragile and vulnerable, and to be fragile and vulnerable can be read as a positive. As such, we need to explore other interpretations, other ways of seeing and living-in-the-world. What calls us to continue working on this theme is the body's ability to speak, to shout? Perhaps it would be the ability to pierce the flesh, culturalise it and make it a body in a symbolic act. The body must, necessarily be thought of beyond the flesh. It is in this sense that the philosopher Michel Foucault poses the following: 'The pressure exerted by the biological on the historical had remained strong for thousands of years; epidemics and famine were the two great dramatic forms of this relationship that was always dominated by the menace of death.'[1]

That relationship and linkages between the natural and the cultural is the centrepiece of discussions that occur in the framework of studies that look at the body as an object of study. Philippe Descola demonstrates this in his monograph *Par-delà nature et culture*.[2] There the French anthropologist asks if we can think of the world without the distinction between culture and nature and gives evidence that the discipline from which it (anthropology) is situated has also helped build, sustain and maintain this dichotomy that separates the natural from the cultural.

From this we might think that for many societies the 'carnal' state of its citizens (the more naturally free and uncontrolled) is unacceptable and must be drawn from other forms, except for Carnival, which tolerated flesh or *carnestolendas* (and allowed the masses to use their bodies, in various forms, as a release before a new closure of the flesh). Etymologically, Carnival comes from the medieval term (Latin) flesh—*levare*, which could be translated as 'remove the flesh,' 'abandon the flesh' and takes place immediately before the Christian season of Lent. It can also be interpreted as *carrus navalis* and would be associated with the ideas of orgy, cross-dressing, and a temporary return to primeval chaos as a way to withstand the ordinary pressures imposed by the system.[3] Also, for Alejandra Castillo, the flesh has a fundamental role in ways of thinking and conceiving of the body: 'Flesh as such is what constitutes us but that, nevertheless, is sublimated in the feminine category whose absent cause is, paradoxically, the flesh.'[4] Interestingly, this last interpretation is linked directly with some of the issues that concern educational managers, when they link the flesh and the school: sexual diversity and their ways of hiding it or revealing it.

The body must be manipulated, shaped or deformed and we need to ask about the role of education in the flesh of those being educated? This is why we should speak of the bodies that also need to be flesh; perhaps we could speak of flesh-and-body as something united.[5] The demand for flesh goes beyond (or maybe before) the claim to the body, from the metaphorisation, enculturation or poeticisation of that flesh, from the raw materials that we bring to our interactions with the world that surrounds us. In Spanish we

have the word 'cárnico,' meat or flesh, and 'cárnico' in Catalan is the union of the Flesh and the Body (*Carn i Cos*). Gloria Anzaldúa refers to this by saying: 'In the same way that we, Mexicans, despise this Indian flesh, we despise and condemn Malinali, our mother, we condemn ourselves. This defeated race, enemy body.'[6] In the practical colonisation of indigenous bodies, flesh is seen as the most dangerous, as the key element to be culturalised and disembodied.

It is said, sometimes, that one of the major problems of western civilisation is presenting the human being as a compound of body and soul. This anthropological dualism, which is already present in Plato in considering the body as the prison of the soul (*soma sema*), was assumed, in large part, by Christianity. The Christian vision of the body splintered from the soul is enhanced with the Cartesian distinction of the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. The is a body that later would be seen and understood as a machine body, a controlled body, a medicalised body, a rehabilitated body or a body without organs. But it is also true that certain bodies, at the present time, have gone from silence to screaming; they are bodies that have meaning—that have spoken. We cannot deny that some bodies (perhaps the boldest) have spoken, and they have begun to talk. They are *nomadic* bodies according to Rossi Braidotti. 'Nomad' refers to the kind of critical consciousness that refuses to settle in socially coded modes of thought and behaviour. What defines the nomadic state is 'the subversion of the set of conventions, not the literal act of travel'[8] They are bodies that cross, trespass, destabilise, and break with the structures that promote the 'normalisation' of populations and the effacement of the speakers' subjectivities.

Bodies are no longer (and happily now may never be) silenced, no longer a cry muted from the hidden corners of the flesh (often rotten), but now they are voices that speak and realise and reason over their state. They are bodies that manifest (through the various forms of the word) what passes through their lives, what happens to them, their 'personal experiences.' It is from there that a pedagogy of the sensitive is drawn, which does not seek to read the bodies as anatomical elements, as something to be objectified and to objectify us all. [9] No. This pedagogy is aligned with corporal writing, with bodygraphy. For us the body graphic, bodygraphy, is not technical, but simply the possibility that bodies could be read from the cultural. And here is where language necessarily appears and through it bodies have meaning, they say, speak, communicate, they silence or they bodygraphy. That is precisely the issues raised by Roland Barthes when he announces:

Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire. The emotion derives from a double contact: on the one hand, a whole activity of discourse discreetly, indirectly focuses upon a single signified, which is 'I desire you,' and releases, nourishes, ramifies it to the point of explosion (language experiences orgasm upon touching itself); on the other hand, I enwrap the other in my words, I caress, brush against, talk up this contact, I extend myself to make the commentary to which I submit the relation endure. [10]

Many times when thinking about this a biblical phrase comes to mind: 'And the word became flesh and dwelt among us'; incarnate (*the embodiment* which is used in the English context).[11] We put into play the word and the flesh, and somehow 'we give the word to the flesh.' That is for us a key and perhaps controversial element: in the very fact of giving the word to the flesh, the flesh stops being flesh because it is symbolised, it has left its natural dimension and has ventured into the symbolic and cultural perspective. To try to understand the body in a Husserlian sense, as *Leib* (from its symbolic dimension) and not as *Körper* (its purely physical dimension).

Letters, the graphic from the body graphic action, according to Ricard Huerta mean that:

There is a common anthropological core, from which part the stroke is man's [sic] gestural and creative complex. Movement and energy, the stroke is the common source from which two ways of communication will emerge: drawing and writing. Depending on the difference, drawing is more linked to the visual and perceptual world, and the letter is linked to the conceptual and mental environment of ideas, of thought.[12]

Then, bodygraphy might be understood as sketching from the body; but also as sketching with the body or even sketching on the body. Carlos Trosman refers to this in a 2013 work when asking the reason for bodygraphies, and answers with the following: 'Because not only our history, but our very life is not only written on the body, but because the body is made of words and the body produces words.'[13]

There are various examples that reveal the ways to carry out the body graphic exercise. I am going to focus on filmmaker Peter Greenaway[14] (especially in his film *The Pillow Book*) and the history of Arthur Cravan.[15] The testimony of Arthur Cravan remains strange and unusual: poet and boxer, man of thought and action, of a mind and a body that articulated and unified in a comprehensive provision that allows an extraordinary form of subjectivity to be understood. Writing poetry (for some the sublime state to which humanity should aspire to reach) and boxing in a ring (according to others, the most base state to which human beings can be relegated). Two ways to create and recreate, of bodygraphying oneself in a way that may seem contrary or complementary, depending how you look at it. It is, in short, a polymorphic Cravan that he himself defined as: 'Knight of industry // sailor on the Pacific // Mule // picker of oranges in California // snake charmer // hotel rat // Oscar Wilde's nephew // lumberjack in giant forest // ex-boxing champion in France // grandson of the Chancellor of the Queen // automobile chauffer in Berlin // burglar,' etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc.

The ideation or if you prefer the projection of desire on one's self and what we would like to do with ourselves is located in the centre of the Cravan project, a project which, among many other variants, led him to be a precursor of the Dada movement, with a statement that opens the doors to all that is possible: 'J' étais sérieux, mais par perversion' (I was serious, but by perversion).[17] I think that Cravan perfectly embodies the idea of being a 'man of letters and of flesh' at the same time through boxing and poetry, a strange combination of arts and disciplines, almost never together and almost always seen as opposites and impossible to reconcile. In the words of one Cravan scholar:

Paris puts an end to the wandering tramp Fabian and converts him to Arthur Cravan, the poet, who tries desperately to be known. He would frequent some literary salon but in a marginal way, and he would be worth a thousand tricks – without shying away from provocation nor scandal – to make a name for himself, not his own Fabian Avenarius Lloyd, but the pseudonym he had just invented: Arthur Cravan.[18]

Peter Greenaway is a film director especially interested in the bodily condition of the human being, as shown in several of his films: *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989), *Prospero's Books* (1991), *The Baby of Mâcon, The Belly of an Architect*, among others.[19] In *The Pillow Book* (the film that interests me in order to illustrate the body graphic aspect of the human being), from the beginning there are characters that write—on the naked bodies of men, both eastern and western—Asian calligraphy.[20] We are not speaking of tattoos, of permanent writings on those bodies but temporary writings, which can be erased at a certain time. As Jorge Gorostiza suggests:

Greenaway conceived *The Pillow Book* through his admiration for a classic of Japanese literature of the same title written by Sei Shonagon.[21] Finished in the year 1000 it is a diary of the memories of a courtesan of the Court of the Empress Hei ... pillow-books, a peculiar genre of Japanese erotic literature, were kept in the small drawers of the traditional wood pillows where lovers' heads were supported.[22]

It is as such that the body is shown, is shown off, and often that showing off is not faithful to reality; a multiform reality, varied, configuring different identities that take shape in the varied body realities that embody them. Each society plays with these quotas of decision, with these margins of realisation when it tries to show what suits each grouping and each specific moment.

I like starting from the maxim of Hans George Gadamer who tells us that the formation is formed, and in that context the body shape is linked with the self-formative process.[23] The process would follow this path: the raw material of the subject (the body from its *Körper* dimension) is modified, transformed, formed or deformed by the contextual elements that participate in that process. If the subject is left to change

without further ado, it will be the subject of instruction through what could be termed a closed body curriculum. In the closed body curriculum bodies are formed from completed criteria that we can organise as:

- silent bodies (not a bearer of textuality),
- normalised bodies (that are adjusted to measurements / characteristics / aesthetics marked by those contexts),
- uniform bodies (that cannot be read or interpreted in different ways)
- physical bodies (that do not have a symbolic perspective)
- obedient bodies (that are subjected to the bio-political elements that mark the pedagogical praxis).

This leads us to rethink a term widely used in art (but also in pedagogy): the canon. What is a canon? What is its function? For whom is it useful? In the mentality of modern humanity, who culturalise nature to the fullest, the chaos of life must be arranged. The subjects' bodies also remind us of the wilder side of life. Therefore, there is a systematic and radical bio-politics that determines normality patterns (canons), the elements that make up and give shape to life itself. We need only go back to perspectives studied by Georges Canguilhem in an old study on monsters. There the scientific philosopher ventures to say that 'the existence of monsters puts into question life with regard to the power that it has to show us order, the monster is the living being that embodies the negative value.'[24]

And in this same area we realise that art should become a space of no control, in a de-pathologised category, but some evidence gives us to understand that the roads that pass between art and education are sometimes different. The handling of bodies (and what they represent or may represent) takes on a special strength in pedagogical praxis. The zenith (or the imagination of other higher borders) of educational policies linked to difference is an incredible limitation. What can be understood by these policies of difference? Who rules, grants, classifies, distributes or redistributes the subjects in education who are considered different? Normalisation (a practice too widespread in contemporary society) has caused irreparable damage, because it has been the pattern that has governed what is allowed and what is not, the pattern that sets the pace for the classification and management of groups and societies. We can say emphatically that normalisation is stably established in our societies; in fact, it is what orders them, guides them, and administers their rhythm.

Thus, like it or not, the school plays a key role in the practices of building a more or less purist society linked to patterns of normalcy. It is something that emerges from the same constitution of the subjectivities of the bodies that embody them. Being or not being a member of the majority becomes, then, something fundamental, unless one makes the decision to live on the margins, lead a different life, to live in another body, to be a militant of diversity. Interestingly, with certain groups something strange happens: people with functional diversity (disability) 'demonsterate' (from monster and demonstrate); and, despite the fact that the purpose of a work of art can be linked with the practice of showing, in the case of functional diversity the fact of show is linked to other objectives and other results.

Twisted theories, for thinking about the flesh

Ricardo Llamas proposes that thinking about the world from Queer theory is situated in what could be described as a 'twisted theory,' a theory that—located in the line of authors such as Fernand Deligny, Michel Foucault, Hans G. Gadamer and others—looks to the border as a space of rupture, as the fringe where it is possible to think in another way. [25] With the passage of the years, it has become evident that there are clear connections between *queer* theory and pedagogy (we can call this terminological unit PedagoQueer). This fact has not always been clear, and it was even seen as something strange (and why

not say it: dangerous). Mixing sexual diversities with education could have a certain flavour of 'danger,' could make someone think (especially with ultra conservative, closed mentalities) that, put in the hands of educators, the word queer was perverting, twisting education itself. And that negative way of thinking and understanding *queer* within the educational praxis, unfortunately, continues to mark many agendas and educational programs of our countries' educational centres.

I think it relevant to point out that the departure point for this meeting conveys what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reflects upon when she says: 'We must think about how formal education or a set of discourses and practices is related to the self-determination of subaltern populations and their subordination.'[26] Subaltern Studies have served to sustain new discourses (most of them dismembering dominant tendencies) and pedagogy open to other possibilities, other forms of thinking about and interpreting the educational act. Spivak ends her book *Subaltern Studies* in a forceful way: 'The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in the global laundry lists with "woman" as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual has a circumscribed task, which she must not disown with a flourish.'[27] The same happens in her 2012 text entitled *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* where she returns to show what happens if the subordinates can talk, if they can take the word (for themselves).[28]

Thinking about the aesthetic forms of education in the present context is fundamental to another author who has the ability to move across borders, traversing territories as literary studies to reach that of pedagogy without neglecting colonial studies or crossing the border between Mexico and the United States. Gloria Anzaldúa (a Chicana researcher who died in 2004), in a clear and convincing text, suggests that she wants: 'freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of entrails.'[29] Is becoming a subject of one's own creation, claiming a certain position of the body in the context of border pedagogy really possible in the educational institutions we have today?

The border becomes the space of the possible and the impossible at the same time, the utopian horizon of many pedagogies and many body realities. We must not hide the fact that the border makes possible this disappearance, construction or reconceptualisation of subjects but at the same time enables a break with dichotomous anthologies.

Thinking of a certain variability in the ways of conceiving otherness can lead us to a very particular vision, driven by certain ways of thinking and understanding the idea of otherness. Why not think of it as a mere stigma-phobia? (Phobia of all that is strange, all that is stigmatised, of the *crip*). It is from this perspective that an important criticism of rehabilitation schemes arises, of the 'old' forms of returning to normality those subjects who had strayed from it. In the face of this way of being, modern teaching takes certain techniques from the art of orthopaedics, of a pedagogy that ends up being the classic remedial pedagogy (although disguised with multiple pleasant monikers) but under the name of modern pedagogy.

Facing these forms of remedial education, not only the transfer of the knowledge of artistic discourses, but also of their practice, helps us to present a pedagogy that is based on the presence of the body realities, at the time that these body realities are self-designed, self-drawn and self-formed. But unlike other proposals, the presence of embodied subjects does not seek the application of power to the bodies, but education through these bodies. From our position, speaking of performativity leads us to be very aware of the following:

- The history of pedagogical subjects, not based on the assumptions that the subjects are anatomical 'bodies' without history, 'embodied/embedded' on a pedagogical context where they should be educated.
- The participation of the embodied subjects (pupils) in all the activities that are developed in the pedagogical context.
- The embodied participation of the teaching subjects or pupils, not forgetting that the teachers are also bodies that desire,

think and act.

The historical presence of the body and the inscription on it through different pedagogies raises a question regarding which bodies determine the curricula that we use in our educational institutions. From this perspective we can speak of pedagogies enabling what we call *bodily heterodoxy* and pedagogies that produce *bodily orthodoxies*. These two models end up creating binary constructions of the body realities, then produce normalised bodies and a-normalised bodies, bodies that are within the normal canons and bodies who live beyond the borders of bodily canonisation. Pedagogy becomes, then, one of the relevant elements for the exercise of bodily regulation, because through it some of these bodies can be straightened and reinstated to the category of body normality, while others will be relegated, definitively, to the margins of this categorisation.

A broad sector of the educational field still has not realised that the body is a cultural objective; a cultural object that presents a wide variety of states and hence its possible body graphic gaze is a multi-faceted look that should let us go through the flesh to get inside the corporeal. A versatile gaze that does not allow a return back: the body cannot be read in a unidirectional way, but is to be regarded as polydirectional. A body which can be read as monstrous, LGBT, old, young, with functional diversity, etc. The body has this incredible capacity to analyse the world from the senses, to feel with the world. We are facing a natural body (naked) and a concealed body (dressed). Staying in the dimensions of the flesh is somewhat easy, every day, but it reminds us of the fragile and vulnerable—this ability to pierce the flesh, to cultureless it and make it body in a symbolic act.

The interpretations developed from the Body Studies framework allow for a hermeneutics of the body in a border territory. A territory where the body is not thought of or experienced as something anatomical or something cultural, but rather as a hybridisation of these two territories. A link, intertwined, that allows for the horizon of subjectivities to open.

We can think of the border crossing as a meeting and a misunderstanding or failed meeting, the border as de-territorialised territory, as fusion and synthesis, as transculturation and rejection. The border becomes the space of possible and impossible at the same time, a utopian horizon of many pedagogies and body realities. In the analysis of body reality and pedagogy, multiple variables are put into play: ethnicity, gender, aesthetics and body shapes, classes, and a bigger etcetera that can go on rebuilding to suit as we move deeper into this fluctuating territory. Some discourses refer to the pedagogy of the body and the border precisely as an exercise in the deconstruction of given and or previously closed normalcies. Speaking about *body and border* means to place ourselves in the same territory where the characterisation, classification, standardisation and a-normalisation takes place, the construction of another body as dangerous, strange and far from the majority idea of a 'normal body.'

The border makes this disappearance, construction or reconceptualisation of the subject possible, but in turn the border also makes it possible to break with the body ontologies that are fashioned out of their own 'entrails.' In this way, a theme that is a constant is drawn: the body built from the perspective of normality/abnormality. The border is what allows the placement of these two binary constructions. This double possibility of playing with bodies makes it strong and vulnerable at the same time, but it is above all the ability to exclude, rather than include, which is interesting in pedagogy. Then, a curious paradox is given which operates with the motto: *exclude to include*, but that often means *exclude to consolidate the exclusion!* The practice of excluding bodies (disincorporation, we can call it) can end, in certain contexts, and in certain situations, producing bodies without subjects. If we approach the pedagogical practices in the field of diversity it is easier to understand. Individuals with disabilities end up becoming only bodies (and are therefore in a situation of total objectification) which have deficiencies, burns, poor ambulation, strange speech, unpleasant conduct in view of the 'good citizens,' ones that don't walk, that drool, or who do not know how to distinguish public from private when they decide to quench their sexual desires. This action with subjects with disabilities produces 'a body without a subject, and also a body without sexuality,

genderless, ageless, without social classes, without religion, without citizenship, generations, etc.'[30]

Conclusion

This is how you can perform the border, placing the bodies without subjectivity on the margins of society. From this perspective, it is important that pedagogy review in detail the mechanisms of production/postproduction of border territories. The construction of inclusive/exclusive borders, as happens in socio-political reorganisation (and, if you want to, in the rethinking of the geopolitical map) we find that the borders have disappeared, have fallen. The new pedagogical discourses note the need to, through pedagogy, seek the dissolution of the borders that places bodies in different territories, meaning that some of these territories are named exclusion, isolation, non-acceptance, exclusion, contempt, etc. As Conrad Vilanou points out: 'The other has stopped being the object of desire of a vulgar colonial fantasy ... in fact, postmodernity appears in a postcolonial context in such a way that the question is not black or white, but rather black and white. It has moved from the logic of exclusion to the logic of integration.[31]

Therefore, the border that proposes placing some to one side (designated by colour, ways of doing, sexuality, beliefs, etc.) and others on the other has fallen (designated by beliefs contrary to those in the first group). A break with the partitioning of the landscape is sought to provide a free and egalitarian pedagogical aesthetic without falling into the standardisation of body realities. But this is only possible from that very corporeality and to do that it is necessary to 'start from the acceptance of other bodies (which are no longer strange and exotic), (so that) we can build a world that gives answers to the demands of a society that walks toward an irreversible hybrid.'[32] All this is symptomatic and reveals certain practices and educational discourses based on the absolute perversion of the word education. Some authors make use of the term educastration, very relevant to the understanding of what happens to us throughout our reflections on the body and its ways of being veiled in the school. Perhaps these practical educastrators are still too present. This idea is the polar opposite of the idea of corporeality (embodiment)—being body, inhabiting the body, having a corporal-personal project.

And at the end of it all, the idea of representation of the body appears in the body of the other, its difference or its sameness. How would we represent that diversity? Do we give it space and time to be, to take shape along its own future and existence? Perhaps we will be accused of insisting on the body, on its diversity, on its possible education and the ways to represent it, draw it, shape it, photograph it or paint it. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that sexualities on the surface of adolescent students are present and manifest themselves. There is no doubt that the bodies of the students cannot be denied. There is no doubt that art education (as is already happening—although but little—in the field of physical education) is the privileged space to think of another way of education itself, its images, its representations, its biases—it is the place par excellence for the representation of the body, of bodies, of difference, of sexual diversities.

We must continue asking ourselves why pedagogy (or pedagogism or excessive didacticism) has not brought about a twist, a bias towards a sensitive pedagogy. Sensitive pedagogy seeks to provide other viewpoints for education beyond skills, data, and performance-related ideas. Looking for something closer to the ideas of pleasure, the gaze, touch and experience. It seeks to pass something along to a student, something that passes through it, which bursts inside them. In art education practices it searches to ensure that there is no place for educastrating looks, reining in the body, its diversity and its multiple representations. We must liberate ourselves from what Foucault criticised: '[An] apprenticeship to a master who has answers for the questions he poses; the world is our classroom ... The tyranny of goodwill, the obligation to think "in common" with other, the domination of the pedagogical model, and above all, the exclusion of stupidity—the disreputable morality of thought whose function in our society is easy to decipher.'[33]

Perhaps this has to do with George Didi-Huberman's proposal on exposed people and people as extras.[34] He is trying to claim the right to the image for those that do not show up in it, something linked to the perspective of human rights, the need to be visible, appear, and not be denied by anyone. Philippe Bazin's project is fundamental to understanding this. Bazin was a doctor who left medicine to devote himself to photography and to some projects related to the photographic representation of those that never appear in photos: the elderly dying in a residence, the newly born, and the mentally ill locked in a sanatorium—and many more.[35] He captured the essence of their difference from a certain proximity—without taboos or spaces that separate—the very same distance that marked him in his first profession, the stethoscope.

This is how I understand the body as a space of representation and of resistance, drawing and writing, as a body graphic space and of subjective inscription. This is how I imagine and dream its journeys and voyages; its rovings in the world of contemporary education.

Notes

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Published with the support of Gender and Cultural Studies, School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

URL: http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue47/ribera-piquer-santos.html

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