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**POETIC, PLAYFUL AND CREATIVE BODY IN THEATRICAL
PEDAGOGY**

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Abstract

The article is conceived as a comparative study based on the need to diversify and classify three basic concepts of body expression: poetic, playful and creative body in artistic creation and theatre pedagogy. It pays attention to qualitative research based on empiricism and observation of corporeality, play and creativity, and then looks in detail at three forms of physical expression (poetic, playful and creative). How does one type differ from another? How can the state of the poetic body be achieved? How does a playful body manifest itself? What makes a body creative? Theoretically, the study touches on the method of Jacques Lecoq and points to the ideas of Eugen Fink. In terms of artistic and pedagogical practice, the topic is reflected on the examples of three basic groups: children, students, and professional artists. Conscious work with physicality in performative art and theatre pedagogy can lead to self-awareness in the sense of vigilant sensitivity not only to one's body but also to one's surroundings, to increase personal creative potential, openness to physical self-expression and generally to deepen nonverbal communication skills.

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1. Introduction

This article considers three forms of the concept of the body expression to outline different possibilities how to think about the state of body in theatre pedagogy and artistic creation as well as in the teaching of drama, dance, or other aesthetic subjects at schools:

- Poetic body
- Playful body
- Artistic/ creative body

The term “poetic body” – “le fonds poétique commun” – “the universal poetic sense” is mostly associated with the French method of Jacques Lecoq. After many years of practice within his school (International Theatre School Jacques Lecoq in Paris), this term crystallized into his vocabulary only in the last third of his pedagogical work. In his theatrical pedagogy, the body is trained to become a poetic body through itself when the rhythm, movement, and dynamics of space, represents the world. “Movement, as manifested in the human body, is our permanent guide in this journey from life to theatre” (Lecoq, 2009, p. 16). “Lecoq did not want to teach a virtuosic mime, the style of imitation and manner, but the miming body, the one that expresses the movement of life” (Lecoq, 2016, p. 172). Then, we can derive a playful body from the findings of Fink et al. (1992), that playful body could be “a whiff of flickering lightness of playing life (...) and inexhaustible charm” (p. 6). And creativity springs from the ability to associate. The association is based on perception and the question is how to insert this imagination into the corporeality. “The rarest moments in the theatrical rehearsal are the moments when the creative process is harmonious, fragile and self-evident. I think that in Stanislavsky’s method this holy moment is called the creative state” (Salzmannová, 2019, p. 73). Generally, the body is a tool of playfulness, source of creativity, and his engine is the dialog between the body and surrounding world and can create a state of the universal poetic sense.

2. Problem Statement

The human body is a remarkable phenomenon, an inexhaustible area of research in all scientific disciplines. In this case I look away and move from the duality of body and soul, which is firmly rooted in the European tradition, from the time of Plato and Aristotle to Descartes and the subject-object, positivist conception to the present, to the unification of the body and its existence in the creative process.

Partly as a result of such understandings, contemporary Western culture has taken a large turn towards valuing the body as the foundation on which to build secure knowledge for life, and also secure knowledge for science and for the arts. Language referring to the body and embodiment is everywhere, from cognitive neuroscience to film theory. [...] Many artists have conceived of movement as the unmediated presence of being human in the world; they have sought to transcend the subject-object opposition and to know the self in contact with what they have understood to be the real (Sirotkina & Smith, 2019, pp. 4-5).

In this study, we perceive that the human body is our bodily existence – embodied existence. We do not own a body, we do not use it, we are a body. The body is consistent, also allows for a holistic view. But it can also be a mosaic like a mind map, always depending on the angle of view of the body,

and on the view that the body attaches to the space, to the partner or to the thing. “The body is a dimension of time and a witness to temporality - the passage of time” (Mikeš, 2017, p. 33). It strives for the present, by its actions and words, it repeats the effort to be present, even though the present changes into the past at every moment. The body observes, listens to stories, creates worlds in response to them, and thus, paradoxically, out of the need to present the past. The body is related, and these relationships create a different quality, which we can name using metaphors, rather than searching for a definition. The body is variable and allows flowing transformation. In his study of the actor's anthropology, the German philosopher Helmut Plessner distinguishes between two basic bodies: organic (*der Leib*) and inorganic (*der Körper*).

The former has its organic centre, rooted in some whole or order, and although this body is separate from its surroundings, it also has the ability to relate to its boundaries; at the other body, the border simply ends where the surroundings begin. Thus, man is a body and has a body, he becomes part of the environment, but he can relate to his boundaries. (Hyvnar, 2008, p. 8)

With his attitude, Plessner responded to the traditional duality of body and soul, psyche and physis, or Descartes' *res cogitans* or *res extensa*. He called the state "eccentric positionality" and points to the fact that a person can be both body and out of body, that he can experience from within and (himself) react from the outside. He thus created a new duality, i.e., a man hidden in his identity (*homo absconditus*) and a man who opens his body to the environment and the world (*homo apertus*).

From the point of view of the diverse conception of the existence of the body, the body tells its stories against the background of the great story of our bodily life. That is why the “judgment” of the body is completely equal to the “judgment” of the spirit. The body signals exactly what it is. Listening to the body means listening to the inner nature. The body still teaches us naturally (Vinař, 2017, p. 49).

In this comparative study, therefore, we look at three types of bodies that coexist in parallel - in interdependence, but also as separate layers of body expression. Lecoq's pedagogical concept works with conscious movement, gestures, intuition, empathy and is fundamentally based on the belief that everything around the body moves.

Lecoq's guiding principle was “*Tout bouge*” – everything moves. His rigorous analysis of movement in humans and their environments formed the foundation for a refined and nuanced repertoire of physical exercises. These develop a heightened somatic awareness in the actor of the relationship between thought, feeling, gesture and language, preparing him or her to communicate with movement in a variety of styles, to employ physical actions that both provoke and define emotion and to invest spoken language with meaningful gesture (Kemp, 2016, p. 8).

The central theme here is the body, which in certain circumstances can develop, elevate, and create a new body, attacking the senses of its surroundings to such an extent that a new reality can arise, thanks to the symbiosis of means of communication from inner to outer space, and especially previous procedures and experiences that involve technique and intuition.

3. Research Questions

All the mentioned "bodies" have their specific subtext, pedagogical approach, artistic significance and thanks to its decomposition we can focus on individual parts of the research of body expression. The main question is, why is it appropriate to deal with the division of body expression into three concepts? When we observe our surroundings, pedagogical activity, or artistic performance, we see a different approach of the "bodies", and yet we can read the common denominators and name the functional principles for the set goals. It means, we all have our own "poetics", creative approach, and playfulness, individual and common way to communicate with the others, with the space, and the objects. Our brain, our meaning is expressed by language, words, and sound. Our body is expressed by movement and gesture, rhythm, and tempo and our body expression under certain conditions creates poetics, expresses creativity, offers playfulness. But how can the state of the poetic/ creative/ playful body can be achieved? And we can add how does playfulness enrich the body? What are the benefits of a playful body in a theatrical pedagogy or artistic creation? What makes a body creative? And how does the creative body manifest itself? Anthropologist, translator, and pedagogue Mikeš (2017) asks in his publication aptly titled:

Why to play, what secret creates the body on stage for us? Why the body exists on stage and how it communicates? To what world does the body draw the viewer or the observer? Acting is always a contribution to the elaboration of the history of the present, it is a poem against the anti-poem, an attempt to snatch the world from anonymity. (p. 31)

Play and creativity can be a precursor to the origin of the poetic body.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to raise questions whether it is possible to diversify physicality in a certain way (into three types: poetic, creative and playful body) and whether it is then possible to purposefully apply this knowledge in the framework of art research, theatre pedagogy and artistic creation. In addition to the parallel relationship, the dependence between them, the study also suggests the possibility of a hierarchical link between the three types of body expression. The theoretical framework is a discourse between disciplines, namely theatrology, pedagogy, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. The study is conceived as an introduction to the issue, although the concept of three creative states of corporeality is gradually immersed.

5. Research Methods

For qualitative research, the method of data acquisition was chosen - a structured interview with precisely formulated questions, participatory observation of corporeality, play and creativity during university education of young theatre professionals and artistic processes, and a survey of theoretical territory. The theoretical framework is based on Jacques Lecoq pedagogy and associated areas, the

relationship between body and performativity and a philosophical excursion. Structured interviews were conducted with twenty participants in the period from September 2020 to July 2021. They were teachers of theatre pedagogy, professional artists, students at art schools from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, France, Great Britain, and Germany. Through the comparison, support in theory and experience, the analysis of the data obtained led to reflection and the creation of a mind map. This construct was subjected to interpretation of the obtained data, repeated examination and verification in space, action, teaching and in the theatrical environment.

6. Findings

The added value of physical expression, the magic of the mime, lies in the inner development of the narrative, which is presented by play - playing, which then represents the state, character, story. This play shapes the way. “The way we walk means more than where our goal is, and the way we pick flowers means more than the bouquet itself ...” (Decroux, 2018, p. 137). Poetry – poetics – poetic body is based on the body’s experience and its possibilities to be conscious, present and at the same time rooted in the situation, but also flying over the reality. Poetic body does not mean to pretend, to re-play, or to cheat. We cannot even push the body to be poetic. It means, that poetic body appears when we do not push anything artificial – but also there is not judgement like good – wrong, only poetic body or emptiness.

Mastering the miming process as an epistemological investigation becomes the foundation from which the actor explores how movement can be theatrically transposed into different styles, in different theatrical dimensions, and into different creative realms altogether. In this sense, mime is both epistemological and transformational. (Murphy, 2019, p. 109)

When we are in the theatre and we see on the stage a strongly emotional image, which was created by attitude, gestures, rhythm, manipulation of the object and the distance of the characters and other details, then there are no exact words to express the feeling, content, moment. There is nothing more than the breath of two artists, certain props - performative objects and the space around them. At this moment, each of the audience feels something special in their own way. For example, as Fensham (2021) describes: “The form of a gesture therefore becomes the unit par excellence in an actor’s movement repertoire, since the gesture hails, or calls, the spectator” (p. 101). The line between the profane and the sacred has been explored by many directors, theorists, and practitioners such as Barba and Savarese etc.

They dealt with the performer's secret or mysterious art, physiology in relation to the non-everyday use of the body, to explore the mystery of the revelation or apparition of presence on stage and the jumping of that spark from the stage to the auditorium (Mikeš, 2017, p. 36).

And this feeling arises from the individual experience, mood, and symbiosis of all the circumstances that create a real presence at a given moment. This presence can be decomposed into mimodynamics, rhythm, symbolist level, aesthetic, and non-aesthetic functions, etc., but the symbiosis of all the mentioned components can be called the poetic body.

Interviews with students and teachers gave rise to thoughts about it. The answers did not differ, their state was that the whole school – Jacques Lecoq pedagogy is about poetry in the body and the world

around and that goes back to how we see the world. And if we are just honest with the world then it will reveal something interesting or reveal some truth that otherwise is hidden. The attention to look or see the world construct the poetics, so they think it's important moment/ or moments. Generally, theatre and art could be all about poetry. Whether it's written or drawn or moved. When asked how the poetic body manifests itself, they answered that poetic body could give feeling of intimacy, individuality, lightness of one's own body. Poetic body comes through the body itself, through the movements and then you can transmit something that is far bigger than the original body. If we have done it well and we deepen into it, then just with the way we move, becomes our story without having to say nothing much more focused on everything that comes before the first word is spoken. It is a way how we can reduce expression to a minimum and tell the whole story just through the body – body expression. And it is not about trained body in sports or dance technique, it's more about sensitivity to mimodynamic, rhythm. Body becomes the world and the word, pure expression – poetic body. The poetic body mirrors the everyday world in an unusual way. It follows that poetic body can be wonderful, miserable, elegiac, Dadaistic etc. and can use quotidian and non-everyday movements. All is about pure articulation, musicality of situation and body in space, the state of play and truth. It is about how to express something true, authentic, and unforgettable as a feeling. Poetic body is created in a specific moment, for a short time, during which not only a rationally graspable context takes place, but also dream, metaphor, symbolism, or a fascinating aesthetic experience that elevates reality above itself.

The physical posture also reflects memory and roots, it is the result of body movement, but also the belief that the body is moved. "It is in such an attitude that we perceive the characteristic duality of the fact that something moves with us, and that it is we who move. This is a basic prerequisite for drama and playfulness already in physical behavior, i.e., that there is the opposite of the fateful gravity of the earth and the open freedom to fly on a horizontal bar" (Hynar, 2021, p. 90). Playfulness enriches the body. Through playfulness, the person - the student - the actor facilitates the endless work. He reveals his deepest self and his inner child. It gives the body colour - mood, vivacity, and strength to continue and thus constantly find new stimuli, and with them new reactions. A playful body can resist stereotypes, fatigue from repetition. Fink et al. (1992) emphasizes that when we target a game, everything is subordinated to its reality. "In a game tool, everything is concentrated in one thing (...) and body movements take on a consciously created meaning" (p. 19). A playful body relies on space, a thing, on the rules of the game. Although this model carries certain restrictions – rules as limits, which are only an initial layer. The original instruction can be also treated negatively if it does not violate its structure too much. The rules of the game in theatrical pedagogy can change and the performance can be transformed depending on the needs of the group or the teacher. The game/ play itself is a principle that should not be boring, it should encourage further movement, further exploration. The moment the game gets bored is the same when the playful body gets bored, then something must change to keep that playfulness back to the process. Lecoq even stated that the game could start with a mistake, from leaving the norm: "...to embrace the possibility of error is to allow for movement, for play, for a departure from the norm, so as to be open to the new and the different" (Murray, 2017, p. 53). A state of playful body could be a basic starting point for theatre pedagogy in children's and young groups. The teachers' answers showed that, their experiences with a 'playful body' are very positive in terms of losing an inner controller in terms of

losing demands on themselves. The concept of the world allows them to fully enter the world of the play, to obey its principles - the body experiences this state (Huizinga et al., 1971). It acts not for the sake of the result - the form, but for the sake of the process of play. It allows to be present here and now, to fully concentrate. A playful body can also surprise us, showing new paths - coming to us as sometimes “by accident”, by chance. The game also allows the body to be more extreme, to test the maximum positions, as it considers the material under investigation as the material of the play, and not as material for the future final art form. When we talk and go for to the state of playful body, we need firstly to provide a safe space, then to clarify the starting point (for example, rules of the game, time limits etc.). We need to specify the assignment, consider individual motivations, and current collective feelings. In groups with children or with people with special needs, it proved successful to build a series of games that set fixed points. These games became rituals - something that can even be attached to as certainty, but without losing the possibility of innovation, even transformation.

Creativity is born from the ability to associate with the world, people, space around. The association is based on perception, and the question is how to insert this imagination into the body. The creative body collects various ways of working with the material such as world in whole broadness - it expands, clarifies, ironic, organizes expressive possibilities, but also applies them to solving everyday situations in new ways.

For example, Stanislavsky is convinced that art in the sense of at least some traces of talent lies in man, but that their use can only be found on the way from himself to the character, i.e. where there is in the human soul as a source of creativity a place bridging distance from himself to the others and to what unites all human beings (Vostrý, 2018, p. 41)

This storehouse of methods is gradually increasing, the creative body itself combines procedures, deduces new ones, tries not to repeat itself, to see even the same material with new eyes, always in a new context. The creative body is not afraid of not knowing, but on the contrary, uses it as a stimulus, as a challenge. It can also be collective, in fact, this should be one of its main abilities - to be able to respond to a group and become a part of it - to try to integrate seamlessly into a group of other bodies. “For Lecoq pedagogy, physical action is the route to creativity” (Murphy, 2019, p. 69). To work purposefully in creative body mode, it is necessary to observe real situations, look for new solutions to situations, support motivation with material props, engage in dialogue with partners and improvise, look for problems to cope with situations in unusual way but believable and when learning not to be afraid of such genres as grotesque or even clown. The body could be a playful tool and at the same time the creative body could be connected to playfulness. And playfulness could be the starting point of the creativity.

7. Conclusion

Qualitative research has shown that a poetic, playful and creative body cannot be limited by a clear definition. All three concepts described by this article could be the pillars of physical expressiveness. These three examined states can be intertwined. They can participate in synthesis, synthetic expression or acting. This means that a creative body can be under certain circumstances a body based on playfulness

and can reach a poetic dimension. They could be also pedagogical principles and help to transpose the associations into the body and express relations to space, environment, and the others. From artistic point of view, it gives the key how to get rid of mechanical movement, clichés, replay, marking, falsehood in whole corporeality and performative approach to the researched topic. We can primarily focus on the following disciplines: physical training of conscious movements, improvement of physical articulation, mask training, sensitivity of space and props, feeling for timing, emphasis on mindfulness.

Everybody has the potential to become poetic, playful, and creative, and thanks to that to discover and through the body non-verbal communication abilities and skills, own performative expression, and self-awareness.

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