

Work and Body Techniques in Neo-colonial times: Towards a moral revalorization of the body

By Diego Quattrini

This issue 28 of RELACES is a collection of insights on the ways the technical-moral-spiritual (re) valorization is enacted today in the body, in various sectors of Latin America. The various articles and themes presented in this issue are related to the regulation of the body and its emotional energies, each article directly or indirectly discussing the consolidation of experiences which impinge on the construction of a moralizing political economy.

One of the main themes discussed in this issue is the grounding of the body in working. We firstly need to point out that the working experience is a heterogeneous process. We are faced with some of the productive sectors where different body movements are demanded in increasing and ever more intense forms—in terms of production time and under unequal conditions—through a use a differential appropriation of up to date methodologies for the improvement of production. Without denying the existence of an exploitation of various material energies in different working contexts in Latin America, in some labor spheres we are beginning to see a “de-manualization” produced by the current capitalist technological revolution. This generates more diversification in the working classes and a multiplication of specialization, new and different ways of working—and therefore of resting—as renewed pedagogic ways of recharging energies, in order to face the requirements of the diverse work management.

The need to valorize the energies related to the aesthetic, the sensitive, and to body movement, marks compromises with working in these “new times”. Questions about expressive and sensitive forms are produced not only in and for work, but they go beyond its sphere, and develop a deep metamorphosis in everyday life conforming the subject’s day in its entirety. This can be seen, for example, in studies about the institutional modulation of male affects, but also in the analysis of recreation of sensitivities during leisure times. The social dimension of emotions appears as central for the construction of

the manifestation of sensitivities, both to others and to ourselves.

In order to understand the logics of pedagogic regulations about what is right and wrong, it becomes necessary to also understand the meaning assumed by “body techniques” of physiological, social, and emotional readiness—a concept coined by Marcel Mauss. These techniques become enacted as the core of the “politics of the body”, i.e. as adequate forms for learning, accepting, and disapproving the distribution of energies and the use of the body as an instrument for creation and interaction. To “approach and rehearse the character,” “train the image of the body,” “improve body movements,” “prepare for labor consent,” “knowing how to be masculine,” are all part of the set of strategies/training analyzed in this issue of RELACES. Thus, the succession of body techniques, validated by learnt processes of “being in the world,” give us the chance to examine the specificities assumed by the forms of domination.

This issue starts with an article by Inés Montarcé: “The fragility of symbolic Taylorism: between consent and transgression to affective control in Call Centers”. The author discusses the relation between work/body in today’s neo-colonial times, analyzing the productive processes in Call Centers in Mexico City. The “in series production of smiles” – codified emotions—are configured for the production of a sensitive effect in the other—a client—generating analytical clues about some of the forms of today’s surveillance of work. Technological monitoring verifies the existence of a whole system of manipulation of emotions, manufactured in accordance with practices that install mechanisms for the regulation of energies. Thus, the author analyses the forms in which labor consent is produced and recreated—under the effects of affective standardization. This labor consent is expanded and adjusted according to the limits of social supportability, promoting a worker with uncountable sensitivities—many of which are experienced under great confusion—which can

derive into “a point of explosion of latent conflicts.” The result is a combination of the contradiction of unconformities, paradoxically both omitting and assuming the imposed rules of reproduction of the logic of neo-colonial labor.

The second text in this issue, titled “New faces to old forms of work: unionization of women sexual workers in Argentina”, is by Gerardo Avalu. The article poses a set of analytical tension about the relations between working, sex, and union representation from an inquiry of the practices of the *Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina* (AMMAR) (Association of Women Prostitutes of Argentina), Córdoba Delegation. The article studies in depth the union/organization practices of sexual labor, the senses associated with these practices, and the configuration of women’s struggles in multiple times and places. The analysis bears upon the collective construction vis-à-vis its antagonists, its links to the State, and its confrontation with police institutions as a mechanism of persecution and repression. Underscoring the text is the exposure of the specific mechanisms which operate on the body and the emotions of women workers, especially in the context of a consideration about the dynamic of claim/recognition and the social condemnation these workers face because of their activity.

The next article is by Valentina Iragola Cairolí: “Running: self-management of an enterprising corporality”. Here, an analysis is developed from the Brazilian urban context –São Carlos-SP city – where “running” is revealed as one of the current social phenomena marking the emotions/corporality of the subjects. “Running” is presented as a normalizing practice established by the demands of competitiveness and individuality of the logics of the neo-colonial market. From an ethnographic research, the author thoroughly analyzes how the modulation of the management of energies is produced for labor by those preparing for and taking part in the competitions. “Quality of life as a model,” “the aesthetics of muscle use,” and “the self-management of pleasure” are revealed as the mandates of the modulations of a sensibility which is adjusted to neo-liberal performative requirements. The labor sphere proposes a process of increasing severity of extortion of body energies, while the body of the workers assimilates various strategies/trainings as an answer to the demands.

This issue continues with a text by Gustavo Andrana Bandeira and Nemesia Hijós, titled “The club is my life: the meaning of emotions in Brazilian and Argentinian football in different ethnographical contexts”. The article is a thought-provoking analysis

of emotions and feelings, understood as a core element of the construction of masculinity and of market narratives of “football as a product.” This study is based on research at two distinct ethnographic locations: The football stadiums of Porto Alegre, and a football club in Buenos Aires. The leading idea of the analysis is that emotions/corporality operate under discursive practices which involve power relations. The inquiry into the narratives is done under a methodology of “participant observation” by which the interactions and routines of the fans are registered during match days. Homophobia and latent violence is deployed in these days, as moderating sensible forms of male affections. This generates ambiguous and intensified emotions which stem from the performative consolidation of gender. The “love for the club” for example, is a love in action; sung, narrated and felt collectively. This makes possible the construction of a sensitivity which allows for certain permissiveness at the limits of the hegemonic forms of being male –embracing during the celebration of a goal. While other forms of masculinity are consolidated which promote mandates such as those expressed in examples of football talk: “we’re not like those fags from B” (second division.)

The next article is titled “Dress up the essences: experiences of cosplayers in Córdoba” by María Cecilia Díaz. The author analyses the experiences of young fans of Japanese popular culture in the city of Córdoba, Argentina, who attend events in which they participate dressing in “cosplay” –and using this expression –as *manga* and *anime* characters. The analysis proposes to take up social studies on performance in order to problematize several practices of these fans. Actions of these fans of “cosplay”, the senses relations between them and the characters they dress as, and mainly, the specific emotional states –feeling moved or in love –are analyzed as part of the situation of making the dresses and of getting dressed. What is interesting here is the complex process of turning into the character, the phase of construction as time of “entertainment” and “rehearsal before the (re)presentation.” Thus, to engage in cosplay is not only to dress as a character, but also to situate oneself in a position of learning “body techniques” through working on oneself (by posing and acting) and the manufacture of the dresses.

The sixth article of this issue is “Quando dançam os homens: a questão das masculinidades em estudos sobre dança, gênero e sexualidade” (When men dance: the issue of masculinities in studies about dance, gender and sexuality) by Talitha Couto Moreira Lara and Juliana Gonzaga Jayme. The authors address

and problematize men who dance, and the tensions between gender, sexuality, and masculinity. Within this framework they expose masculinity through a diversity of voices, experiences, corporalities, and performances established from the existence of the multiplicity implied in being male. This text also includes a detailed revision of the literature on the theme, revisiting authors and influential concepts. Then, it discusses the issue of masculinity in studies of men who dance, intersecting this theme with gender and sexuality. The study concludes with several preliminary consideration developed from fieldwork carried out among dancers in Belo Horizonte and Viçosa.

The next article “Ecological Risk: Climate Change as Abstract-Corporeal Problem” is by Tom Sparrow. He uses Ulrich Beck’s concept of “world risk society” to understand the existence of a deep crisis generated by an anthropogenic climate change. This crisis is the result of social, economic, political, and above all, moral factors, molten by the succession of industrial revolutions, which have generated an environmental degradation on a world scale. The text claims the existence of an “abstract-corporeal” threat of complex epistemic and ecological challenges. These reflections help us to demonstrate how the current campaigns to improve and/or modify our bodies at their most material level (chemically or genetically) does not go beyond one of the most abstract and immaterial problems faced by humanity: the ecologic crisis and its existential narrative. It is a problem – a threat of immeasurable annihilation – which the senses, our bodies, are not currently equipped to perceive. This, for Sparrow, is a challenge of an epistemic character which leads us to the discussion about the vulnerability of the body, and to a confrontation of environmental threats generated by our own behavior as a species.

The last two writings included in this issue are book reviews. Alexandre Zarias writes about the book by Bernard Lahire (2018) “L’interprétation sociologique des rêves”. Paris: La Découverte, in a review titled “A sociologia dos sonhos: jogos entre o passado e o presente para a interpretação das práticas sociais em Bernard Lahire” (The sociology of the dreams: interplay of past and present for the interpretation of social practices in Bernard Lahire). In his book Lahire presents a general theory for the sociological interpretation of dreams, grounded on the dynamic interlocking of three dimensions of the social life of the dreamer: dispositions, or the incorporated past, the context of present life or existential problematic, and the frame in which the dream develops. The author critiques the main claims of Sigmund Freud’s

psychoanalytic theory and traces the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological basis for the analysis of the narratives of dreams. María Paula Zanini reviews the compilation by Scribano, A., Timmermann Lopez, F., & Korstanje, M. (Eds.) (2018). “Neoliberalism in Multi-Disciplinary Perspective” (1st ed.). Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, titled “A necessary journey to redefine/rethink neoliberalism”. This is an edited text which includes an important group of authors who, from different regions and perspectives, reflect on neoliberalism and its historic implications today. This collection is an important aid to the problematization of the emergence of present day governments and their social and economic policies.

Seduction, entertainment, recreation, risk perception, these are some of the themes which help us to interweave an analysis of today’s configuration of the body and its senses, under a specific social structuration. This not only links with the idea of technically, bodily, and emotionally preparing oneself for work and leisure, but also with the elaboration of a way of living a future life conformed from expressions, disposition, and identities. These characterizations allow us to at least, observe the dynamics of distribution of body energies as forms of the regulations specific of the state of neo-colonial capitalism in the twenty-first century.

We thank the authors and all those who have sent us their manuscripts. We would like to remind you that we are permanently receiving submissions for publication.

Finally, we would like to restate that as from the 15th issue of RELACES we are publishing up to two articles in English per issue. As we have been stating for some time, all of RELACES’ editorial team and editorial council believe it is necessary to take each one of our articles as a node that allows us to continue in the path of dialogue and scientific/academic exchange as a social and political task in order to attain a freer and more autonomous society. Therefore, we would like to thank all those who see us as a vehicle to open the aforementioned dialogue.