

TIME AND EXPERIENCE. ANOTHER LAYER OF EXPLORING THE ALIVE TERRITORY OF THE BODY¹

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'It was necessary now to carry everything a step further. With her foot in the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta's arm and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past.' (WOOLF 2000:121)

'Time is eternity—in this time'. (BAINBRIDGE COHEN, Berlin, 2016)

Time is reminiscence and reminiscence is time, the unity between consciousness and essence. (Emmanuel Levinas 2013:29)

What I like most about the human body is its inherent potential to travel through its own lived time. I am pointing towards the sensations of 'openings,' 'widening memories,' 'possibilities' that we can experience, sometimes, when in movement, or when someone is attending carefully to the vast spectrum of our anatomical structures, physiological reality, touching, 'tuning in.' Through movement exploration—both by experiencing touch and/or moving in and with an environment—I have encountered the inherent potential of my own and other's physicality to engage in this relationship to time. 'Potential,' meaning: we do not have to 'look' for this ability, as it is always present. And too, we do not want to reduce or label this

164

¹ This text were Published in Currents Journal of the Body-Mind Centering Association/BMCA, Winter 2017 and was kindly given from the Journal Committee of BMCA to this O Mosaico Edition. This is a first step towards a co-partnership between the Dance Course of UNESPAR, in Curitiba mediated by the teacher Marila Vellozo and the BMCA. Members of the Editorial Board of Currents: Dana Davison, Martha Hart Eddy, Pat Ethridge, Amélie Gaulier, Wendy Sager-Evanson and Kate Tarlow Morgan.

(Tradução de Marila Vellozo: Este texto foi publicado no *Currents Journal* da Body-Mind Centering Association/BMCA, Inverno 2017 e foi gentilmente cedido pelo Comitê do Jornal da BMCA para esta edição da Revista O Mosaico. Este foi um primeiro passo para estabelecer uma co-parceria entre o Curso de Dança da UNESPAR, em Curitiba, mediado pela Professora Marila Vellozo e a BMCA. Os atuais membros do Comitê Editorial do *Currents Journal* são: Dana Davison, Martha Hart Eddy, Pat Ethridge, Amélie Gaulier, Wendy Sager-Evanson e Kate Tarlow Morgan.)

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(Tradução de Marila Vellozo: O interesse da autora Eva Maes pelo movimento foi nutrido no Estúdio de Dança Cunningham, pela School for the Body-Mind Centering® (em Chiemsee/Alemanha e em Northampton/EUA) e por meio dos Pontos de Afinação (Tuning Sores) de Lisa Nelson e na colaboração com Chantal Yzermans/Radical Low e com Anouk Llaurens. Eva Maes mora entre Berchem/Belgica e Sevilha/Espanha e é certificada como Terapeuta em Body-Mind Centering pela School for the Body-Mind Centering®). Contato: evamaes@hotmail.com

aptitude for sensation and memory as simply *regressive states*, but rather tuning into the intriguing capacity of our physical anchor, our body, to vibrate this basic category of life, which is time.

This possibility of the physical body to travel through its own time shelters deep meaningfulness for me. As if the unconditional respect with which my own physicality and others can sometimes, with grace, be met, can make the past a past reality.

Rudolph Laban wrote:

Movement shows the difference between space and time, and simultaneously bridges it. Therefore movement is a suitable medium to penetrate more deeply into the nature of space, and to give a living experience to its unity with time. (LABAN 1984:36)

Or, inverted: movement as a medium to penetrate more deeply into the nature of time, and to give a living experience to its unity with space. Many thinkers, artists, writers have all searched for words, movements, images to raise attention to this concept of ‘unity.’ And while I cannot present here a comprehensive overview of the research on time perception, what I can do is sharing, from this vast pool of scientific, philosophical and artistic research, a few beautiful articulations on the space-time continuum.

Every structure (node, layer, lining) or every patterning (radiation, reflex, righting reaction) in the body offers a variety of gateways and entrances that shed light onto my own ‘lived time.’ ‘Lived time’ exists as an *a-mension*, as the writer and philosopher Jean Gebser calls it, and reaches beyond dimensionality.

Only time in the form of ‘chronological time’ or as a ‘geometricized magnitude’ is for Gebser the more traditional concept of ‘dimension’ (GEBSER 1986:340). Other than that, time (the temporal as well as the timeless) is a basic constituent of space.

Time is not a part of space, that is, a disqualified dimension, but its very basis. (GEBSER 1986:179).

This is the reason why Gebser calls into being the term *a-mension*. He also writes that we should constantly—

relive and re-experience in a decisive sense the full depth of our past(...) the humus of the decaying world beneath(...) (GEBSER 1986:4),

—in order for our consciousness to be integrated into a new and more intensive form. The emergent perception of time, as he saw it, is accompanied by an opening of space. Time is thus a basic constituent of space, not to be conceived of as ‘time,’ or ‘movement,’ or ‘timeless being,’ but as ‘presence of origin’ (GEBSER 1984:179). Thus, exploring our physicality is not only an exploration *in* space, but also an exploration of time.

‘Time and memory merge into each other’ (Tarkovsky 1998:57)

Exploring time is exploring memory.

Andrei Tarkovsky, the Russian filmmaker writes that for years he has been tormented by the certainty that most discoveries in the realm of ‘time’ would still lay in front of him. He was convinced that we all know less about time than about anything else (TARKOVSKY 1994:53).

Tarkovsky and the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, both considered ‘time’ as something different than an uninterrupted stream of ‘moments of now.’ For Levinas, “‘time’ is essence and ‘monstration of essence.’” (LEVINAS 2013:9). He continues:

In the temporalizing of time, the light comes about by the instant falling out of phase with itself, which is temporal flow, the differing of the identical. The differing of the identical is also its manifestation. But time is also a recuperation of all divergences, through retention, memory and history (...) nothing is lost, everything is presented or represented and lends itself to inscription, or is synthesized. (LEVINAS 2013:9)

It is thanks to, and not in spite of, our subjective experience of time and by, and not in spite of, encountering the limitations of us ‘recollecting’ memories that we can fully meet the diachronical quality of time. The alive and vibrant guide of our ‘lived time’ may appear anytime to us, unexpectedly.

When we are talking about ‘embodied presence’, why would we not also be referring to this ‘guiding’ that can result from ‘*recuperation of all divergences*’? From acknowledging we exist in time. When I further read Levinas in relation to ‘time’—

It is then the temporalization of time, in the way it signifies being and nothingness, life and death, that must also signify the beyond being and not being; it must signify a difference with respect to the couple being and nothingness. (LEVINAS 2013:9)

Do not the falling into ruins and the disengagement last; do they not occur in the being? (LEVINAS 2013:9)

— I wonder (again) what inhabits for me the naming of ‘Earth’ and ‘Heavens’, as proposed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. I have related ‘Earth’ to gravity, sensory information,... and ‘Heavens’ to space, to the others, maybe also to ‘*the falling into ruins*’ that lasts?

Levinas, as always, and to my understanding, invites to extend further, to ‘reach beyond’.

Equally deeply inscribed in Levinas’ philosophy is the realization that (human) experience is only to be described through subjective encounter. Levinas understands that the body is an event, not ‘just’ a bearer of life. He describes a corporality based on human subjectivity. Another sentence of him to read slowly and carefully...

It is because subjectivity is sensibility and exposure to others, a vulnerability and a responsibility in the proximity of the others, the one-for-the other, that is, signification—and because matter is the very locus

of the for-the-other, the way that signification signifies before showing itself as a said in the system of synchronism, the linguistic system, that a subject is of flesh and blood, a man that is hungry and eats, entrails in a skin, and thus capable of giving the bread out of his mouth, or giving his skin. (LEVINAS 2013:77)

With Levinas we encounter a philosopher who knows that (human) beings are more than their thoughts, as they are made of flesh and blood (and more!) and that they are always living in, and thus are influenced by, the world. Reading his writings acknowledges a process that exists. Therefore, his thinking feels very connected to the experience of diving into the nature of our physical selves as manifest in Body-Mind Centering. In BMC, we ask: where else are we simultaneously invited to be material, student and teacher? Where else is individual experience embraced as both expression and witnessing of our understanding of ourselves, of others and of our environment? So too, proceeding along on this path of experience and inquiry with ourselves, with others, and in our environment—

It usually takes some...helping. (BAINBRIDGE COHEN, Berlin 2016)

To be a body is to have time (Levinas 1979:117)

What can I learn and understand when I read Emmanuel Levinas' words:

(...) a more profound, or originary, time behind linear time, which is understood only on the basis of the mortality (...) (LEVINAS 2000:54)

Time is not the limitation of being, but its relationship with infinity. Death is not annihilation but the question that is necessary for this relation with infinity, or time to be produced. (LEVINAS 2000:19)

Time must be understood in its duration and its diachrony as deference to the unknown. (LEVINAS 2000:38)

Do some of these insights and impressions relate to the depth of experiences in Body-Mind Centering? Are we aware, each time we approach, touch each other, meet without a goal-oriented plan that 'we exist in time, not just in space' (BAINBRIDGE COHEN, Potsdam, 2016)? We are guided in the first place by questions and answers that arise in a particular moment in our own physical structure and our partner's, and we wonder: how do these questions extend beyond the present moment? Does the experiential nature of Body-Mind Centering-based researching and exploring allow us to also delve deeper in 'time' (and memory, as they merge together)? Can we abstain from narrowing memories that surge, and allow all the insights, joys and sorrows, accompany them without relating them immediately to traditionally-identified concepts like regression, post-traumatic syndrome, etc.? Rather, can we encounter the potential of a moment, where our innate sensibilities with this intriguing capacity of our physical structure to store time, blend to reveal the subjective 'originary' as pure memory?

In the present of the self, there are pasts that have 'passed by' never being present to the self and therefore never being an event of its

remembered past. The present from which the self predicts, perceives and remembers is jumbled with pasts that have 'passed by' without being present to consciousness?' (HUTCHENS 2004:69).

Can these '*pasts that have 'passed by' without being present to consciousness'* become truly present, alive and articulable, when attending to our physical form, our body? At least for a moment in time? What significance appears out of this meeting of the 'pasts'?

How do any of these concepts resonate with the *different layers* we experience when we are in the midst of a movement improvisation, or a dance?

***'Asking oneself and questioning oneself does not undo the torsion of the same and the other in subjectivity; it refers to it.'*(Emmanuel Levinas 2013:25)**

Levinas' sentences about touch, sensibility, trauma, body and time, have offered me a different frame through which to consider basic concepts with which we are all working with through Body-Mind Centering. Concepts that appear when we are working in groups as well as one-to-one settings: touch and movement as the first senses to develop, exploring the often blending (even vanishing) duality between passivity and activity, the state of 'being/not doing', exploring inner-outer relationship.

Levinas wrote about all levels of experience that are concerned with encounters with the world, with the (human) Other. But, overall, his thinking is dedicated to the reconstruction of a layered interiority characterized by sensitivity and affectivity. In her synthesis of Levinas's *Otherwise than Being*, Bettina Bergo wrote:

The experience of the affective trace of my relations with particular others is preserved again, not as a psychological memory, but as a reminiscence of the flesh. (BERGO 2015:5.2)

Thus, it is agreed, from both Body- Mind Centering and a sensible philosopher as Levinas, that physical layers, structures, and tissues....all hold this sensitivity to a past that is not simply 'memory.' It follows then, as stated at the beginning of this essay that that body will travel in its own lived time. The body holds, we hold, truly 'shelter', this inherent possibility and potential. It is stored in our tissues and will remain present.

It was Levinas' hope that in the culture at large, the personal nature of persons—in the sense of a real openness to the meaning of human existence that demand full dedication—would prevail over long historical traditions. This openness, the definition of what Levinas reaches for, resonates in the "*on-going, experiential journey into the alive and changing territory of the body*" (BAINBRIDGE COHEN 2012:1). A journey where the "*universal has emerged out of the specific just as the specific has emerged out of the universal*", in full awareness of the continuum between cellular experience, body, relationship, culture, planet. (BAINBRIDGE COHEN 2012:2)

In Levinas' terms, we encounter here a possibility to carefully, patiently attend to this personal nature of persons. BMC is not a technique, but, yes, an approach that

invites us to appreciate more fully the depth and width of our body, of all the layers of our body—in movement, in rest, while dancing, expressing, or executing daily tasks.

In the end, Levinas is a truthful philosopher of ‘Embodiment’.

I, you, self and/or other, the person(s) whom we are working with, we are all revealing or suffering, or joy, or particular symptoms, or certain limitations, or ease of movement, or unique syndromes, or..... , but this may not yet be the ‘whole. By meeting—working with the body, attending to specific questions, themes—we are repeatedly informed by all inherent, profound abilities of our physical form. One of these resources is travelling through time in the body.

We can find deep support in this potential of the body, of our ‘selves’. Another layer of awareness about the relationships that prevail throughout our body-mind-spirit opening up. And on last time we breath with Levinas:

Two questions come up simultaneously: What does ‘authentic’ time mean?-Is the whole possible? (LEVINAS 2000:32)

By moving into our body we learn that every moment is there and that nothing is definitive because each moment recreates the past.

Postscript

While writing I found out that Fallingsbostel, a cluster of prisoner-of-war camps, was not only the place where my grandfather had spent time during the Second World War. Also Levinas did. Levinas’ wife and daughter found shelter in France and survived the war. Other of his family members did not. Last summer, after my grandmother passed away, I found a letter of my grandfather in which he ‘broke up’ with her during mobilization. Leaving the message that- even though he could only dream of an eventual future wife to be someone ‘like her’- the fresh relation was over. They met again after the war. My grandfather translated his war experience by insisting on eating any leftover moldy bread, knowing that this could also be nutritive. And by considering only one anecdote possible or worthy of communicating to grandchildren: that of a guard offering a cigarette, to be shared.



Dragonfly near Dachau

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