

The body, the playful, and the good-living¹

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“The world is not. The world is being”
(Paulo Freire, 1996)

We live in a sick society: according to a report published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2017, the depression increased 18% throughout the world in ten years. Brazil is the country with the highest incidence of depression in Latin America (5.8% of the population, i.e., about 11.5 million Brazilians!), second only to the USA (5.9%) when entire America is considered. Also, Brazil appears with a huge rate of anxiety disorders (9.3%, i.e., 18.6 million people), a rate which is three times higher than the world average. Depression can lead to suicide and, according to the WHO, is the second leading cause of death among young people around the world. Add to that the accumulation of environmental problems, which are inseparable from social issues. There is a growing desire for healing and improvement, as well as, on a significant part of the people, the belief in easy solutions, often full of intolerance and hatred. Such beliefs lack understanding on the systemic character of the existing problems and originate from the shortage of perception on the human connection to its surroundings, coupled with a profound ignorance both about the most recent and the farthest history. We are the onset of individual development trajectories generated within social contexts in which routines attached to values such as production and productivity have been instilled into each one of us. We live our lives, fulfilling goals and deadlines. We sometimes even question such values, but we do not act to change: our lives are based on extensive agendas aimed at production at the expense of good-living, leading to psychic suffering which comes together with body suffering since we are undivided beings. Therefore, questioning the logic of our lives is urgent.

There is a bidirectionality between how we affect and are affected by our surroundings. Each person carries an evolutionary history shared with the other beings, and a private history, which develops intertwined with those of others, building together the cultures that define our social and physical environments. As it is impossible to live if not through the body, it is essential that we value senses which are our channels with the world, all, our existence is given through our senses. Although this statement seems obvious, this is what we have done less

in our modern times, depriving us of what would bring us a sense of plenitude.

Human beings are curious and have a pleasure in exploring (Bateson, 2014). Through exploration, we discover things and are fascinated with the world. To explore, one needs free time, which we have less and less. And we have more and more children deprived of playing due to a schedule filled with several so-called “educational” activities. Some of these even involve the body and a certain playfulness, namely sports activities, but, since they are always directed and monitored, they hinder the full exploration of learning that, with all its richness of meaning and potential, would lead to an expansion of repertoire, fundamental to create new forms to solve the various challenges throughout life. It is in free playing and leisure time that new possibilities arise, as well as new obstacles and conflicts (Lodolo & Bichara, 2009). When we deprive children of these sources of conflicts and obstacles, we are also depriving them of the possibility of creating solutions and learning how to deal with setbacks (Smith, 2010). In addition to limiting both the potential as the frustration-coping abilities, a full schedule early in life has been already shaping our children for an always-stressful and uniforming routine (due to the little repertoire), with little or almost no place for a critical position, in addition to being quite medicalizing. There is not time/space for creation or decision on the part of children. And, as stated by Freire (1996), a person is not able to learn to decide if this chance is not given to them and, thus, never being able to decide, they cannot achieve autonomy, as this is a process. One can see that, upon arriving at college, a significant part of people already had psychic distress, which often intensifies with the course or maturity demands with which they are not able to cope since there was no opportunity to learn while growing. How can one escape from that?

Assuming we are historical agents and can build life practices, we need to reformulate these practices and our routines to find and focus on space/time for BEING and LIVING, valuing the feeling/perceiving that only happens through our bodies. Upon realizing we are part of a whole that includes people and living and non-living things, we become aware that both environmental and economic problems as psychological and social issues arise from the same source – the valuation of profit and productivity at the expenses of the good-living that emerges from the connection between each element making up the network of life. This way of life will

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also impinge consequences to the traditional societies' way of life, spreading world wide the misfortune that are outcomes of this nature/culture detachment.

Overcoming the hatred and discomfort of the times we live in includes perceiving the connectivity among all living organisms and non-living elements comprising the world network. This perception may

emerge from promoting and encouraging curiosity, a basic human motivation, from the search for playfulness, and the pleasure

that comes from knowing, exploring, playing freely, and understanding oneself as a historical agent who perceives, acts and uses the past to build what is coming next.

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