

Body culture as a driver of catharsis: for learning that forms human potential

A cultura corporal como propulsora de catarse:
por uma aprendizagem formadora das potencialidades humanas

La cultura corporal como motor de catarsis:
por un aprendizaje que forma el potencial humano

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ABSTRACT

The category of art is inserted in the most complex human activities, which are guided not only by the need for survival, but by the need for expression and creation. Among these human activities, there are those that were produced as bodily expression and that characterize more or less complex artistic creative activities. In this way, this article aims to demonstrate that body culture has an intimate relationship with art and its cathartic potential. Starting from historical-cultural psychology, historical-critical pedagogy and historical-dialectical materialism, the text discusses, at first, the essence of body culture, as a historical-social activity and continues analyzing aspects that characterize the formation of higher structures and its relationship with artistic creation. Throughout the text, there is a view of art as an essential phenomenon for understanding man, as a way of finding his own subjectivity. Body culture, due to its artistic bias, follows a cathartic path as a qualitative leap, which provides an intellectual, educational, political and ethical transformation. The appropriation of body culture, through the mediation of intentional activities, makes it possible to understand the meaning of art and its cathartic potential. Therefore, reflection on the relationship between body culture and art allows

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the identification of the potential for its appropriation in order to boost individuals' self-awareness through artistic content.

Keywords: Catharsis; Body culture; Human development.

RESUMO

A categoria de arte está inserida nas atividades humanas mais complexas, que são guiadas não só pela necessidade de sobrevivência, mas pela necessidade de expressão e criação. Dentre essas atividades humanas, há aquelas que foram produzidas enquanto expressão corporal e que caracterizam atividades criadoras artísticas mais ou menos complexas. Dessa forma, o presente artigo tem como objetivo demonstrar que a cultura corporal tem uma íntima relação com a arte e seu potencial catártico. Partindo da psicologia histórico-cultural, da pedagogia histórico-crítica e do materialismo histórico-dialético, o texto discute, em um primeiro momento, a essência da cultura corporal, enquanto atividade histórico-social e segue analisando aspectos que caracterizam a formação das estruturas superiores e sua relação com a criação artística. Verifica-se ao longo do texto uma visão de arte como fenômeno essencial para a compreensão do homem, como uma forma de encontrar sua própria subjetividade. A cultura corporal, em específico a dança, o circo e a mímica, por seu viés artístico, trilham um caminho catártico como um salto qualitativo, que proporciona uma transformação intelectual, educacional, política e ética. A apropriação da cultura corporal em seu viés artístico, por meio da mediação de atividades intencionais, possibilita a compreensão do sentido da arte e de seu potencial catártico. Portanto, a reflexão sobre a relação da cultura corporal com a arte permite a identificação do potencial de sua apropriação de modo a impulsionar a autoconsciência dos indivíduos por meio de conteúdos artísticos.

Palavras-chave: Catarse; Cultura corporal; Desenvolvimento humano.

RESUMEN

La categoría de arte se inserta en las actividades humanas más complejas, que se guían no sólo por la necesidad de supervivencia, sino por la necesidad de expresión y creación. Entre estas actividades humanas, se encuentran aquellas que se produjeron como expresión corporal y que caracterizan actividades creativas artísticas más o menos complejas. De esta manera, este artículo pretende demostrar que la cultura del cuerpo tiene una íntima relación con el arte y su potencial catártico. A partir de la psicología histórico-cultural, la pedagogía histórico-crítica y el materialismo histórico-dialéctico, el texto analiza, en un primer momento, la esencia de la cultura del cuerpo, como actividad histórico-social y continúa analizando aspectos que caracterizan la formación de estructuras superiores y su relación con la creación artística. A lo largo del texto se observa una visión del arte como fenómeno esencial para comprender al hombre, como forma de encontrar su propia subjetividad. La cultura corporal, por su sesgo artístico, sigue un camino catártico como salto cualitativo, que proporciona una transformación intelectual, educativa, política y ética. La apropiación de la cultura corporal, a través de la mediación de actividades intencionales, permite comprender el significado del arte y su potencial catártico. Por tanto, la reflexión sobre la relación entre cultura del cuerpo y arte permite identificar el potencial de su apropiación para potenciar la autoconciencia de los individuos a través de contenidos artísticos.

Palabras clave: Catarsis; Cultura corporal; Desarrollo humano.

1 Introduction

Human creative capacity developed during the ontogenesis of the social being, arising from the cultural enrichment of the world and the appropriation of this historically constructed wealth. In this ontological process, guided by their needs, individuals through their activity and labor produced the most varied forms of expressing their being within reality, increasing their complexity in accordance with their level of consciousness. Labor, as Leontiev (1978) demonstrates, is not merely one activity among others but the foundational activity of the human condition; through it, humans transform nature and, simultaneously, transform themselves. From this creative activity, other specifically human forms of activity emerge, including art, a unique expression of human objectification and the quest for subjectivity.

Thus, evolving from immediate, everyday labor, needs emerged that were technically more complex extending beyond mere utility or survival. The category of art, in all its varied forms of expression, falls within these more complex human activities. Here, we will focus specifically on artistic forms of bodily expression (such as dance, gymnastics, theater, and mime). Following Nascimento's (2014) discussion, we understand that the objects of body culture can be divided into three groups: (1) mastery of one's own bodily action, centered on the production of a performance mark or record; (2) control of another's bodily action, centered on mutually opposed objectives; and (3) the production of artistic imagery through bodily actions a group that encompasses dance, circus arts, and mime. Although all three groups may contain artistic elements, it is in this third group that art presents itself as an essential feature; therefore, we will concentrate our analysis on it.

Our objective is to demonstrate that body culture bears an intimate relation with art and its cathartic potential, as its forms of expression are the fruit of human creative production throughout the history of humanity. This entails understanding that the essential traits of dance, circus arts, and mime do not lie merely in the repetition of movements, but in their artistic intentionality, linked to the aesthetic and the cathartic, which is capable of elevating human subjectivity. Based on this perspective, we also reinforce our theoretical preference for the term "body culture" rather than "body culture of movement" (Bracht, 1989); the adjectival phrase "of movement" restricts

understanding of the phenomenon to the motor dimension, whereas we—along with Soares (1996) and Nascimento (2014)—understand body culture as representing a broader field that is symbolic, historical, and artistic.

In light of this reflection, we present a proposal grounded in Historical-Cultural Psychology—which is based on historical-dialectical materialism—aiming to clarify and expand the understanding of body culture and its cathartic potential. To this end, we draw upon Netto's (2011) explanations regarding Marx's method, which begins with the reality of the object in a movement from the syncretic to the synthetic. Thus, the intention is to start from the reality of the research object (body culture), seeking to move beyond appearances to grasp its essence—capturing its structure and dynamics—and to work with the synthesis of a cathartic activity capable of explaining reality.

Initially, we will present a discussion about body culture and certain aspects of the Marxist view of art; subsequently, we will address the formation of higher-order structures and the cathartic movement arising from the appropriation of body culture as a creative and artistic activity.

2 Body culture activities as historical and social knowledge

Reflecting about the development of humanity and its cultural productions leads us to the following question: what truly distinguishes humans from animals? Some attribute it to biological superiority, while others point to the capacity for creation and thought. Following Leontiev (1978), we can state that what makes humans essentially human is their creative and productive activity: labor. Labor is, therefore, a distinct form of human activity—one that founds the human condition—as it opens up the possibility of objectifying oneself in the world through products that embody social meanings. As Martins (2013) explains, it is through labor that the ontological essence of the human being is revealed—as a being that shapes and transforms itself historically.

Human development unfolds through people's creative activity, which not only transforms nature, but in a dialectical relation, transforms their own aptitudes and knowledge, crystallized into material, intellectual, and bodily products. Each generation begins life not on a blank slate, but in a world already constructed by preceding generations, highlighting the central role of cultural mediation in the process of humanization. This fact allows us to highlight that the acquisition of

culturally produced knowledge is essential to the process of humanization; each form of cultural richness possesses its own unique role in shaping the individual and, above all, in developing higher-order aptitudes.

Thus, the cultural riches produced throughout history, which encompass representations of the world externalized through bodily expression, play a role in human formation. Such knowledge, produced by human beings and represented through bodily expression as a socially and historically constructed language, is defined by Soares et al. (1992) as "body culture." The themes representing it include games, dance, combat sports, gymnastics, sports, juggling, mime, and other forms of symbolic representation of the reality experienced by human beings.

In this context, it is important to clarify a conceptual debate regarding body culture. While Daolio (2004)—drawing on the writings of Valter Bracht and Mauro Betti—proposes the expression "body culture of movement," other authors such as Soares (1996), Escobar (1995), and Nascimento (2014) advocate for the use of the term "body culture." The use of the adjectival phrase "of movement," far from being neutral, restricts the scope of Physical Education knowledge almost exclusively to the motor dimension and the subjective experience of movement. This relegates fundamental dimensions of corporeality, such as the aesthetic, symbolic, and artistic aspects, as well as the historicity of bodily practices, to the background.

By opting for the term "body culture," we argue that its subject matter is not restricted to movement itself, but extends to the complex network of historical and cultural meanings expressed through the body (Vasconcelos, 2019). This choice aligns with the perspective advocated in our article, which highlights the need to move beyond naturalizing or functionalist interpretations and instead understand body culture as a socio-historical product, rich in meaning and formative potential.

The body culture, as a body of knowledge to be appropriated, is advocated by various authors (Escobar, 1995; Soares, 1996; Castellani Filho, 1997) who adopt a historical-critical perspective, recognizing the need to appropriate historically produced knowledge for human development. Soares (1996) emphasizes that body culture consists of human activities that endure over time, transforming themselves to establish their place within culture; they constitute a language, laden with sense and meaning, through which humans represent and understand their journey through the world.

In contrast, authors such as Kunz (2004), Daolio (2004), and Betti (1991) explicitly advocate the "body culture of movement" perspective, which focuses on the lived experience of movement, the student's subjectivity, and intersubjective interaction. Although their contributions value student experience and autonomy, this approach, in our analysis reduces Physical Education knowledge to its motor and experiential dimensions, disregarding the historicity, aesthetic dimension, and cultural meanings that constitute the totality of body culture. Thus, we reaffirm that Physical Education should embrace the concept of body culture, valuing the critical, historical, and social appropriation of bodily expressions, in alignment with the critical-surpassing conception.

Throughout human history, bodily movements and physical exercises have been performed: prehistoric humans ran to hunt for food; Greeks exercised to meet aesthetic ideals; and people in capitalist societies prepared their bodies for labor. Yet, does simple physical exercise constitute an activity of body culture? What distinguishes the bodily movement a person makes while cleaning their home from the movements a ballerina performs while dancing? Leontiev (1978) indicates that an activity consists of processes carried out through human interaction with the world to address a specific need. In the context of human activity—specifically the processes humans carry out to meet their needs—the activity transcends mere biological requirements and gives rise to human motives (which are social in origin).

In this sense, activity essentially consists of psychological processes driven by a motive; thus, all such processes are directed toward a goal that stimulates the subject. According to Leontiev (2017), the motive is what compels the subject to act, guiding the action toward the satisfaction of a specific need. Consequently, these actions are processes that do not necessarily coincide with the ultimate aim of the activity itself. Consider, for instance, an individual who feels a need to learn ballet. This need can be met by studying at a dance school, and this becomes the motive for a series of actions: improving flexibility, developing a sense of rhythm, practicing specific movements, sitting for exams and so on. Each of these actions has its own objectives, yet together they share an overarching motive: completing the ballet course. Thus, meaning is created within this objective relation between the motive and the focus of the actions. The individual's journey into the Dance School is imbued with meaning, which will determine how they appropriate this knowledge.

Thus, regarding the culture of the body, its activities possess a sense that—according to Leontiev (1978, p. 94)—changes in accordance with the subject's life and their relations with phenomena; however, these activities also possess a social significance, which represents the

generalization of reality crystallized and fixed in a perceptible vector—ordinarily a word or phrase. It is the ideal, spiritual form of the crystallization of humanity's experience and social practices. [...] Significance, therefore, belongs primarily to the world of objectively historical phenomena.

Activities within the culture of the body represent every form of bodily expression constructed throughout human history. Gymnastics, for instance, present since prehistoric times, developed out of human needs. In this sense, it possesses a specific significance rooted in systematized and organized knowledge which, when appropriated, enables the development of higher-order motor skills and conscious, voluntary movements. Regarding these bodily culture activities, their social significance and sense transcend the simple bodily movement involved in, say, cleaning one's house.

Each activity within the culture of the body possesses its own significance, enabling human development and the formation of higher psychological functions. According to Nascimento (2014), these significances are represented variously by the mastery of one's own bodily action, the control of another's bodily action, or the creation of an artistic image. Thus, bodily culture activities can be organized into three groups, each defined by an essential trait: (1) mastery of one's own bodily action, where the focus is on producing performance benchmarks; (2) control of another's bodily action, centered on mutually opposed objectives; and (3) production of artistic imagery through bodily action, a category that includes dance, circus arts, and mime. These essential traits constitute the core of each group, that is, the element defining its specific nature and formative significance. In the case of dance, circus arts, and mime, the essential characteristic is artistic creation; precisely for this reason, these practices possess a high potential for catharsis.

By recognizing artistic creation as the essential trait of dance, circus arts, and mime, we understand that these activities do not merely develop skills but mobilize higher psychological functions, such as imagination, memory, and thought, in unity with motor activity. This grants them a unique power to shape and transform subjectivity, in close connection with catharsis.

Explaining this essential trait is crucial: it is not simply a matter of motor skills or movement, but of the creative intentionality that imbues the activity with an artistic character. Unlike cleaning the house or running to catch a bus, dancing or performing mime entails a conscious process of aesthetic creation, wherein corporeality becomes an artistic language. Thus, this is the point where art and bodily culture converge, creating the possibility of catharsis as a qualitative leap in human development.

Drawing on Demerval Saviani (2008) and Duarte (2019), we can assert that this cathartic movement represents a qualitative leap in the process of expanding and enriching the relationship between individual subjectivity and sociocultural objectivity. This fosters intellectual, emotional, educational, political, and ethical transformation, as well as a new stance regarding one's own life, society, and humanity.

Therefore, considering that catharsis allows the student to achieve a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the surrounding whole—moving beyond a syncretic and fragmented view of reality to act upon it consciously—we recognize this movement as fundamental to the individual's transformation.

For this reason, the next section will address the contributions of art to the formation of consciousness and human development, aiming to reflect on its role and direct relation with body culture activities, specifically those characterized essentially by artistic creation.

3 Contributions of art to human development according to a Marxist aesthetic

When reflecting about the way art serves as a means of knowing and acting upon the world, we find no consensus, but rather various contradictions. Some regard it as a form of knowledge, while others highlight its ideological character. On the other hand, seeking theoretical coherence with dialectical-historical materialism, the most viable solution for approaching art in a way that integrates its various aspects, without reducing this, it would be to view the essence of the artistic object fundamentally as a free human creation, based on the understanding that “art is knowledge only insofar as it is creation” (VÁZQUEZ, 1968, p. 36). (VÁZQUEZ, 1968, p. 36).

Thus, it is necessary to highlight that, from the perspective of psychology in a historical-cultural context, art cannot be understood outside the category of work. As

Leontiev (1978) explains, work is the foundational activity of the human condition, and higher forms of activity, such as art, derive from it. Thus, if all art is creation, it is a creation rooted in human work, which carries within it social and historical meanings. At this point, we also follow the contributions of Martins (2005), who discusses educational work as an intentional form of transmission of cultural wealth, in which art plays a central role due to its aesthetic and formative character.”

When focusing on the sphere of art, Marx (2004) observed that the type of creative work that constitutes it in the first instance is a work of creation that essentially contradicts this alienated work that the class system imposes. Reflecting about the fundamental principles that would underpin a Marxist aesthetic, Vázquez (1968) reaffirms the role of art as an essential sphere in human development, considering that,

If man is truly man insofar as he is capable of rising above his mere nature to become (as Marx puts it in the 1844 Manuscripts) a *human* natural being, then art is precisely the activity in which he elevates this specific capacity to humanize everything he touches to a higher level. Or, to put it another way: if man, as a truly human being, is above all a creative being, then art is a sphere where this creative power manifests itself in a renewed and limitless fashion. Because it is an act of creation, the work of art is always unique and unrepeatable, and the act of artistic creation always partakes of the nature of an adventure. It is creation—that is, not merely a reflection of reality, but the establishment of a new reality. Thanks to art, this reality formed through labor—a world of human or humanized objects—expands and grows ever richer. And, in turn, thanks to art, our own relationship with reality is enriched and deepened (VÁZQUEZ, 1968, p. 114).

In this sense, it is precisely the fact that art transcends the needs of mere subsistence that makes it a fundamental phenomenon for understanding the human being. Thus, if man's creative labor is in itself a humanization of nature, art as a form of creation that lies beyond utility and immediate physical necessity responds to man's creative impulse after he has objectified himself and perceived himself as a "species-being." Consequently, although art presents itself as an offshoot of labor, it is an offshoot that demonstrates the objective expression of the self in search of its own subjectivity.

In this way, human beings possess the capacity to imagine and create, transforming the images in their minds into reality. This essentially human potential is what enables the development of art, given that creative activities and imagination were among the essential factors in the emergence of artistic expressions.

According to Vygotsky (2018), human creative activity refers to the creation of new images or actions without merely reproducing previous impressions or actions; to achieve this, the individual draws upon imagination. In short, imagination—which materializes in reality—forms the basis of all human creative activity.

Every field of our cultural, artistic, scientific, or technical life is the product of human imagination and creation. Music, dance, painting, and every other artistic manifestation result from human creative activity.

Thus, imagination relates to reality because it is constructed from materials appropriated from reality itself. According to Vygotsky (2018), the relation between imagination and reality is defined by four laws: (1) The creative activity of imagination depends on the richness of the individual's prior experiences; (2) It involves more than the mere reproduction of past experiences since creative activity entails something new yet creation relies on those experiences, as the newly created actions and situations arise from combining the diverse cultural wealth the individual has accumulated and appropriated; (3) Creations possess an emotional character; artistic creations, for instance, evoke feelings and sensations in those who engage with the activity; (4) The moment of constructing this new entity is when crystallized imagination truly comes into existence in the world and exerts an influence on things.

The interplay of these four laws bridges the gap between creative activity and reality. Consequently, the creation of any new artistic knowledge stems from combining the cultural wealth already produced by humanity.

For this reason, according to Lukács (2018), art possesses the capacity to convey the particularities of a specific phenomenon. Its distinctiveness lies in the fact that its immediate impression preserves the structure of the recorded reality; art manages to lend immediate evidence to the essence of that phenomenon.

Thus, it is precisely this power to reveal essence that grants art its cathartic character. As Duarte (2019) argues, catharsis is a qualitative leap in consciousness, capable of transcending the immediate and fragmented view of reality. When the student engages with bodily culture practices defined by artistic creation (NASCIMENTO, 2014)—such as dance, circus arts, and mime—they do not merely learn movements; they internalize aesthetic meanings that mobilize and transform their subjectivity.

Therefore, the importance of art lies in its capacity to act “directly upon the human subject; the reflection of objective reality, the reflection of social beings in their reciprocal relationships, in their social interchange with nature [...]” (LUKÁCS, 2018, p. 268). Thus, art can be described as a mediating element, a means of fostering human growth.

In this way, artistic production

[...] creates, on the one hand, reproductions of reality in which the being-in-itself of objectivity is transformed into a being-for-us of the world represented in the individuality of the work of art; on the other hand, through the efficacy exerted by such works, human self-consciousness awakens and rises; “when the receptive subject experiences—in the manner referred to above—such a reality within themselves, a ‘for-itself’ of the subject is born—a self-consciousness that is not hostilely separated from the outside world, but rather signifies a richer and deeper relation between an externally conceived world—rich and deep in its own right—and the human being as a member of society, class, and nation, as a self-aware microcosm within the macrocosm of humanity’s development” (LUKÁCS, 2018, p. 286).

The art, therefore, possesses a transformative power, in the sense of shaping subjects who are conscious of themselves and their relationship with the world. It transforms not only those who produce it but also those who receive it. As a cultural activity, artistic manifestations play an essential role in transmitting knowledge historically produced by humanity, as well as in constructing new knowledge.

Thus, it is important to view art as an ally in an educational process that is truly transformative and enables the subject to develop their full human potential. This is, in fact, the point of convergence between art and bodily culture activities; both possess the potential to develop the subject to their fullest capacity. Moreover, the essence of art can be present within bodily culture activities themselves, as these are grounded in expression and creation. Circus arts and dance, for instance, are activities that derive their meaning and significance from artistic creation; consequently, they play a pivotal role in the educational process by fostering the formation of higher-order structures, grounded in an understanding of the subject's own interiority.

In this vein, the next section will delve deeper into the formation of higher-order structures through bodily culture activities and artistic creation, drawing upon the framework of Historical-Cultural Psychology.

When considering specific bodily culture activities such as dance, theater, mime, and other games with an artistic dimension that allow students to express their individuality, even those that are not overly complex or abstract serve as valuable resources for structuring instruction as a means of enhance affective connections among peers and transform their individual meanings.

According to Vygotsky (2001), children internalize scientific concepts at school based on a foundation previously formed through spontaneous concepts learned during their preschool years. From this, one can draw a parallel between how Vygotsky analyzed the role of art, as capable of elevating an individual's feelings to the level historically attained by humankind and how he analyzed the role of scientific concepts in the development of thought: both progressing from elementary forms to higher forms.

This implies that, just as scientific concepts break away from immediacy and common sense through the possibility of synthesis and generalization, “[...] art generates in individuals, whether adults, adolescents, or children a process of transcending everyday forms of emotional reaction through their incorporation” (DUARTE, 2019, p. 10).

On the other hand, just as scientific concepts encounter a “weakness” in often being too abstract, art and its cathartic power may also face this same obstacle.

4 The formation of higher structures in the artistic creation of body culture activities and catharsis as a didactic tool

Human development is not a natural process, but a mediated one. This mediation is not neutral; it occurs through activity, with labor being the foundational activity of the human condition (LEONTIEV, 1978). Thus, it is through labor that humans create tools and signs, transforming their own nature and elevating their psychological functions to higher forms. In this sense, as Martins (2004) discusses, educational work is the intentional and conscious means by which the appropriation of these cultural riches is promoted. When analyzing bodily culture and particularly its artistic manifestations we must understand it as a product of this historical process of human objectification.

From the moment of birth, the child is immersed in socio-historical conditions that enable them to appropriate signs already produced by humanity. Therefore, their development occurs through the appropriation of culture. Tools and signs, which act as mediators in human development, enhance human intellectual capacities, transforming human behavior and creating a completely new psychological situation.

Based on Leontiev (1978), the tool is a product of material culture that embodies characteristic traits of human creation. He views this as a social object rooted in the operations of historically developed labor. A human being's appropriation of the tool signifies a reorganization of their instinctive movements and the formation of higher psychological functions. Thus, this tool assumes the role of a mediator of development, as its appropriation enables the process of forming new higher functions that modify not only the psyche but also the motor sphere. Meanwhile, according to Vygotsky (2021, p. 105), the sign consists of “[...] all conditioned stimuli artificially created by humans as a means of controlling behavior—whether that of another person or one’s own - [...]” (Vygotsky, 2021, p. 105). In this way, the sign acts as an artificial instrument created by the human being for self-stimulation and the control of their own reactions. In this sense,

Creating and using artificial stimuli as auxiliary tools to control one's own reactions also serves as the basis for a new form of behavioral determination that distinguishes higher behavior from elementary behavior. The presence of created stimuli alongside presented stimuli appears to be the defining characteristic of human psychology (Vygotsky, 2021, p. 105).

Thus, complex behaviors such as planning or creating through the use of external tools to enhance psychological and even motor functions are essentially human characteristics. When a person uses a knot in a cloth as a device to remember something, they are using a sign to enhance their memory; this capacity to create mediating resources forms the basis for the development of higher psychological functions. Humans produce the very conditions that enhance their own development; as culture advances, new needs for control arise, and consequently, the creation of signs and tools advances as well.

Mediating activities form higher structures, which constitute “[...] a qualitatively special form, a truly new form that emerges during the process of development” (Vygotsky, 2021, p. 136). These new formations do not emerge from a vacuum; the

foundation of all higher-order structural formation lies in crystallized psychological forms that emerged during the most primitive stages of human cultural development. Thus, the formation of higher functions depends on the formation of elementary functions; without the crystallization of the latter, the process of incorporation and transcendence that transforms the individual's entire psyche cannot occur. If the path to forming higher psychological structures passes through elementary functions, the same must hold true for motor aptitudes, which according to Leontiev (1978), develop in the same manner as phenomena within the psychological sphere.

An important distinction must be clarified here: in historical-cultural psychology, higher psychological functions and aptitudes are not equivalent concepts. Functions, as explained by Smirnov et al. (1960), refer to qualitatively new psychological processes mediated by signs and tools such as voluntary memory, directed attention, conceptual thought, and creative imagination. Aptitudes, on the other hand, while developing historically, refer to acquired dispositions for performing specific tasks. Therefore, when discussing "bodily culture," the goal is not merely to develop isolated motor aptitudes but to mobilize higher psychological functions in unity with motor activity a process that only truly occurs when the activity is experienced in an artistic and intentional form.

In reflecting about the formation of higher structures within the motor sphere, we focus on understanding bodily culture activities, viewing them as the most highly developed form of contemporary motor phenomena. Activities such as dance, circus arts, and mime, for instance, represent an organization of knowledge that transcends the mere execution of bodily movements. Nascimento (2014), demonstrates that certain bodily culture activities are imbued with their own unique meanings, which can be expressed through artistic creation.

If we consider a child dancing at home spinning and jumping along to a specific piece of music, can we say that she has truly appropriated the dance-related bodily culture activity in its most developed form? Drawing on Vygotsky's (2021) explanations regarding the formation of higher-order structures, the answer must be no. Thus, the distinction between a lower-order structure and a higher-order one lies in the separation of the sign-stimulus from the object-stimulus and, secondly, in the self-regulation of behavior. The mastery of behavior is a mediated process achieved through auxiliary stimuli, which may take the form of signs or tools. If, while dancing, the child does not

execute her movements consciously or with mastery over her own behavior, then the formation remains in its elementary form. This is because there has been no break with the naturalness and immediacy of the representations we form in our daily lives.

In light of this, we highlight the importance of understanding the relations between the elementary and higher forms of the individual's psyche. In his studies, Vygotsky (2001) points to the petrified and fossilized psychological forms that originate in human history. Such historical traces allow us to elucidate the developmental process of cultural behavior. This is the key to understanding the higher forms of the psyche, as it presents the union between plasticity and petrification between the end and the beginning of the cultural development of conduct.

Fossilized forms that is, the lower structure represents natural psychology, which depends primarily on biological aspects. They serve as a starting point for new psychological formations and for the transformation of the structure of thought.

Thus, the formation of higher functions depends on the formation of elementary functions; without the latter, a process of incorporation and transcendence one that transforms the individual's entire psyche is impossible. We can state that the path to forming higher psychological structures passes through elementary psychological structures.

When discussing so-called higher psychological functions, we can revisit the systemic and complex understanding of functions presented by Luria (1981). The function is a complete functional system incorporating various components; it is a systemic structure characteristic of more complex forms of mental and motor activity. These are faculties formed over the course of historical development, characterized by being social in origin and complex in structure.

Consequently, they are responsible for the formation of all human characteristics and capacities both psychological and motor throughout a person's life. "Everything that is specifically human in the psyche," emphasizes Leontiev, "is formed in the child during their lifetime" (1978, p. 25). According to Leontiev's hypothesis, the development of humanity's psychological functions results from the accumulation of socio-historical experience, crystallized in the form of objects created by people.

In part, the development of motor faculties is expressed through the historical evolution of tools and manual instruments. A child can only master human movements by

achieving an appropriate form of active interaction with these tools and instruments. In this relation of creating and manipulating tools, the motor sphere is transformed as is the individual's psyche in a dialectical relation.

The development of a child's motor sphere is essentially a process of mastering the socio-historical experience of previous generations, as embodied in objects, tools, and instruments. Thus, Leontiev characterizes the process of the psyche's humanization through this motor mastery. On their own, human beings cannot grasp the purpose of objects or master the appropriate way to use them, as these qualities are not directly perceptible. Only with an adult's help can a child master the socio-historical experience associated with a given object. However, the child does not confront the world of objects in isolation; his relations with that world are conditioned by his relations with other people and are embedded within the process of socialization.

Therefore, mastering the movements that define a specific element of body culture requires a process of increasing complexity, involving a dialectical relation among psychological, motor, and affective dimensions. Whether in dance, gymnastics, or sports, mastering these movements requires engaging with socially constructed tools and knowledge. In this sense, the socialization process necessitates the acquisition of new, more complex forms of mental and motor activity. Interactions with others and with tools and instruments serve to foster the development of faculties social in origin and complex in structure that are built up over the course of historical development.

This mastery is not limited to the acquisition of motor skills—which might be understood merely as specific aptitudes—but entails the formation of higher-order functions. In dance, for instance, it is not enough for a child to develop physical aptitudes like flexibility or a sense of rhythm; the essential aspect is the appropriation of aesthetic sensibilities that engage the imagination, memory, and thought processes, thereby qualitatively transforming the child's consciousness. From this perspective, and focusing specifically on the artistic dimension, the appropriation and formation of higher-order psychological and motor structures depend on activities that involve creation.

In explaining the significance of artistic creation within body culture activities, Nascimento (2014) points out that the artistic element lies in the specific organization of movements, which rely on the various components that make up the artistic image. In

dance, for example, for a ballerina to perform “The Nutcracker”⁵, she must know which body parts to move, where on the stage to position herself, the required speed, and the roles being portrayed at any given moment; in other words, the dance requires the ballerina to use movement simultaneously as the raw material, the instrument, and the product of the form being created and performed.

In summary, bodily culture activities with an artistic dimension—whether dance, circus arts, or mime are specific forms of expression shaped by human capabilities and knowledge generated through social practice. Consequently, they cannot be understood merely as the free expression of feelings or of the body, as often happens with dance. Performing movements to musical accompaniment does not in itself constitute dance, as that is not its essence as a cultural activity. In order, to be properly understood in its higher form and thus contribute to human formation and development, it must be treated as art: not merely as movement, but as an intentional activity organized to create and communicate something to others.

When dancing, human beings develop not only their motor skills but also their higher psychological functions. Dance is impossible without intentional bodily movement and without functions such as memory, imagination, and attention. Therefore, when discussing the relationship between bodily culture activities and art, we must highlight the essential role of memory and imagination as the higher functions that enable the creation of art. Martineli and Almeida (2017, p. 529) note that,

Memory and imagination are higher psychological functions that make the creation and production of art possible. There is a direct link between reality and imagination and, in turn, a reciprocal link between imagination and emotion. Thus, works of art foster human subjectivity by enabling those who encounter them to experience feelings and emotions.

In this sense, the connection between bodily culture activities and art lies in their creative aspect and their direct link to the development of human subjectivity, as they

⁵ The “Nutcracker” ballet was written in St. Petersburg and premiered on December 18, 1892. The ballet consists of two acts; the original choreography was by Marius Petipa (1818–1910), and the score is one of three ballets composed by the Russian Tchaikovsky (1840–1893). The story takes place at the home of a young girl named Clara on Christmas Eve, a night filled with fantasy and magic. During the plot, a human-like nutcracker embarks on an adventure alongside Clara.

enable the formation of intentionality and expressions that transcend mere utility or immediate physical necessity.

It is precisely through this development of human subjectivity that bodily culture, in its relation with art, possesses its cathartic potential. Historical-critical pedagogy recognizes this cathartic movement as fundamental to didactics and to the organization of a pedagogical practice committed to the transformation of the individual. After all, the goal of education is to enable individuals to advance both quantitatively and qualitatively in their understanding of the world, so that they may act upon it in a conscious and meaningful way.

Duarte (2019) argues that generating catharsis is essential to creating meaning not only for students but also for the teacher; for him, this cathartic movement takes effect when the content is planned and composed of organized, intentional activities that are consistent with the students' context and their current level of development.

Thus, if bodily culture, as an artistic manifestation, can provide to individuals with an intensified subjective experience of conflicts that propel self-awareness to ever-higher levels, it performs a formative—that is, educational—function. Educational work, whether involving art or other subject matter, shares this same goal; for, according to Duarte (2019),

if we understand education as a process through which human beings consciously shape other human beings, this process can only be fully realized if it combats fetishism—insofar as fetishism is the very negation of the human being as the creator of their own reality and self. If art has a mission to de-fetishize, the same applies to education that refuses to capitulate to the generalized fetishism found in contemporary social life (DUARTE, 2019, pp. 470–471).

Historical-critical pedagogy holds that, in the educational realm, catharsis occurs not only through students' engagement with art but also through their engagement with other fields of knowledge (such as science and philosophy), provided that their relation with cultural productions is undergoing a qualitative transformation. For instance, when a child learning to read and write masters new syllables and subsequently new words, he is altering his consciousness regarding knowledge historically constructed by humankind and, in doing so, undergoing a cathartic process.

Thus, characterizing a change as "cathartic"—contrary to common belief—does not necessarily depend on the emotional intensity of that change; rather, it hinges on the occurrence of a qualitative shift in the individual's subjectivity. This holds true even if the shift is minor, indirect, and nearly imperceptible, as it is often the case with the catharsis generated through mediation and the educational process.

5 Final Considerations

Viewing body-culture activities (dance, circus arts, and mime) as art historically produced by humanity entails analyzing their social significance and the importance of appropriating them for the development of conscious individuals. The teaching and learning of an artistic activity constitute a process of transforming the individual — fostering higher psychological functions, creative capacity, thought processes, and volitional action—through the appropriation of scientific knowledge.

Affirming the role of art expressed through body culture means understanding it as a vehicle for catharsis and as an intellectual product of human social practice in its totality. In this analysis, we identify body culture as essential knowledge within the educational process, wherein the dialectic between the individual and the work of art becomes a vital source of information for comprehending the world in its entirety.

It is also important to reaffirm that, even within historical-critical pedagogy which recognizes the cathartic movement as a decisive element of the educational process and human development, it is impossible to properly explore this category without understanding it through the lens of Marxism, grasping its political, ethical, and revolutionary significance within the context of class struggle.

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