



An Aesthetic Interpretation of the Pilates Method: its principles and convergences with somatic education

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ABSTRACT – An Aesthetic Interpretation of the Pilates Method: its principles and convergences with somatic education – The Pilates method, originally called *contrology*, has been gaining a significant following in Brazil. This article discusses the method's principles and convergences with somatic education by analyzing the original works of Joseph Pilates using an aesthetic-philosophical approach. It seems implicit that the Pilates method can be instrumental for the performing arts, and the article accordingly points to some connections in this regard. However, the article also argues that, in the absence of the guiding principles proposed by Pilates, the method ceases to be an *art of control* and instead is reduced to something not much different from other physical exercises.

Keywords: **Pilates. Somatic Education. Performing Arts. Aesthetics. Body.**

RÉSUMÉ – Une Interprétation Esthétique de la Méthode Pilates: ses principes et ses convergences avec l'éducation somatique – La méthode Pilates, appelé à l'origine *contrologie*, rencontre actuellement une importante adhésion au Brésil. Dans ce texte, ses principes et ses convergences avec l'éducation somatique sont abordés dans une approche esthétique et philosophique des œuvres originales de Joseph Pilates. Il semble tacite que la méthode peut contribuer efficacement aux arts de la scène et certaines relations sont proposées en ce sens. En outre, il est question que, sans les principes directeurs proposés par son créateur, cette contribution cesse d'être un *art du contrôle* pour se réduire à une pratique physique pas très différente d'autres.

Mots-clés: **Pilates. Éducation Somatique. Arts de la Scène. Esthétique. Corps.**

RESUMO – Uma Interpretação Estética do Método Pilates: seus princípios e convergências com a Educação Somática – O método Pilates, originalmente denominado de *contrologia*, vem encontrando adesão significativa no Brasil. Neste texto, discutem-se seus princípios e convergências com a Educação Somática em uma abordagem estético-filosófica das obras originais de Joseph Pilates. Parece tácito que o método pode contribuir de modo efetivo ao artista da cena e são propostas algumas relações nesse sentido. Mas também é discutido, neste artigo, que, sem os princípios norteadores propostos por seu idealizador, essa contribuição deixa de ser uma *arte do controle* para reduzir-se a uma prática de exercícios físicos não muito distinta das demais.

Palavras-chave: **Pilates. Educação Somática. Artes da Cena. Estética. Corpo.**

Introduction

The so-called Pilates method has been gaining a significant following in Brazil, especially in the past decade. Like any enthusiasm for a body-centered practice, fondness for the phenomenon's superficiality may stymie the practice's foundations and produce a kind of mixed practice in tandem with other current trends, thus creating a situation in which the appearance of the practice becomes more important than its essence. Considered as one of the techniques encompassed by the direct or indirect concepts of somatic education (Strazzacappa, 2012; Foster, 2011; Loui, 2009), Pilates is commonly associated with dancers and has been gaining a following among actors and others in the performing arts.

Somatic education is an expression coined by Thomas Hanna in the early 1970's and initially encompassed a number of similar initiatives regarding body-based practices that proposed a holistic and ecological understanding of the body (the *soma*). These practices can be understood as holistic in the sense that they do not separate the body and mind as is commonly posited in, say, Cartesian dualism. They are also understood as ecological to the extent that the principle of life is considered fundamental, preceding the mechanical and anatomical model of the study of the human body.

According to Hanna (1976), somatics emerges to the extent that we deal with a living body that is not simply reduced to its physicality, but that brings with it the relentless psychological, philosophical, and social weight of the individual embodied in his reality. Bolsanello (2011) associates this need for embodiment in reality with, for example, Merleau-Ponty's presumption of phenomenology, bringing the permanence of subjectivity and the unyielding nature of the experience – two features of the change in paradigm that soma proposes – to the area of corporal education.

Hanna (1976) questions the noisome emphasis on positivism that permeates modern science, a positivism that treats the ecological presumption as if it were a poetic or prophetic vision, but not a scientific theorem. In an attempt to edify that which he calls somatic science, the author brings together some of the practices consonant with these proposals, characterizing a principle identified by Strazzacappa (2009), namely that somatic education is constituted

from the practice to the theory. Therefore, examples of somatic education are varied, so that the examples meet Hanna's presumptions despite showing rather varied qualities and quantities. The Pilates method, the object of research of this article, also presents aspects that both liken it to and distance it from somatic education. Treatment of the method is critical for characterizing it as, and determining the applicability of, somatic education, especially in the face of its current proliferation. This is likely why Bolsanello appears cautious when she states "[...] some lines of Pilates" (2011, p. 17) may be considered somatic education.

An initial comparison of some principles of somatic education with the Pilates method reveals similarities and differences. Strazzacappa (2009) points out a common principle of the Pilates method and the methods jointly covered by the concept of somatic education, namely that their pioneers sought a solution to some of the anxieties of their times or even to subjectivity. Joseph Pilates' interest in the recovery of World War II veterans led him to design a method to counter the anguished injured or amputated body or the body that was physically and mentally marked by the horrors of war. In Joseph Pilates' proposal, human integrity is congruent with this principle of rescuing humankind's unity and identity (Panelli, 2009). Another principle of somatic education presented by Strazzacappa (2009) that is also evident in the Pilates method is the relationship between bodily techniques and health, providing a glimpse into alternatives to traditional medical treatment and preventive care. In the opening to one of his central works, *Your Health*, published in 1934, Joseph Pilates expresses what he deems to be a grave situation:

Daily, from sunrise to sunset, radio, newspapers and magazines broadcast to the world how to maintain health, how to regulate health, what to eat, what to drink, even what to think.... That's why I've written this booklet, so that all who are interested may read, digest and know what is wrong with the human race today and how its physical ills can be cured or prevented. Through medicine? No! Through their own efforts, simple exercising, simple health rules that can be observed and must be observed (Pilates, 2008, p. 7-8).

Some scholars, such as Pestana da Silva (apud Bolsanello, 2011), interpret the practice of Pilates as something other than the practices that compose somatic education. Their main arguments

point out that Pilates' explicit proposal of physical conditioning is counter to the gestural freedom professed in somatic education, and thus Pilates' focus on the product is incoherent with somatic methods' regard for process. Denovaro (2012) argues with Pestana da Silva's position ascribing a fundamental role to the relationship between movement and breath in Pilates, in addition to stressing the instructor's positioning as a determinant in how the session is conducted. Regardless, it is clear that pronouncing Pilates to be a method of somatic education is not immediately obvious, and the ways Pilates is applied are crucial to determining its proximity to the term somatic education.

Other principles seem connected to the concept of somatic education, especially when we consider terms that operate within the same sphere, such as mind-body modalities or mindfulness, for example. In this sense, we might even stress criteria like those proposed by Gavin and McBrearty (2006), such as the need for self-reflection during the activity, consigning oneself to the present moment, focusing on postural alignment and breathing, and perceiving movement and surrounding space. This final perceptive quality, in fact, offers its own fertile ground for conceptual exploration – under the terms kinesthesia or proprioceptive sense of aesthetics – as proposed by authors like Sheets-Johnstone (2009; 2011). In other words, the principles of somatic education, although reasonably confined to the concepts expressed, have been branching out and taking on new connotations in accordance with the emergence of other practical and theoretical proposals. Understanding this mobility of terms seems to be part of a reflexive immersion in somatic education, a concept that is still expanding and untethered to theoretic hermeticism.

Therefore, in this article, the Pilates method will be understood as a possible form of somatic education only when proposed in a manner congruent with the principles established by its creator. Correspondingly, this article suggests that the failure to observe these principles would result in a practice of Pilates probably coopted by some of the superficial physical exercises currently available.

Another factor that contributes to the multifaceted nature of this reflection is the fact that the demands for physical preparedness for actors and, above all, contemporary dancers bring to light the discussion about which work models produce satisfactory physical

effects without exposing the artist to a routine of exercise that fails to respect his body as poetic and sensitive. In other words, although it appears convenient for performing artists to increase the range of certain parameters, such as strength and flexibility, this cannot come at the cost of exposing the body to brutal or mechanical models. This article makes its arguments based on the method professed by Joseph Pilates (1883-1967), today known as Pilates but originally termed *contrology*.

This article neither rejects nor avoids the term physical preparation, though somewhat overused in its allusion to sports performance. That choice will ultimately be made by assuming that overuse may lead us to proposing various terms for a single practice whereas it would be more prudent to propose various practices for the same term. Furthermore, the possible substitute term *bodily preparation* assumes – in the language of some actors – a wider, technical-expressive connotation that may admit interferences with the concepts. Indeed, *contrology* proposes physical preparation exactly as expressed in the first lines of the method's basic treatise, *Return to Life through Contrology*, written by Joseph Pilates in 1945 (Pilates, 2010).

A cursory observation of the series of exercises that compose the method would have us suppose that many movements are similar to calisthenics or physical-fitness conditioning. The basic series of so-called mat Pilates or floor Pilates, which is the basis of the method, includes stretching, strength, and abdominal exercises.

Generically speaking, an initial mat Pilates series consists of 18 exercises and follows an order that takes the body through a type of warm-up, localized muscle work, and stretching. Basically, the exercises encompass four exercises with guided breathing (hundred, roll up, spine stretch forward, and saw); the objective of the first exercise is to warm up and prepare the body for physical work, and the other three exercises are designed for stretching. There are seven exercises that focus on abdominal work (single leg stretch, double leg stretch, scissors, lower lift, corkscrew, crisscross, and teaser). The remaining seven exercises (one leg circle, rolling like a ball, swan, single leg kick, side kick, seal, and front support) alternate between working the muscles in the upper limbs, back, and sides. Nevertheless, what sets the method apart or makes it unique among contemporary bodily practices and situates it among the movements that make

up somatic education, is its strict connection to guiding principles, principles that are biodynamic but also singularly transcendent.

Thus, the initial series only truly assumes the proposed meaning in the original method, found in Pilates (2008; 2010), when added to a core concern for the guiding principles. These principles seem to bear an aesthetic aura. In other words, there are certain objectives that are not met with mere gestural mechanics. The meaning of the aesthetic aura used here comes close to the intention of synergy proposed by Thomas Hanna to define the field of somatic education. Indeed, “The term ‘somatic education’ is defined by American Thomas Hanna as ‘the art and science of the inter-relational process between awareness, biological function and environment, all three factors being understood as a synergistic whole’” (Hanna apud Strazzacappa, 2012, p. 18).

This inter-relational process, which allows biological function, awareness, and environment to interact, seems to connect with Joseph Pilates’ proposal (2008; 2010), in which we identify central concerns that are present while doing the exercises, but that are not solely kinesiological in nature; rather these concerns encompass a broader performance that, because they touch upon a more sensitive sphere, we may call aesthetic. In other words, this transcendence of the method seems to result from the apparent capacity of the practice of Pilates to exceed mere physical execution and to speak to the practitioner’s state of awareness and relationship with the environment.

The fact that Joseph Pilates refers to his own method as the “art of contrology” (2010) gives hints as to epistemological affiliation and to comprehension of the movement involved. By choosing six principles that lie at the heart of the method, the practice itself seeks an uninterrupted dialogue with these principles, not limiting itself to the immediate materiality of the exercise. There are relational units of awareness and reality in each of these principles, factors that transcend mere physicality, that draw our understanding of Pilates closer to the field of somatic education, and that seem to allow for this aesthetic-philosophical approximation. These six principles are: breath, centering, concentration, control, precision, and flow.

The following sections will directly and indirectly discuss each of the six Pilates principles. This is not a technical presentation of

these principles. This section is not meant to compare the principles to the assumptions and objectives of somatic education, which was done in an introductory way until now. The aim is to aesthetically and philosophically reflect on these principles and, thus, possibly reinforce thoughts on certain aspects of this method or perhaps even diversify or better develop how we view such.

First Disposition: the perfect instrument of will

A watershed in German philosophy and, to a certain extent, the breakpoint of modern and contemporary thought, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) chose will as the central element of the world and the expression par excellence of mankind¹ (Schopenhauer, 2005). In this context, the body occupies a central place, which counters the Cartesian psychophysical dichotomy and breaks with the well-established epistemological tradition. Will is what causes man to act, makes man exist and pushes man in his direction in life. Our body, as an immediate expression of this will, is thus the cognitive apprehension of this world.

It is interesting to note the congruity between Schopenhauer's understanding of the world and one of the bases proposed by Joseph Pilates when he lays out his arguments for contrology: "[...] an ideal system to transform the body into a perfect instrument of the will" (Pilates, 2010, p. 2). In this claim, Joseph Pilates appears to guide his proposal to synchronization between the power and the act, or – in other words – between will and action. Whether on account of the incorporated inheritance of the thought-body dichotomy or whether by the ills of social life in a post-war world, a condition distant from the body, unarmed and fading seemed to him more the rule than the exception. Contrology seems to propose a vector of important change that, while perhaps still unable to promote holism, collaborates for future possibilities that encompass such. Perhaps one of the best ways of conceptually interpreting the method lies exactly in this premise, whereby we simultaneously see both the proposal's merits and its limits.

In *Return to Life through Contrology*, Pilates quotes Arthur Schopenhauer, indeed the only philosopher he quotes in the entire book: "Schopenhauer, the philosopher, said: to neglect one's body for

any other advantage in life is the greatest of follies” (Pilates, 2010, p. 11). Evidently, given the particular form of writing out the method, far more centered in the author’s convictions than on backing his writings up with theories, there is no explicit development of a vitalist philosophy² in his practice. Nevertheless, Joseph Pilates (2008; 2010) clearly argues in favor of internal dispositions for life and reality, to which his method would be an efficient connector. And it bears remembering that, for Schopenhauer, one of the greatest influences in his thought, was the Upanishads, the sacred collection of Vedic texts that express connections with philosophies such as yoga and stress the need to live in the present, the need to not be overrun by desire, and the central importance of balance in a broad sense.

As Barboza summarizes (2001), Schopenhauer praises the unity that he finds in Plato and in Kant and that is also illuminated by the Upanishads. Research like that of Martins (2007) reports positive results in the work of actors-dancers who submit to a combination of Pilates and yoga, stressing certain congruencies between them. It seems important to emphasize that the Pilates method, when analyzed from a philosophical point of view, does indicate a certain uniformity and expansion that hint of a philosophy, at least in the most common and restricted sense of the term. It flirts with aspects of Schopenhauer’s philosophy and, at the same time, with the Vedic content within. Nevertheless, going beyond this mere initial identification seems imprudent. The Pilates method does not possess the philosophical depth of the age-old practice of yoga and is not set up as a proposal of systematization of thought in the strict sense. This does not detract from its value or applicability in a variety of contexts; it merely places the Pilates method in safer position for conceptualization and consideration.

Going against a philosophical tradition in which rationalism is considered the only form of comprehending reality, Schopenhauer finds the matrix for consciousness in the body and proposes a self-understanding that is in a way similar to some of the principles of somatic education. For Schopenhauer, the body is “[...] an immediate object, the starting point for perception and thus of the subject’s knowledge” (Schopenhauer, 2005, p. 62). The subject who can know nearly everything from his contact with reality can learn little about his own body from that reality, since the relations of

cause and effect do not apply to him as an immediate object. As an object of representation for other subjects, he may be submitted to relations of cause and effect, but, as an immediate object (body), the direction of knowledge should be from within the body to outside the body. For the discussion proposed in this article, the notion of the body presented by Schopenhauer is similar to the principles of somatic education, but it also brings to light divergent boundaries specifically regarding Pilates, given that exercises are standardized based on an external reference, and that the principles of the method are yet representations that measure the knowledge of the body – Schopenhauer’s immediate object.

A central concern of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is that of desire, which is broadly dealt with in his authoritative work, *The World as Will and Representation* (2005). In modern civilization, with the atrophying of our instincts, these desires correspond more to external objects than the demands of the body. In their yearning to be satiated, they fuel a cycle of unhappiness: to desire, to not fulfill, and to be frustrated by not fulfilling the desires. Or likewise: to desire, to fulfill, and to be frustrated by the fulfillment of our desire not corresponding to the intensity of the desire. Only the wisdom of life is capable of staving off being coopted by such a cycle, since this is discernment between what is the desire of my body as an immediate object and what is mere representation of the desire emanating from the material world (illusory). For Joseph Pilates, the body as an “instrument of the will” (2010, p. 2) seems also to allude to a practical wisdom that gravitates between its principles of control and balance in both the exercises and, by extension, everyday life. This wisdom would be essentially destined to retrieving man’s “[...] naturally healthy condition³” (Pilates, 2008, p. 12). In Pilates’ own words, “What the savage lacks in mental development, the civilized man lacks in physical development” (2008, p. 24).

We also must consider that the sense of control that spans these understandings does not have a connotation of being limiting or coercive. Given this, the control that seems to interest Pilates is dominion over movement, just as what interested Laban (1978) and others, although in different ways. According to Panelli (2009), Laban met Pilates and admitted having incorporated aspects of contrology into his proposals. Broadly speaking, what is under

debate seems to be the regulation of energies and the construction of techniques capable of optimizing gestural efforts. However, there is a fundamental distinction between pragmatism in this regulation and some underlying aesthetic notion in Pilates. When Joseph Pilates expressed his ideas in the opening lines of his book, he proposed developing “[...] high levels of strength and beauty” (Pilates, 2010, p. 2). It is precisely this union with “beauty,” a consistent presence in the other aspects of his proposal, that appears to situate Pilates’ concern in an area that is not exclusively performatic or prophylactic, but that is centered on the aesthetic content of its practice. From the earliest expressions of his method, Joseph Pilates presented himself as a person concerned with the elegance of gesture and posture and in search of psychophysical holism represented by the dominion of bodily actions, even if he repeated the psychophysical dichotomy various times in his discourse (Pilates, 2010, p. 2-4).

In summary, it is interesting to note the epistemological affiliation of controlology and a philosophic vitalism allusive of Schopenhauer that bring to light conceptual convergences. It is at least worth reflecting and responding to assertions like the body must be an instrument of the will, which is not exactly a Schopenhaurian project. However, the bases consisting of thought and proposal underlying the Pilates method reveal how their essence seems to encompass, albeit incompletely, an aesthetic vitalism of gestural materiality.

The Body Based on Pilates for Performing Artists

Although current enthusiasm surrounding the Pilates method may lead us to presume its benefits, we cannot directly infer that this methodology is of interest to the performing artist. Caution is needed to not assume that the Pilates method, by presenting itself as an alternative to the usual techniques for physical preparation, such as, for example, the most common forms of physical fitness⁴, is capable of eliminating all problems found in these practices and, at the same time, providing nothing but advantages for those who practice it. Whenever a model shows signs of overuse, an opposing alternative seems to bring with it a certain hope that it is the solution to the problems generated by such overuse. This attitude causes us to frequently find underlying factors, behaviors and conceptions that,

if not transformed, will continue to determine a sense of finality for any practice, even those that present themselves as renewing.

Understanding the body as an expressive matter may bring with it a rejection of physical preparation that restricts the body's ability to mechanically increase strength, flexibility, and coordination. Even though these physical characteristics may be interesting, by themselves they are not capable of empowering the body in its expressive sense, and they may even jeopardize its development, depending on the methodological brutality. That is why there is an implicit contemporary mistrust of the modes of performatic preparation that can be reduced to physical qualities or whose narrow objective is to simply increase strength, flexibility, and coordination. Nevertheless, the compensatory tendency of models that are not concerned with such characteristics may result in proposals that do not contribute to effective physical preparation, assuming this is of interest to the performing artist. In other words, satisfactory levels of strength, flexibility and coordination are important prerogatives for the person who desires good physical preparation, including if the person is an actor or dancer, but – at least for actors and dancers – it is important to reflect carefully on the methods and quantities, in order to not affect the necessary delicacy of the poetic body.

Joseph Pilates' life experiences have perhaps been decisive for the pluralism present in his method. As a police instructor, circus performer, and boxer, among other professions, he seems to have acknowledged the need for a versatile body. In this sense, contrology points to life, which is exactly what Pilates' most important work indicates (*Return to Life through Contrology*). Although presented in a different, post-war context, this return to life seems to bring with it the desire to dexterously place the subject with respect to reality. For a potent body heading to the stage, this return perhaps represents the recovery of the essential strength and disposition, that have been obliterated by the passive and sedentary way of life that is ever more dominant in contemporary culture.

In Pilates (2008, p. 12-13), we can find what he considers a concrete result of the efficiency of his method applied to singers, actors, and dancers, shown here in a series of photographs. Following this image, Joseph Pilates underscores that the gains in posture and *perfect form* promoted by contrology would allow the subjects to develop professionally.



Image 1 – Photos from the archives of Joseph Pilates portraying dancers he deems to have physically and expressively improved through his method.

The systematization proposed by Bonfitto (2002) seems especially useful here. The author refers to three materials for the composition: the body as the primary material, physical actions as the secondary material, and elements that constitute physical actions as the tertiary material. If the actor's primary material is his body, it must be full of energy and capable of serving as support for the other materials. It is interesting to note that Bonfitto himself supports his arguments here by citing Aristotle's important conception of matter. He shows evidence that matter is fundamental for maintaining strength, which leads back to the understanding – as discussed throughout this article – that a body deprived of “disposition” and “physical strength⁵” becomes naturally impotent, whether in life or on the stage. The body as material for the composition thus needs to achieve and maintain high levels of activity.

Also according to Bonfitto's systematization (2002), if the secondary material consists of physical actions, an analogy can be made with controllogy. The models seems rather pertinent when proposed to performing artists to the extent that exercises in the Pilates method must be carried out under the prerogative of control, either in terms of breath or in terms of flow of the exercises or even

in terms of the amount of effort expended for each moment of the series. In the most basic definition of controllogy, Joseph Pilates opposes to the exhaustive repetition of exercises and summarizes that what is most needed for the method to work is total concentration in execution of the exercises. Without this, he argues, it would make no sense to choose controllogy over any other exercise method (Pilates, 2010, p. 10). This demand for concentration supports the analogy of the artist's immersion in his stage work and the ensuing importance of physical preparation for such immersion. Evidently, these are just some inferences that, by overlapping different theories – one related to the stage and the other to physical preparedness, reopen the debate on controllogy in current and localized terms.

It is rather baseless to say, in opposition, that the stage artist subject to repetitive and exhaustive physical exercises can take such into his expressive work, tending therein as well to the repetition of models. Nonetheless, this is an apparently possible risk. We would have to suppose that the subject quietly and unexplainably separates physical preparation from expressive preparation to accept that a model of repetition-based and mechanized exercises, untethered by rhythmic-strength control, can possibly add value and not jeopardize.

It is because of this impression that, at this point in our argument, we cannot but notice that the most widespread models of physical activity – nowadays represented by gym workouts and bodybuilding – mostly fail to satisfactorily meet the physical-preparation needs of the performing artist. On the other hand, the demands of – for example – contemporary dance or other manifestations of contemporary theater, which often require intense physical efforts far beyond basic levels, challenge the artist's physical preparation. The forms of somatic education based on the principle of bodily awareness, highly connected to the self, despite their noted emphasis on other factors that make up the energetic total that represents the stage artist's body, are not sufficient to offer these specific levels of strength, flexibility, and control. Controllogy may perhaps represent something mid-way between these two extremes. In a way, perhaps much of the method's current expansion may be linked to this intermediary space, the alternative sought by those desiring a healthy and active body, but also physical activity along the lines of gym fitness.

We can analyze each one of the six principles of controlology to substantiate this view of the possible adaption of the method to the stage artist's physical preparation. For such, note that this article will once again make use of aesthetic-philosophical inspiration, whereby the construction of meaning comes from the form the sensitive datum is treated (Johnson, 2008). Thus, each of the principles will be analyzed starting from what it aesthetically present, as a sensitive datum, which will evidence a possible bridge between these principles and the proposals for the performing arts.

Breath

Many proposals of somatic education are concerned with breath, some more explicitly than others. This article has already cited Gavin and McBrearty (2006), who discuss that the focus of the breath may be the most commonly encountered principle among the techniques comprising somatic education. This article is not concerned with comparing controlology to other techniques, but rather stressing its attributes as specially related to somatic education and the performing arts. In this sense, the method's concern that the exercise should be carried out with proper breathing is already, from the start, an attempt at totality that is often not present in the most common physical activities. We also see that controlology is not limited to proposing inhaling and exhaling in harmony with the effort or strength expended, which is most common. In fact, we see a proposal for rhythmic breathing, which goes beyond merely supporting the exertion, characterizing a sense of totality in the gesture. In other words, our inherited segmentation of the body, that views the body as anatomical-physiological, and that understands physical activities within the framework of this vision tends to ascribe a mechanical function to breathing, reducing it to the need to supply the body with oxygen. It is intriguing to note that Joseph Pilates perhaps incorporated experiences with Eastern body practices when conceiving his own method since we see that he ascribed breathing an unusual role in his exercises (Panelli, 2009, p. 22). One possible sign of this hybridism is the fact that not all exercises are accompanied by breath guidance.

Joseph Pilates seemed to have a certain mystical understanding of breath, positing that deep inhaling and exhaling can stimulate

the muscles and revitalize the blood (Pilates, 2010, p. 12-13). It is interesting to note that Joseph Pilates' proposal is presented without any empirical evidence, but a more aesthetic reading of his work perhaps allows for a form of exegesis in which the terms used and the results expected are less objective in nature and more constitutive of a certain aura of vitality for the body. And is Nietzsche's construct of "great health" (2010) not somewhat similar? For Nietzsche, health, as proclaimed in modern times, conveys static wellbeing whereas the great health he desires corresponds to a transfiguration of the body's energies such that energy goes from passive, thus a slave and sick, to active, thus strong and healthy. The aesthetic level of this transfiguration of health in Nietzsche seems to echo in the quasi-alchemic vision of breath in Pilates' controllogy, whereby "[...] breathing is the first act of human life and the last" (2010, p. 13). As is recurrent in Joseph Pilates line of reasoning, breathing appears in his discourse not as a technique, but as an "art" (Pilates, 2010, p. 13). In this, his alchemy of breathing, there seems to exist a certain manichaeism, also recurrent in his work. There seems to be a type of dispute between "pure air" and "impure air" (Pilates, 2010, p. 13). The latter is potentially damaging and needs to be expelled, while pure air is reinvigorating and stimulates the most important result of controllogy: circulation.

Circulation

Circulation is not traditionally listed as one of the method's principles, since it is not directly linked to movements and is rather a result of such movements. However, since this analysis is aesthetic and not kinesiological, this important concept in Joseph Pilates' conception will also be presented as a type of method, since it composes an attribute without which we would not be thinking completely about the Pilates method.

For Joseph Pilates, circulation cures and rejuvenates (Pilates, 2010, p. 12). The basic principle of his reasoning consists of the idea that the blood irrigates all of the body's tissues and thereby bears the possibility of renewing it by supplying fresh air, as mentioned earlier. Additionally, circulation is entrusted with removing some damaging substances and excreting them from the organism. Therefore, physical exercise that speeds up circulation immediately promotes

such benefits. The first exercise in his basic series is called *hundred* and consists of a type of pumping of the blood based on vigorously balancing the arms one hundred times. Activation of the body in this phase is the central element, and the means to achieve this is circulation. Since the series needs always to be executed in the same order and during a time of extensive incorporation, we can infer a quasi-ritualistic form of execution. Joseph Pilates presents his method in very self-assured manner, absolutely convinced of the results, but he stresses that the method requires commitment on the part of the practitioner. This following of the method is as pragmatic as other models of physical activity, yet it is permeated by an outlook that discusses the active being in a type of corporeal plenitude heading toward *joie de vivre*.

The healing properties of controllogy reach a certain status especially to the extent that some dancers who have not met success with other therapy claim to have been cured after a certain time practicing controllogy. This was the case of Romana Kryzanowska (1923-2013), a dancer with George Balanchine, who supposedly recovered from a severe ankle injury. She ultimately became a great proponent of the method for performing artists, especially dancers. For Joseph Pilates, circulation would have been what cured Romana. The practice of highly specialized gestures, such as those of classical ballet, does not incorporate complete circulation, and thus does not meet the principle of totality that controllogy so defends. In this sense, controllogy is considered both preventive and healing for dancers (Panelli, 2009, p. 25-26).

Fluidity

Linked closely to the principle of circulation is flow, whereby the method's exercises must be carried out. Unlike vectorial, linear and disjointed execution, controllogy requires continuous and harmonious flow among the exercises. Every exercise must be executed within the series starting from three different phases that substantiate this flow. The phases are preparation, the execution itself, and the transition between one exercise and another. Evidently, the last phase of an exercise mixes with the first phase of the next and, as a whole, creates a continuous series of harmonious flow. Although there are moments of intense exertion during the series, this flow confers an interesting

organicness upon the set, and therein we find the analogy with stage/performance processes whereby this continuity proves especially useful. This does not mean to say that there is any explicit stage/performance intention in the constitution of contrology's exercise series. The focus of this article is, in large part, the perception that there are points of convergence between the two, despite the fact that it appears this was not the intent of the exercises. Aesthetic meaning often emerges exactly from this point, that is, from the congruence of feelings among different phenomena united by the sensibilities common to them.

Centering or Center

Another interesting aspect of the method is the proposition that energies and actions should be organized from the center of the body outward toward the extremities. This principle places the method of Pilates in a zone of perception that is highly connected to expressivity. Although it is possible to argue the mechanical benefits of this proposition, Joseph Pilates' intention in supposing an expansive body, a body that condenses energy at its center and expands the energy with gestures, seems implicit. According to Gallagher and Kryzanowska (2000), Joseph Pilates' intentions are contained in a paramount principle of the method – the center – since “[...] fluid movement starts always from the center of strength and radiates outward” (Gallagher; Kryzanowska, 2000, p. 12). This expansion that the principle of centralization comprehends is the antitheses of the more explicit vectors of strength exercises whereby overload seems to promote gestural introspection. Bear in mind that one aspect that is always stressed in contrology is the combination of strength and flexibility exercises (Wells; Kolt; Bialocerkowski, 2012). Indeed, the series encompasses a planned alternation between moments of concentric action and moments of eccentric action. The danger of gestural brutalization or bodily strain owing to the practice of resisted exercises thus seems minimized.

Beyond these technical considerations, from an aesthetic point of view, the meaning of centralizing in the gestural act is also rather useful. In addition to representing the capacity for maintaining a certain symmetric balance around this center or alluding to a core for storing energy, the image of the center refers to physical,

psychological, and expressive balance. Loui (2009, p. 49), for example, demands of the actor an ability to maintain great central physical strength, allowing the actor stable and agile movement of the entire body throughout the space. Control of the center, through breathing and flow, is just as important an element of the performing arts as it is of contrology.

Precision and Concentration

These are two separate principles, as mentioned earlier, but since the analysis in question is aesthetic-philosophical and not kinesiological, the author takes the liberty of treating them as one. As already noted, Joseph Pilates promises broad results, but he demands total dedication from his practitioners. This dedication is especially apparent in an attention that is completely immersed in precise and concentrated physical practice. The lack of conscious focus when doing the exercises seems to represent, in Joseph Pilates' discourse, a disconnection from the transcendent aura that he, in a certain respect, proposes. In this sense, there is a quasi-metaphysical understanding of the practice, which leads Joseph Pilates to recommend that there is no reason to practice contrology if there is not full commitment and complete concentration during the exercises (Pilates, 2010, p. 11).

It would be precipitous to suppose that the method, if practiced with such care, proposes an immersion capable of opening the frontiers of the body to new sensitivities especially because the basis of the movement is still repetitive exercise. What is notable here is that the combination of principles interestingly reconfigures repetitive exercises. It thus seems possible to comprehend the role of precision and concentration as moderators of dispositions for the repetition of such exercises, completely separate from that which we find when there is no influence of these principles.

Control

Finally, the principle that lends its name to the method could be nothing less, epistemologically speaking, that the glue that binds all other principles. The concept of control in Joseph Pilates' works is the basic pillar on which all other principles are expressed, as if what governs the synchronicity among them is the body's capacity

to control dispositions and actions. In this context, movement is considered a complex and relative phenomenon. Unlike a causal, Newtonian vision in which the gesture is derived from determined anatomical-physiological actions, the art of movement stems from the control that comes from perfect coordination between will and action. The cosmology in which these concepts circulate in Joseph Pilates' rhetoric assumes psychophysical dichotomous forms, supposing control as an attribute of the mind in the direction of the body. Pilates also refers to the spirit, but there is no consistent ontological unfolding of the concept to the point of singularizing it, and so the spirit appears as yet another of the objects to be controlled. The capacity to control is fundamentally an ability of coordination, different from the others, but homogenous with them.

Control, as the *topos* of contrology is, for this article, an aesthetic figure since it binds all the interchangeable sensitive data that refer to the human being and not just his biomechanics. The production of meaning that Pilates proposes for this orientation (and only for this one) seems something that can be harmonized with the processes of physical preparation meant for performing artists, whether through solidness in a series of strength, flexibility or coordination exercises or whether in the principles that guide the method, in line with what we currently refer to as somatic education.

Final Remarks

The Pilates method seems to occupy a singular, non-consensual place among that which is conventionally called somatic education. In a certain manner, it also plays a different role with respect to the most common set of Western physical activities. A certain rediscovery of the method and its rapid expansion throughout Brazil has led us to reflect on its characteristics in many ways. This article is an analysis of the aesthetic-philosophical inspiration regarding the guiding principles of contrology, finding possible resonance among performing artists.

The presumption that the Pilates method curbs the difficulty of developing a manner of physical preparation for stage artists is naïve. Saying so would be another way of jumping on a method-based bandwagon. As this article has argued, Joseph Pilates' proposal does

not abandon the Cartesian, platonic, psychophysical dichotomy. His project is clearly positivist and even moralizing at many points. His messianic commitment to his own method clouds a more consistent argument regarding the actuality and extent of both his thoughts and proposals.

Nevertheless, the advances that Joseph Pilates proposes, the results of corporal versatility that he seems to have tested on himself and in his various professions, are notable and even surprising. Seeking out actors and dancers in order to increase their corporal and expressive potential often reminds us of the search for diverse techniques, among which those comprising somatic education have been gaining prominence. A reading of controlology from its principles, such as proposed here, seems to be a valid alternative for the intersection of proposals with the performing arts. At the same time, it is clear that, if the method's guiding principles are extracted, the empty gestures of other activities will be repeated in similar manner and degree.

The stage artist's interest in this game can be decisive. More than passively making use of a method to increase physical preparation, epistemologically and aesthetically understanding the principles of the method may generate a renewed interest in the method's so-called transcendent qualities. In the sense of the logic that this article has attempted to devise, however brief, this recovery seems to revive the desire that the method proposed by Joseph Pilates be tested as an effective art of control.

Notes

- ¹ The original work dates to 1819.
- ² The philosophies of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and followers are called vitalist philosophies, and the premise is *say yes to life*, as opposed to the ascetic philosophies that preceded.
- ³ Adapted from “a normal-nature condition” in the original. The author opted for “naturally healthy condition” in light of what follows in the immediately subsequent argument.
- ⁴ Such as bodybuilding, calisthenics, and a wide range of activities offered by gyms.
- ⁵ Here we use the terms “disposition” and “physical strength,” though they are relatively vague, to maintain consistence with Joseph Pilates discourse throughout his writings (2008; 2010). He argues that his method is capable of conferring greater disposition for life, for work and, as already pointed out, for the art produced by singers, dancers, and actors. Throughout his argument, he consistently points out increased physical strength.

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