

Experiencing the Body in Order to Enrich the Spirit

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Abstract - The perception of the body by man, is a main topic for humans in every age and culture. Our objective is to review few points from the past and to discuss what is occurring now. Doing so, we hope understand what could be the dangers for present generations, and more importantly, to discern some of the opportunities. First we will look how body is perceived as raw material to be handled with care, being 'by definition' complex and dangerous. In a second phase we will see how human body acquire subjective legitimacy. Then we will observe the more complex stage that occurs when the individual wins sole ownership of his/her body and embarks upon the search for meaning. Lastly, we will attempt to describe the possible path in which the philosophy of leisure and culture of the body offer the individual a process towards personal harmony.

Key Words - Body, spirit, meaning, consciousness, harmony.

Vivenciando o Corpo para Enriquecer o Espírito

Resumo - A percepção do corpo pelo homem é um tópico primordial para os seres humanos em todas as épocas e culturas. Nosso objetivo é revisar alguns aspectos do passado e discutir o que está ocorrendo agora. Assim fazendo, nós esperamos entender o que poderia constituir perigo para as gerações presentes, e mais importante, distinguir algumas possibilidades. Primeiro abordaremos como o corpo é percebido como matéria bruta, para ser manuseado com cuidado, sendo "por definição" complexo e perigoso. Numa segunda etapa veremos como o corpo humano adquire legitimidade subjetiva. Em seguida, observaremos o estágio mais complexo que ocorre quando o indivíduo obtém domínio exclusivo do seu corpo e parte na busca do significado. Por último, tentaremos descrever o possível caminho pelo qual a filosofia do lazer e a cultura corporal propiciam ao indivíduo um processo em direção à harmonia pessoal.

Palavras-chave - Corpo, espírito, significado, consciência.

"The human spirit inside the human body; here we find the greatest strength inside the greatest weakness" --Isocrates

As early as the fifth century BC, Isocrates pointed out what he saw as the problematic nature of the body within the human being's perception of himself¹ (BARASH, 1992).

In this presentation, we will not spend time discussing the ideas of Plato² and others (such as Descartes) who proposed that man exists on two simultaneous yet different plains of the body and the soul, the physical and the metaphysical. Nor will we discuss in detail the fascinating attempts of Aristotle

and Spinoza to describe man as one being. Aristotle³ said that 'to be' was meant in terms of the many meanings of the human being, and Spinoza saw the body as the basis for the human spirit.

We will not spend time discussing Albert Camus⁴ sincere revolt vis-à-vis the fact that while man is mortal, he also has an absurd desire for immortality; a conflict that would lead Andre Malraux⁵ to wish to 'make his mark' on the world's 'flesh', with the fingernails of his passing existence.

We cannot begin to enumerate the infinite number of attempts to contain (in both meanings of the word) and frame our 'trouble-making' bodies.

We intend here to focus on the manner in which humans perceive the body in terms of belief, conventions and changing views in different periods,

¹ "Before 2400 years Aristotle asked 'how soul is linked to the body?', and we still are asked the same question" Leibowitz, I., 1982.

² "But the soul doesn't never reason better than when nothing disturb it, no hearing, no sight, no pain neither some pleasure; in the contrary, the soul isolate totally in itself, getting ride of the body breaking up all contact with it in order to try to understand reality." Plato, Phedon, 65b.

³ The soul, I-403ab; III-425b

⁴ Camus, A., (1942).

⁵ Malraux, A., (1933).

from one civilization to another. The history of art illuminates this point well, presenting the difference between the representations of the human body in Western civilizations. We will see how the human body appears as a sign and symbol of a period and particular social status, how it disappears behind a cardboard, placate image or bursts forth with a richness of detail in perfect concrete beauty, while still attempting to deny its material nature. We will see how the body is an unimportant detail in the greater celestial composition during one period, and takes the center of the canvas, if not the entire space of the picture, in another period.

The body, and primarily the perception of the body by man, is a topic that has occupied and continues to occupy humans in every age and culture. Our present and more specific objective is to consider a few central points from the past and to discuss what is occurring in our generation, in order to note some of the dangers, and more importantly, some of the opportunities.

- First we will look at the body when perceived as raw material, or an animated infrastructure, seen as an object to be handled with care, being complex and dangerous, like that of an explosive material.
- Second, we will examine the body, which has escaped from the 'narrow passage' between this world and the next, to take its place in the vast gallery of life, here and now. We will look briefly at the place of the body when its owner wins actual subjective legitimacy.
- Then we will look at the more complex stage that occurs when the individual wins sole ownership of his/her body and embarks upon the search for meaning.
- In summary, we will attempt to describe the possible path in which the philosophy of leisure and culture of the body offer the individual a path to personal harmony.

I. The Body as Raw Material

In periods that were ruled by faith, as in European Middle Age, considered to be telling the absolute truth, the body was viewed as temporary raw material where the care of it was complex and sometimes even dangerous, similar to the care of an explosive material.

The mass of believers who lived in the shadow of institutionalized faith was used together with their bodies to uphold the splendor of faith on earth. The presence of faith became stronger as more believers

joined and believed in its teachings, and the life-style it dictated. The material existence of believers was, therefore, the raw material upon which the existence of faith lay⁶.

However, this basis required dealing with two problems stemming from the existence of man as an actual mortal being, that is:

- As a material that eventually deteriorates, and
- As a body made of flesh and blood that is fragile and easy prey to temptation.

The first issue could be dealt with via the command to 'increase and multiply', thus providing new followers. The second problem was dealt with via a careful process of education and socialization within a framework that was dictated for the body, or more precisely, for the owner of a body whose physical existence was somehow reduced.

The external appearance, collectively, made each individual appear in costume that fit his 'status' in the social mosaic. This refers both to clothing and to other items covering the body. Thus one's canonical identity was determined – in the eyes of others -- and ensured, as clothing was a kind of insulating material protecting one from the uncontrollable currents of concrete existence. Clothing was used as something similar to an insulation material which changes a dangerous electrical cable into a harmless wire.

The life-style and daily order were set, with precise details of how to behave, and these also determined the various specific roles that the body was meant to play. These roles were not in accordance with what the body felt or perceived, but rather were the faithful fulfillment of the predetermined role. In other words, specific behavior did not stem from what the person felt in his/her body and mind in a particular situation, but rather was a direct result of the repertoire of determined and required models of behavior. Thus, for instance, a woman married to a farmer or workshop owner in a European city one thousand years ago would be devoted to her husband regardless of whether she was attracted to him and would accept his views regardless of whether she agreed with them, as this was how it was determined she should act.

Prohibitions and sanctions. In order to ensure the enforcement of these social orders, a series of prohibitions was set up, along with censorship and

⁶ "But first, let us consider the fact that man is not pure spirit. This statement, of course, could be spoken in a variety of tones. Not seldom, it is said with the feeling of regret, an accentuation that is usually understood as something specifically Christian, but both Christians and no-Christians alike. The sentence can also be said in such a way as to imply that 'certainly, man is not pure spirit', but that 'the true human being' is nevertheless the intellectual soul" Pieper, J., 1998.

sanctions. The individual learned to internalize these prohibitions, first in order to ‘prevent himself from falling [from grace]’, and secondly, this socialization gave people a means of participating in the community notion of ‘providence’, in which each individual guards and takes care of the others. If we return to the previous example, this kind of self-censure was likely to prevent any expression of rejection that the woman’s body might feel in contact with her husband even without her awareness. Similarly, it was expected that she would be called upon to foil any kind of attempt by other women around her to be disobedient toward the men in their lives.

Nevertheless, or more precisely, despite all of these precautions, the body was the Achilles heel of the heavenly world. Thus, in addition to all of these fortifications, a concentrated and perpetual effort was made to inculcate a kind of suspicion and reservation between people and their bodies. Thus the body was bluntly described as weak, vulnerable to every bad influence and easy prey for any temptation. The individual believed, with the depths of his collective awareness, that the range of temptations that was set before his body was the secret weapon of the forces of darkness, wishing to harm the forces of good and piety. It was fairly certain that neglect of appropriate clothing meant that Satan had come to reside in the weak body of a heretic.

Thus if the body should be only used as a living structure representing the glory of faith, it was appropriate that believers lived their concrete lives with constant suspicion regarding possible treachery by one’s body and the urges flowing within it; a kind of ‘Fifth Column’ or threat from within ⁷.

II. The Body as Raw Material For a long time

For a long time the body was seen as raw and fallible material because people lived in the shadow of faith that believed one’s physical existence was temporary and unimportant, a kind of short and dark passage to the next world, where he would find the light of truth and eternal rest. Thus people tried to become convinced of the subordinate nature of the present physical existence and the unimportance of time spent during this passage.

However, with the improvement communication and the increased flow of people and trade, new ideas

came to light that brought forth alternatives to this closed monopolistic world. The proportions of human existence on earth became broader. The enthusiasm for the heavens, to which so many impressive cathedrals had been built, was on the decline and the desire to take greater advantage of the time spent on this earth, here and now, was becoming stronger. The ‘passage’ mentioned earlier was slowly becoming wider and larger, turning into a great hall in which the body was gaining importance, as something to decorate and glorify, and less as something one spent covering in a concealing and isolating manner.

The body thus stood in the center of the canvas, while the background sought to eternalize its earthly incarnation. Leonardo Da Vinci performed dissections on dead bodies in order to more fully learn the physical structure of the human body. This allows him to present it in all of its beauty while he drew figures from another world at the same time. Moreover, mortals dared to display portraits of their bodies in the living rooms of their homes. Galileo listened to his body when he looked at swinging chandeliers that whispered ideas that conflicted with the existing ‘order of things’. Descartes, who indeed suspected his bodily sensations, wrote a guide that enabled ordinary people to make use of the body for concrete and experimental science.

A person may consider it insufficient to believe and begin to investigate the dimensions of the bodily existence, as it becomes broader and ‘safer’ to do so. Such an individual can now be seen as being more ‘present’ in his body, and may even attempt to realize his or her life here and now. “Our father who art in heaven, please stay there/ and we will stay on the Earth/ which is sometimes so beautiful...” ⁸, writes Jacques Prevert.

Nevertheless, only at the end of the 19th century do we begin to pay attention to the development of the body itself, and not only to its abilities. Gymnastic clubs and sports competitions arose that emphasized the aspiration of improving physical ability, though their mottos show that they still viewed the body as a means (for instance, the sports association that was established in France in 1873 stated: “Homeland, bravery and morale”). Only some twenty years later, did Pierre de Coubertin attempt to renew the ancient Greek tradition of the Olympic games as a cultural summit in which man is free to devote his life to the care of his body and the strengthening of his spirit. “The effort is the greatest

⁷ Even in last 19th century, in the Victorian era, we still have this sort of statement about ‘Lady Lilith’ painting by Rosssetti: “She is body; she is sexuality; she is danger” Pollock, G., 1994.

⁸ Prevert, J., (1946)

satisfaction; success is not the goal but rather only a means to achieve more. The individual has no value except in relation to all of humanity”, writes de Coubertin⁹.

And where are we now? What remains of all of the warning signs and forms that previously protected the body, with the weakening of the traditional demands and systems of guardianship?

The times of uniform dress that showed the collective identity of the individual, his profession and place in the fabric of society have expired. Today we bear witness a fashion that is almost universal –jeans and a t-shirt, alongside an infinite variety of available fashions. One hundred years ago, it was possible to know who was who only by seeing which hat he wore – men of the working class wore a cap, the bourgeois wore a bowler, and the remaining aristocracy wore top-hats when they attended their tea parties. In our day, it is hard to know what one’s status and profession are by what s/he wears, and to understand where s/he ‘belongs’. Clothing is no longer an ‘isolating’ cover between the individual and his body, or between his body and the “earthly” perspective of those around him. Clothing emphasizes the body’s characteristics and natural qualities that the suntan, diet and plastic surgery also attempt to emphasize. The body’s covers are no longer a method of isolating and distancing, but rather an invitation to converse.

Similarly, the idea of pre-determined and constant daily routines has expired. Conventions change quickly and their constancy is only a broad framework of possibilities, within which each individual has a good deal of space to maneuver. In addition, the individual responds at each point in time in accordance with specific events, while attending to his unique feelings. The body is no longer a shell dragged along in response to the ‘automatic’ nature of canonical life, but rather the body is a full partner in each individual’s physical existence. Everyone wishes to be the lord of his own body and, almost from the moment a child learns to say his first words, it is difficult to force him to wear a particular item of clothing. Women have won their place –after ongoing battles—with full dominion over their bodies. At present, legal discussions are being held regarding the right of the individual to determine when

and to what degree his body will be connected to life-support machines.

The legitimacy of the individual’s ownership of his body has greatly weakened the mask of the sanctions and censorship vis-à-vis those who wish to do something ‘forbidden’ or unusual with his body. Homosexuals have come out of the closet with trumpets and drum-rolls, and divorce is no longer considered the mark of Cain. Women can now decide to experience motherhood without needing to be ‘encumbered’ by the presence of a father. From this perspective, the body is indeed at the center of man’s private and public life.

It would appear that we live in an era in which man and his body have been freed from all of the restraints of doing things ‘properly’, and that the rights of the individual are now thriving within a perfect democracy. However, this ‘liberation’ can become similar to another form of bondage... Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, 160 years ago:

“I wish to list here the main things that the new tyranny can bring to the world. I see a vast, undifferentiated mass of people, who are similar and equal, celebrating themselves endlessly, seeking only small pleasures to gladden their hearts. Each person takes care solely of himself and doesn’t concern himself with others’ fates: his wife and children are all humanity to him. As for his neighbors, while he does live near them, he doesn’t see them; he touches them but doesn’t feel them. He lives for himself and for himself alone, and if he even has a family, it is certain that he doesn’t feel he has a homeland”.

Alienated within his body, man dedicates himself joyfully to these new bonds because he is devoted to egocentric temptation that is so similar to freedom, but is merely permissiveness.

From here the feeling of having reached a ‘dead end’ arises, where life is made up of momentary satisfactions, and is empty even while it is full of every possible pleasure. And thus we must ask: Is the ultimate glorification of the body in fact an over-valuing, not of the body, but of the body image? Are we witnessing the new-old perception that views the body once again as raw material, a convenient means for bringing the masses to a new temple that goes by the name of “the shopping mall”. Has the statement “I believe, therefore I am” has become “I buy, therefore I am”?

III. The Presence of the Individual in his Body: To feel –a step beyond?

⁹ We must remember the disgraceful use made by Hitler of the 1936 Olympics held in Berlin, and we cannot ignore the present scandals revolving around the Olympic games in our day. However, must we give up the aspiration to realize Coubertin’s vision when holding such games?

And so it is that the individual is exposed to a full existence; he not only exists in one place but also is 'present' in his body. Like an artist who is poised, ready to create, one wishes to mobilize his whole self in order to create some concentrated sign of his entire existence. Let us consider our artist:

She sits before a blank sheet. She is both excited and anxious. She is excited because, on this page, some part of the trembling agitation of her whole being is expecting to come to light; feelings and pictures, still foggy, lie at this unique confluence of her existence, the point at which this intersection is occurring, that will always be a once-in-a-lifetime confrontation between what she has accumulated in her consciousness until this moment in time, and the present moment of existence, in which she looks both around and within herself.

The body is subject to chaos: to sights and feelings, sounds and smells, thoughts and colors, memories and longings, and the connections between all of these. The body exerts its senses and mobilizes its wisdom, and though the moment is passing, its passion seeks the absolute and the eternal. It is from here that both the excitement and anxiety stem. Every feeling, every sight that is revealed to the spirit's eyes bursts forth in its desire to be. However, in order to be, there is a need to take form. Forms come and go, arise and fade, between the feelings, the thoughts, the picture that exists in one's mind and the white page. The anxiety is great: so much excited vitality revolves around the tip of the pencil in the artist's hand, and yet the page remains blank.

Suddenly, a sentence is written, and is immediately present. Like the initial paint-stroke on an empty canvas, the sentence asks not just for consideration but demands partnership. The person is no longer alone with herself; the dialogue has begun. Slowly the page fills; the mental images, and foggy feelings take shape, the words condense into combinations, and the text creates an image of its own. It is as though the lines write themselves under some kind of enchanted spell by the author. The creation is here, though it has been born via the coupling between what has been noticed in one's internal world and what can be seen by the world around, still it is now an entity unto itself.

The artist looks, contemplates things around herself and inside herself, and finds that everything has changed. It appears, in 'objective' terms, according to

outside observers, as though nothing has happened, though among the mirrors spread before herself and within herself, there is now a new entity. The artist's perspective has now broadened.

One who is present in his or her body and who listens to the great many voices wins back the right to discover not only the agitation of life but also life's purpose; that is, the meaning of life.

The 'present' person wins back the strength of the intimate, individual (and thus unique) experience for himself.

Let us return to the shopping mall... There we see a giant wall covered with tens of television sets, all tuned to the same channel, showing the exact same picture. However, when we consider those who watch the same broadcast (for example, the body of an Olympic runner that stretches and contracts at the outer limits of ability), we understand that each of the many viewers has an intimate and subjective experience of this athlete. Each viewer feels a unique experience inside his body that is different from that of every other viewer; it can also be an experience from which he can reach further, if he wishes to make the effort, to a fuller understanding that will broaden his awareness.

Those who are 'present' in their bodies may attempt to experience the concrete subjective, while at the same time aspiring to overcome it, in order to reach the universal. The poet Lamartine summarized his personal and subjective experience on the absence of his lover as follows:

"Another person is missing, and the world becomes desolate".

And here we have, as though with a magic wand, the unification of a great number of feelings in one grand vision. The poet has created alchemy, and a simple anecdote has become the song of the body that exclaims, and is lifted up to, a universal human statement.

When the individual has learned to listen to the range of feelings that results from his body dialoging with its environment, when he lifts his gaze, he notices the surrounding chaos that ultimately leads him to a new and dynamic order. Then he feels a connection and ceases to be dependent. This will be his personal statement, however it is not an alienated one, because the authentic and complete individual takes responsibility for his whole being and expresses

himself, not in order to melt away into the anonymous mass, but to discover affinities in the Buberian sense.

As a result of attentive listening to his body, the individual can bring his awareness to a rising spiral. First he experiences his body as flesh, then he connects with the realm of feeling; from here he moves to the sphere of understanding. After the rational stage, the individual often wishes to return to feeling in order to feel what he seems to now understand, hoping that it will bring about a further improvement in his understanding. “The individual must learn what he experiences, and experience what he learns”.

The individual who is ‘present’ in his body and who opens himself up to observation of his consciousness can penetrate and be attentive to the whispers of his body, that is completely submerged in his physical being, because from it, he knows that he can expect to obtain meaning from his human existence. So the person is both physics and metaphysics, and the pathways between them. For this, the individual must be available; that is, he must be free.

IV. The Culture of the Body and of Leisure, and the Empowerment of the Individual

In the last few decades the phenomenon of free time has been increasing. However, free time is not necessarily leisure. Free time is a space that has been opened up in the daily task-oriented and functional agenda that does not have tidings or obstacles other than what the individual wants and is able to place within it. “Free time is time that is open for all forms of human corruption or for every kind of human blossoming”. Because there, in the time that is free of defined tasks and guardianship, the individual stands at the junction of his freedom, where he must determine how to use this time, which is the basic resource that he possesses. Will he find himself being dragged after every passing and random fancy in various forms of casual leisure, most of which are passive? Will he free up his energy for self-development?

When the individual with free time turns it into real leisure, one’s experience is of walking in vast open spaces that are free from the ‘expected’, in which there is a chance to rehabilitate one’s lost ability to wonder. What I mean to say is: the individual can notice the uniqueness in what he thinks he sees in the familiar and daily routine. With this rehabilitated ability to wonder, the individual may discover a great number of

perspectives on his existence that he has not previously been exposed to, because none of the roles in his routine daily life has required them. This is a kind of extra-territorial area in which the individual feels, with his every organ and being, that there is no longer any requisite need or task that must be done to justify his existence. We are talking about a direct meeting of the person with himself, when he feels himself to be free of any title or role; wherein he may discover that he is more than his titles and roles. This is the place in which one can be open to the opportunity to listen to one whole self, to feel her body and listen to its infinite messages.

Following Paul Valery, it has been said that the intention is for “internal leisure ... that significant peace of the human depths, that absence –in a place beyond all judgment –in which the pure perspectives on life are refreshed and maintained, in which the individual makes a kind of disconnection between past and future, from the awareness of ‘now’, from pending and standing commitments, from expectations that lurk, without worry, without tomorrow, without internal pressures. A kind of rest in absence, of beneficial emptiness that returns his spirit to its freedom”.

This kind of emptiness brings freedom back to the spirit, enabling it to sprout wings beyond the required, and beyond the compromise, toward a worthy life. Emptiness –that is being present in one’s absence from the concrete, invites the individual to lift his sights to higher planes, to his *raison-d’être*; there he will likely find a small detail of his functional existence that gives great meaning to the understanding of his entire existence.

It would be accurate to say that the noises filling our physical being, including concerns, commitments, remains of the past and fears of the future cannot disappear or allow our consciousness to be free. However, it is possible, just for a short time, to dim the strength of the physical world in order to allow ourselves to notice the metaphysical, to experience its crystal tones and to engrave it in one’s conscious memory. Henceforth we will always be able to notice its presence, as a sort of comet, in the earthly, physical day-to-day chaos. In order to better understand this process, we can think of what happens during a hearing test. Initially, the technician plays a particular sound alone, and then gradually adds additional noises – typical background noises—and asks the subject to

press a button each time s/he is able to hear the first sound.

Attempts at such disassociation from our surroundings will enable us to hear the sound of meaning, the sound of one's spirit, in order for us to be able to notice its 'broadcasts' even in the cacophony of what we know as daily life.

In the painting by Vermeer, 'Woman embroidering lace', we see a routine and banal moment as people of that period could see often, and to which it is likely they did not pay much attention. And yet Vermeer invites us to look at this moment with a new perspective, without the fog of 'déjà-vu', thus providing us with a chance to see beyond the instrumentality of existence in order to notice the budding spirituality—for those who are able to see—that is apparent in every human reality. The woman embroidering lace is fully present in Vermeer's painting, and her focused gaze bears witness to her total dedication to what she is doing. Though her work is apparently routine, she somehow concentrates the essence of 'being'. Moreover, affinity is born between the observer and this anonymous figure; slowly her Dutch clothing and environment fade in order to make room for the universal human experience. A banal anecdote dissolves all the borders of time, space, ethnicity, and all of the partitions which have attempted, and continue to attempt, to separate people from one another and from themselves, and also from their potential wholeness.

This is the place to deal with the apparently vast gap that separates the body and the spirit. It seems that in the internal calm, when the noises of the instrumental existence have become calm, the individual can listen to the sensations of his body and, at the same time be open to the aspirations of his spirit.

"And so it is for man... The subconscious desire to realize something benefits from the enlightenment of awareness only when his thoughts, that had previously been a chaotic mass, now wrestle with one another. Having previously prevented one another from being expressed, these thoughts begin to separate from one another, to become distinct, and finally relate to one another with rational links to become a meaningful whole". This is how we must view our existence, both the physical and spiritual.

Sometimes, primarily when the body's good functioning stops being taken for granted, a person can concentrate and feel the various organs in his body. The individual attends to his breathing, while feeling the

coolness of the air that penetrates through his nostrils, into his warm lungs. One feels the weight of his head and notices the flow of the pain as it moves throughout his body... However, at the same time, he does not cease to be human: aches and thoughts, pains and hope, all go together.

The body, with its unique intelligence, gives the individual its physical substance; the person who experiences his body consciously, causes the physical to rise—in terms of its meaning—to the metaphysical plane. And then, the metaphysical—with the power of its inspiration—is present in the actualization of ideas that are being woven into it. Thus it happens that a member of an Olympic team feels, in his body, affinity with the other members of the group; affinity that is the actualization of inspiration of the spirit returning and rising up to a spiritual experience that electrifies the body.

How much energy, not merely physical, can be found in a handshake between friends; how much spirituality arises in our consciousness from this very concrete contact...

From here, almost naturally, we see how physical education can become concrete metaphysical training. This occurs when the occupation of sport passes from the level of need—entertainment that is required, to the plain of aspiration for improvement.

Let us first concentrate on the body as the infrastructure of our being, feeling the effort of our muscles and the pleasure of the blood as it flows more quickly and increases the agitation of life... Then we can experience the internal partnership of the whole body and the growth of intimate motivation (RUSKIN, 1984).

To invest the space of leisure with all of the characteristics upon which we have elaborated can invite the individual to then choose familiarity with himself, in which all of the dimensions of his humanity can be found. It is true that this is a familiarity which will require effort; effort is required both to make the leap and to persevere. "The effort is painful, but of great value, more so than the deed to which it leads, because thanks to the effort, we have gotten more from ourselves than what was previously there; we have reached the sublime".

If you allow me, I dare to suggest as an outsider, that this training be called not 'physical education' but rather 'culture of the body'. Because culture is not

simply the matter of a teacher or instructor, but also the personal mobilization of the student who views it as an approach to life...

The focus on combined growth of the body *together with* enrichment of the spirit may bring the individual closer to his humanity. When this is pure of the tendency towards separatism, humanity that is built out of affinity becomes open to tolerance for others, which is needed not only in order to ensure fair play on the playing field.

‘Physical education’ or, as I call it ‘culture of the body’ is one of the few disciplines that still receives some degree of enthusiasm from students of all ages, and is approached with a leisure frame-of-mind.

In ancient Greece, the concept of leisure was called ‘scholē’. However, the aristocracy who was granted this great privilege did not view leisure as a kind of passive consumption of idle amusements. ‘Scholē’ was perceived as a personal commitment to invest all of one’s energies, and his physical, mental and spiritual resources in order to grow and develop, ultimately hoping to become worthy of the humanity that beat inside of him. The term ‘scholē’ is still at the root of all of our educational institutions, though some say that for some time now these institutions have forgotten the idea on which they were based; that is, the enrichment and holistic development of the person.

Are we allowed to dream that in the realm of ‘the culture of the body’ we will hold the end of the line that will lead us to a more humane future?

Is there a worthier task?

Who is ready, together with all those people of good will around the world, to hold up this torch?

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