

"I no longer want to think except with my body": practices for grounding and cultivating presence(s)

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Abstract

Faced with the suspension of face-to-face activities during the COVID-19 pandemic period, we were forced to continue and sustain bonds with the people we were accompanying in our teaching-research-intervention activities, as well as caring for them. The text starts from three experiences that share the challenge of continuing to act through the use of technologies: a body workshop with visually impaired people, a course on groups and collective practices, and another that carries out care actions with the body and artistic practices with women. The goal here is to present what was problematized and invented in the search for producing presence, body, and groupality in the formative process. We carried out cartographic research, mapping the regimes of affectability and following their effects. The immersion in this immense online universe was configured as a way to let oneself be mobilized by the unexpected event of the pandemic and by the possibilities of detecting what could be created, experienced, and learned in this process.

Keywords: Body; Group; Online environment; Pandemic; Presence.

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“No quiero pensar más a no ser con mi cuerpo”: prácticas para aterrizar y cultivar presencia(s)

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Resumen

Ante la suspensión de las actividades presenciales durante el período de la pandemia de Covid-19 nos vimos obligadas a dar continuación, cuidar y mantener los vínculos con las personas a las que acompañábamos en nuestras actividades de enseñanza-investigación-intervención. El texto se fundamenta en tres experiencias que tienen en común el reto de permanecer activos a través del uso de tecnologías: un taller corporal con personas con discapacidad visual, una materia sobre grupos y prácticas colectivas y otra de acciones de cuidado con prácticas corporales y artísticas con mujeres. El objetivo es presentar lo que se problematizó e inventó al tratar de producir presencia, cuerpo y grupos en el proceso formativo. Llevamos a cabo una investigación cartográfica en la que se mapean los regímenes de afectabilidad y acompañamos sus efectos. La inmersión en el inmenso universo on-line se configuró como forma de dejarse movilizar por el hecho inesperado de la pandemia y por posibilidades de detectar lo que se podía crear, experimentar y aprender en este proceso.

Palabras clave: Cuerpo. Grupo. Ambiente on-line. Pandemia. Presencia.

"Eu não quero mais pensar a não ser com o meu corpo": práticas para aterrar e cultivar presença(s)

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Resumo

Frente à suspensão das atividades presenciais durante o período de pandemia de Covid-19 fomos forçadas a dar continuidade, cuidar e sustentar vínculos com as pessoas que acompanhávamos em nossas atividades de ensino-pesquisa-intervenção. O texto parte de três experiências que têm em comum o desafio de seguir atuantes pelo uso das tecnologias: uma oficina de corpo com pessoas com deficiência visual, uma disciplina sobre grupos e práticas coletivas e outra que realiza ações de cuidado com práticas corporais e artísticas com mulheres. O objetivo aqui é apresentar o que foi problematizado e inventado na busca de produzir presença, corpo e grupalidade no processo formativo. Realizamos uma pesquisa cartográfica mapeando os regimes de afetabilidade e acompanhando seus efeitos. A imersão no imenso universo online se configurou como forma de se deixar mobilizar pelo acontecimento inesperado da pandemia e pelas possibilidades de detectar o que podia ser criado, experimentado e aprendido nesse processo.

Palavras-chave: Corpo. Grupo. Ambiente *online*. Pandemia. Presença

"I no longer want to think except with my body": practices for grounding and cultivating presence(s)

Introduction

After a year dedicated to the remote workshop via WhatsApp, Eronides gives a statement that brings to the scene the affective nuances of how he experienced the device: "I keep doing our study, trying not to think that I'm alone at home, only with a cell phone. The word that comes to mind is loneliness; it's very difficult not to be in contact with each other and to remain in contact only with this device." Adélia makes a counterpoint with the statement of loneliness generated in dealing with the cell phone: "It's good that we have this technology so we aren't forgotten in the world." We move forward. "This way we can communicate and know how our friends are doing." Others reply: "Today's class was wonderful. I was able to do the "8" with my nose and everything that was indicated" (Miriam). "We are all together in it! Our group is very strong" (Iolando). Cesario, completing the discussion about loneliness, cellular phones, and pandemics, says he really enjoyed dancing with us: "Let's move forward, creating paths as we can! Let's move forward with joy and faith in life. I remember something I heard one day: loneliness is not being alone; it's being lonely; it does not mean being on an island; it means being an island. So let's be open to new emotions, letting the feelings flow. Let's feel where we are, practice, and let's go!" The conversation audios they sent after the body movements shared the day's experience and brought some news on how they were doing.

In the last meeting with two groups of students, the objective was to address the feelings that had been produced by the pandemic. One class presented a list of songs and proposed the creation of a collective playlist. Another class proposed the theme "saudade" (homesickness). They began by reading a poem and invited the students to put images on a virtual wall that answered the question, "What do you miss?" The mural was quickly filled. There was no shortage of pictures of the beach, sunsets, bicycles, friends, the sorority they lived in, and the university. Then they invited the students to comment on the images posted there. Many opened the microphone to say that they also missed some things, even the hardships of life: the chain that comes off the bike on exam day, the smell of fish in the university restaurant that permeates everything, taking buses with air conditioning at full power on rainy days, and going to field activities by van. An atmosphere was created with lots of laughter and the realization that they missed the simplest things in life. At the end of the meeting, the students said goodbye, saying that they would miss this group, although they had never met in person.

Due to the pandemic, we appeared to have lost Tânia, a woman we accompany in our activities at the Núcleo de Apoio Psicossocial (NAPS) in Santos, SP. We could not find out about her

whereabouts until Leticia, an occupational therapist at the service, told us that she had always been dropping by to pick up her medication. Leticia tells us that Tânia always talks about the group, the teachers, the students, the experiences, and how much she misses those meetings. With this information, as Leticia is our partner in working with women, we arranged for her to mediate a possible meeting, now using Google Meet. The two were in front of the NAPS computer on the day and time scheduled. With a smile, Tania spoke of how much she missed her and of the joy of "being there." She told many stories with her eyes scrutinizing the screen, looking for faces, and seeking closeness with each student who spoke to her. It was her first time in front of a computer, and Tânia showed her taste and competence by putting her body "to the test" in connection with this new and unusual context.

We bring to the text, as the ground from which the knowledge is woven, three fragments of different experiences that will be resumed throughout the text, and that we lived as teachers and researchers with students and people who assisted in activities that took place during the pandemic period of COVID-19. They are scenes from a workshop on the body, movement, and expression held with visually impaired people; scenes from a remote classroom in a discipline about groups and collaborative practices; and also scenes from another discipline that focuses on carrying out care actions involving body and artistic practices with vulnerable women. The unexpected accompanied us in these and many other experiences. They touch on the inventive and careful dealing with the singularity of each situation, articulated with the limits imposed by the pandemic, the use of technologies, and the different ways of persisting and continuing. Based on what we could cultivate with our experiences and realizing the possibility of group construction and participation in the remote format, we are interested in detecting ways of elaborating, analyzing, and producing presence in the formative process, whether it is remote or not. We intend to analyze the ethical, aesthetic, and political meaning of experiences that provoke presence and activate different regimes of affectability to sustain the meetings produced at that moment.

Reinventing ways of being together and thinking about new (or old) questions

In March 2020, when our feet were knocked off our usual work paths because of the physical isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to reinvent the activities we had been doing before. Overnight, we emptied the classrooms and the various corridors that made up university life to sit in front of a computer or other mobile device in the places where everyone was, looking at a

"I no longer want to think except with my body": practices for grounding and cultivating presence(s) screen often composed of a mosaic full of closed cameras. A world of uncertainty invaded us, accompanied by ambivalent and sometimes contradictory feelings: loneliness, challenge, fear, longing, expectation, discouragement, strength, and sadness. Alongside many doubts, a question frequently arose at the university: are the students paying attention to what is happening here?

We consider the enormous difficulties in accessing a possible formative adjustment guided by online tools. The suspension of classes and any other face-to-face teaching and learning activities at all levels, from kindergarten to graduate school, highlighted the inequalities and differences in living conditions, seriously impacting (and even more so!) the students' economic, social, and emotional situations. The inequalities already present in our country, related to social markers linked to race, gender, class, and others, demanded permanent confrontation, care, and reflection (CASTRO, 2009; ARTES and RICOLDI, 2015; MACEDO, 2021; LIBERMAN et al., 2022).

As teachers, we realized that there was a universe going on behind the closed cameras: the absence of this resource in the computer, the poor quality of the connection, the fatigue generated by hours in front of the devices, the shame of exposing the house and the shared study space, the discomfort of conflicting and chaotic situations that could be happening in the home environment, and the embarrassment and shyness to expose one's image. We had to sustain doubt, not knowing what was going on or where the experience would take us, provoking countless reflections on what was possible.

Attentive to the affections in motion in this new format, we realized that the camera off did not always mean absence, disinterest, or lack of student participation. For some, the will to have cameras open could mean the need for a known and familiar scheme that accommodates the vision in front of an unknown world. The images allow access to facial expressions, body movements, reactions to the contents, and activities happening at that moment. Immersing in this vast online universe was configured to let oneself be mobilized by the unexpected event of the pandemic and by the possibilities of detecting what could be created, experienced, and learned in this process.

Many things happen whether or not we show what is going on behind the camera. In a way, the experience with visually impaired people is an opportunity to analyze how a workshop or a class does not function without the camera and a visuocentric tradition of control. If we take the body as multimedia, multifaceted, and pulsating (FAVRE, 1992, 2004; KELEMAN, 1992; LIBERMAN, 2010), it seems to us that considering the body only by the dimension of sense organs and, more than that, focusing on the functionality of the eyes, seems to restrict too much what the body, the living, and, therefore, life, can do. Keleman "understands the body not based on organs, which would be to

restrict the understanding about the processes through which a particular existence occurs, but as a medium that permanently builds form in the maintenance of a vital pulse" (FAVRE, 1992). Here, we find the possibility of accessing experiences of presence that awaken the body to the circulation of affections produced in the remote encounter in a situation triggered by the pandemic and its multiple effects on individuals and collectives, personal and professional, at the same time.

As our bodies opened to this new field of experimentation, we started to question: how is presence produced in these conditions, and what sensorialities could be provoked or even captured in this "new" situation? What do we learn from the bodies in these encounters? These questions have particularly accompanied us in our experiences in the online environment and face-to-face mode. For capturing the various dimensions that comprise a presence, it is necessary to recognize and connect with the various and varied states of the body. We understand that simply being in class does not guarantee presence, even in a face-to-face format. A person can be in a "present body" but be asleep, not very sensitive, impermeable, too stiff, or not very porous to what is happening in the encounter, among so many other states in their multiple shades.

In the years preceding the pandemic, we observed that there was already a lot of dissatisfaction and concern about students, professors, and employees getting sick in universities. Academic training was being questioned by the excessive bureaucratization of actions, the productivist demand, and the necessary search for spaces for dialogue and ways to produce engagement and collective participation – a form of care in the context of collective health. Intellectual sedentarism, or "comfort zones," that stifle thought, appears as a clue in anesthetized bodies, distanced in their territories of study and work, aching and suffering most of the time, alerting to a silent discomfort where they should act, think, or create (POZZANA; KASTRUP, 2019).

As Rolnik (2018) points out, regarding the "micropolitical insurrection" movements, we realize that the pandemic expresses, worsens, and amplifies many of the issues that had already crossed our paths, including the worsening of social inequalities and, therefore, also digital ones. During the pandemic, the right to education depended, among many other aspects, on the adaptive and inventive capacity resulting from the different access conditions to the Internet and digital technologies (MACEDO, 2022). With the reactive forces of conservatism and neoliberalism temporarily united, the malaise exceeds a tolerability threshold, and a state of alert is installed in subjectivity.

We are then seized by an urgency that summons the desire to act. The responses of desire to these traumatic situations oscillate between two extremes: a pathological

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As a result, our concerns about the online environment were and continue to be relevant in the face-to-face setting. What is "presence"? Is it to be present or to have a presence? How do you activate or build bonds of trust that sustain the encounter's continuity? How do you produce a spark that attracts the body to the event that springs from the experience? We start from the idea that producing presence is much more than doing a "warm-up" for the class through games or group dynamics. "Presence" refers to a way of being active, of cultivating a body that is sufficiently porous and sensitive to the crossings of the situation, whether it is the teacher's or the student's body, face-to-face or remote. In the face-to-face mode, the fact that the bodies occupy the same physical space does not grant presence and bonding. In remote teaching, for example, even when using open cameras as a protocol, nothing guarantees active presence and connection among the participants. Students are the ones who tell us if we are open to listening to the experience that happens beyond what we see since processes are alive and in permanent reconfiguration. This means keeping an eye out for the event.

Thus, we have chosen to follow an uncertain, ambivalent, mobilizing, and joyful path through these experiences that emerge as small insurgencies capable of influencing the social scene, starting from the problems that arise in order to proceed.

A little more of the experiences that make us think with the body

The first scene that opens this text refers to the workshop "Body, movement, and expression," held with visually impaired people at the Benjamin Constant Institute (IBC), in Rio de Janeiro, since 2007. Faced with a potentially dangerous and constraining situation, we began designing a device that could continue shooting and following the research-intervention practices while also ensuring the group's bonds were maintained.⁴ Since most of the people in the group are visually impaired and do not use digital platforms on the computer, we started using only audio in our communications from the beginning. We sent audios, prepared in advance, proposing a suspension of the usual postures, an emptying of preoccupations, attention to sensations, evocation of presence, and activation of the body through mobilization of joints and body movements accompanied by music. Our Tribe, as we named

⁴ From April 2020 to November 2021, the meetings took place through a WhatsApp group, gathering an average of 15 participants every Friday from 9 to 10 a.m., each one in her home. We maintained the meetings' regularity and held 70 workshops during this period. We had the participation of an intern from IP/UFRJ, Mayara Nascimento, who collaborated in planning, conducting, and recording the remote meetings. We are very grateful to her.

it, became the way we went on as a group with the workshop and dealt, as we could, with the guidance and mobility of its participants, the health and vital disposition of each one.

In these practices, many of the cognitive aspects of orientation and mobility that we have worked on over the years are present in an affirmative, propositional way: a way of getting ready for an activity, working on presence, body supports, breathing, and ways of standing and moving in space, including the affections triggered by the encounter, with music and other aesthetic elements. Our work focuses on perception and the senses (auditory, tactile, gustatory, visual, and proprioceptive) through an incarnated language in the conduction of activities and the possibility of making the experience explicit. Everything goes along with displacing attention, usually turned only to practical life and accomplishing tasks. It starts turning to what is present as experimentation of oneself in the relationship with others, the dance, and the emotion that emerges from the group meeting and that which is spoken and could not be anticipated.

The many testimonials sent via audio on Fridays underscored the importance of the group in maintaining a disposition for life. This was how we managed to follow how the participants were doing as the period of restrictions and health crises lengthened. They wanted to know how their families were doing and the mood of each companion.

"With this workshop, I feel safe continuing to stand up and move around wherever I need to go." "I am less afraid of this politicization of the world, of so many bad news stories." "One aspect that marks our meetings is the dance, a dance that is not just any dance, because it has mystery, something that takes us beyond." "I feel good; I learn a little more every day." "I prepare a place in my house, close the door so as not to be interrupted by grandchildren and neighbors, and when I see it, I feel that I am at the IBC, hand in hand with our tribe." In these brief speeches, we highlight the participants' implication in the practice as a self-study, a learning process done with the body, with the activated presence, when we disconnect from our usual life for moments, crossed by the performance of tasks, the care of grandchildren, and home activities.

"These exercises make me live well, I can breathe better," says Cesario, who spent almost two months in the infirmary of the National Institute of Cardiology, waiting for a surgery to implant a pacemaker. Every Friday he listened to the workshop and somehow was present, updating us about his process and feeding off the group's circulation through him.

Since its inception, at the end of every meeting, we chant together what they have invented as our battle cry (or battle cry of honor). Nilton, an 88-year-old blind man, is usually the leader: "Attention, group!" Everyone stands up, hands clasped on your thighs, head up, hands stretched high

"I no longer want to think except with my body": practices for grounding and cultivating presence(s) above your head, thinking of a better world, take a deep breath... We take a breath: one, two, three, and "haaaaaa!" Everyone shouts out in unison. Nilton sings along: "The best place in the world is here and now!" And everyone answers, "The best place in the world is here and now!" This kind of prayer—singing—went on to be remembered and embodied every Friday during the pandemic, in one of the final audios shared via WhatsApp.

The "here" for the group was no longer circumscribed by the IBC's physical space, where we used to meet. We were together in another space, amplified and connected across distances with our homes, other objects, affections, and people. And the "now" of that moment in a circle, collectively, via audio, was not exactly a synchronous time. It was a presence activated by the tribe, grounding capable of following and orienting itself by the events. Thus, listening was much more present in the process than any visual image transmitted by screens. Since everyone could send an audio file at the end (and was asked to send it because that was the only way we knew about each other), everyone's participation was more evenly distributed. Everyone was present in the voice, space, and time created by the workshop with Our Tribe.

The experience with blind and visually impaired people draws our attention because it can contribute to the cultivation of presences without the use of cameras. It may also make us ask, as Vinciane Despret (2012, p. 2) puts it, "What would change if the privilege we grant to the visual were replaced by a relationship with the world of sound?"

The second scene at the beginning of this text happened in the module Teamwork and Collective Practices, offered to undergraduate students from different health courses in the Health Work Axis⁵ of Unifesp/Baixada Santista. The objectives previously established in the lesson plan became, in the online environment, a great challenge: to produce spaces for listening and welcoming through health promotion actions. We saw the potential for creating group experiences with students, which are now techno-mediated by computer screens and cell phones.⁶

At the first meeting, the expectation was very low and the anxiety very high: what would our first approach be like? We proposed that they stretch and perceive and embrace each other. Then we

⁵ The Health Work Axis is one of the three common axes that make up the pedagogical project of the Instituto Saúde e Sociedade (Unifesp/Baixada Santista). It offers teaching activities for mixed groups formed by students from Physical Therapy, Physical Education, Nutrition, Psychology, Occupational Therapy, and Social Work undergraduate courses. To learn more, access the site at: <https://trabalhoensaude.unifesp.br>.

⁶ In face-to-face teaching, the students developed weekly or biweekly activities with several groups that were in the health and social assistance services of the region. With the impossibility of resuming the activities in the institutions due to the social distancing measures, the module was rebuilt in remote teaching with the following format: biweekly, each group of students would develop activities with another group of students, which we call "experiential workshops." In between these meetings, each class would meet with its own teacher to plan the activities for the next workshop.

invited them to write collectively on a virtual wall, to share who they were, what they had done in quarantine, and how they were coming into the group. In the second moment, we started planning the next workshop, and, while we were worried about giving all the directions, a student interrupted us: "Can I give a suggestion for an activity?" Little by little, body awareness practices, digital tools to provoke discussion about group issues, songs, and activities to close the meeting with the other group began to emerge.

Throughout the semester, the workshops went well: we took yoga classes, talked about the difficulties of quarantine, shared care and nonviolence strategies, learned what the health professions invented during the pandemic, and expanded our musical repertoire. While we lived the experience in the online environment, many questions crossed our minds: what senses are being produced about what we are doing? Is it possible to establish a relationship of trust through technology that allows us to dive into the experience of the encounter? What words and elements have the potential to draw attention to something meaningful happening in this online space?

Here, we propose games and experiments with cameras, microphones, and chats that explore the materiality of the connection tools. The technology that initially presented itself as precarious and limiting the experience could establish events that escaped the expected protocols and produced transformations in the classroom environment. This is a way to boost pedagogical and artistic practices that activate the production of techno-mediated presences. This disposition of the body requires being attentive to what produces "a spark, a special spark of life, an atmosphere transformed unexpectedly, and, for a few moments, a subtle instigation" (FEDERICI, LIBERMAN, GUZZO, 2021).

We start to think about the possible compositions that establish moods and different qualities of presence and that can be mobilized in this techno-mediated context. We map the crossings that occur when activated by the resources we have available, so that there is a simple and direct engagement, a possible outline for action, to make the group experience happen, even if we do not know in advance what is going to happen.

Giving and promoting meaning to the techno-mediated encounter between people separated by the pandemic event appears to have been a gesture of care and self-care, a pedagogical gesture of how to sustain a formation process, and an artistic gesture of forging a disruptive aesthetic experience in a time of bluntings and sadness, which are so common, trivialized, and normalized even within the university (FEDERICI, LIBERMAN, GUZZO, 2021).

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Here lies the political dimension of this wager, which aims to create tension and extrapolate the protocols that disregard the experience that takes place in act and that involves unforeseen and singular paths that take place "in the present of the experience." The use of protocols is full of automatisms, bureaucracies, obligations, and disciplinary strategies. In the field of health, where we are included, the same protocol is used in several distinct and unique situations, where technical knowledge and competence to intervene on the other's body are considered to prescribe "correct ways" to lead life and to live (Franco; Hubner, 2019). In the use of tools, this submission to regulations is also present.

Examples are the requirement for available cameras, the proper use of chat, the correct framing of the face, and the moment to turn the microphone on or off. This is a proposal to de-frame, to allow ways of being present and engaging in the experience to leak out. We are not interested in measuring the quality of the engagement or in defining the meaning of being absent or having the ideal presence but rather in stating that the activation of presence happens through the desire and need to share common issues. It is the encounters that interest us in the construction of possible presences. Processes that happen in action produce small events capable of establishing transformations in the bodies that inhabit the present.

In one of the meetings, a Mandala workshop was proposed and conducted by two students. The only open camera was of the student who was giving the instructions for the construction of the mandala, while her video showed the drawing she was doing. Another student opened her audio and put on a song free of vocals and with lots of nature sounds to inspire the activity. All the other students had their cameras turned off without knowing if they were executing the proposal. At the end, the student who was leading the activity asked everyone to post their drawings on a virtual wall. Many mandalas with different colors and shapes were shared by those participating in the meeting. Their bodies were present in the drawings and accounts of how they felt while doing it.

The third scene that opens this text reports the experience of the project "Art, body, and aesthetic and cultural accessibility," carried out since 2009, also in the Work in Health axis of Unifesp/Baixada Santista. The challenge for the continuity of this project was to stay connected to a group of women living in the northwest region of Santos. With the interruption of the face-to-face ways of doing things,⁷ we felt driven and eager to establish other ways to connect, to continue, and to sustain the

⁷ The work, which used to be face-to-face, took place weekly with the departure of a van from the university with the teachers and students, going to the "other side of the hill." There, every time, we would do what we called the "harvest," consisting of going to each person's house to take them to a cultural facility in the neighborhood to promote the most varied experiences with lots of music, conversation, dances, artistic projects, games, outings, snacks, affection, and, most of all, to enable the collective meeting based on the desire and the search for "joy."

bonds and the good things we had always achieved. What did we have "at hand"? The computer and the virtual tools, besides the good old landline phone that one of them still had and the cell phones are still little explored by these women, who, in their majority, are not young, except for one of them who has already communicated with us through social networks.

This entire situation prompted us to return to the questions we had been investigating: presence. Is it possible to be present in an online environment? Is it possible to build groupality, to sustain and create bonds, to build what we call a "common presence"? How can we deal with the inequalities and differences in the experiences of accessing the tools, considering the lives of each one of those women? Can we continue building a formative, collective, and trustworthy environment (FAVRE, 2004; KELEMAN, 1992), a place of support and creation?

Tania, a participant in this group of women, is a middle-aged black woman with rings on all her fingers and short hair (now graying), sometimes hesitating in her words, perhaps because of the medications she takes. Her movements were always "kind of nomadic." We did not know for sure where Tania lived, where we should pick her up, or if we had to wait for her arrival in the group. However, often Tania would be found at the house of a friend participating in the group, or she would show up at "*Arte no Dique*," a cultural facility in the region where we held our "on-site" activities. She liked to be with us; she was happy, she talked "nonsense," and she laughed. There was a strong bond there.

We closely followed his body and his eyes focused on the screen in the online environment, often bringing many narratives about his tastes, his days, and his pleasure in listening, his dancing a *forró*, and his homesickness. The group, sensitive and attentive to the experiences associated with the arts, that which "enlivens" lives (vitalizing practices), moved quickly to put a *forró* on the "*roda-galeria*." Tania's body stood up, the spinning was present, and she took little steps that crossed the limits imposed by the computer screen. Her body was moved by music that involves the body, making it contagious for our bodies to join in the dance. In our view, these were magical moments where rituals for being present in front of the computer were extravasated and amplified, creating a dancing, festive, and surprising atmosphere. It was fast, fun, pleasurable, and intense. Some bodies leaning on the chair left room for the movement of heads, torsos, and maybe arms. Other bodies, sometimes a little less embarrassed, got up from their chairs, trying out little steps in the small space where they were. It was such a joy. A small and immense event! Art against adversity (THOMPSON, 2021)!

These moments, among many others, were sometimes fleeting, simple, and remarkable. They happened in the midst of many challenges. Among the many challenges, we can mention many

"I no longer want to think except with my body": practices for grounding and cultivating presence(s) students' lack of empowerment due to the impossibility of experiencing the "flesh and blood" encounters promoted by the university's daily life—the series of personal, family, objective, and subjective issues of each one of us. For some teachers like us, the urgency, the need, and the desire to also learn quickly the resources of virtual tools to adapt to a whole other working condition require rethinking priorities, possibilities, urgencies, problems, and potentials in this context that add up to a planetary crisis (climate, political, economic, and social), particularly in Brazil.

Moreover, regarding the tools, paying attention to the captures caused by behavioral and communicational protocols that demand a certain kind of presence in the online environment was the challenge, as was also capturing and building presence, activating other sensorialities, other powers of this multimedia body (FAVRE, 1992, 2004), and so many others.

Friccioning ideas and crossing experiences

We are now interested in focusing on the experiences described above, resuming the issues that crossed our paths in each one of them, and trying to map the possibilities of presence production in the construction of groupality in the online environment, but not only in it. We will seek to analyze the ethical, aesthetic, and political sense that emerges from these experiences and the regimes of affectability that were produced at that moment.

There is a common germ from which we start to analyze the narrated experiences: how can the online environment be powerful in the group experience, causing sparks that make the body overflow the limits imposed by the "cold" use of technology? The clues that we will present will attempt to outline the emotions and sensorialities that were triggered precisely because we lived in such an unusual time. They aim to map the events built into situations that seemed impossible.

What kind of presence is possible to establish with remote platforms? The formative process was more intensely based on the fine articulation between the arts, the encounters between bodies, and the care processes. This composition could allow us to practice grounding actions in the virtual practices of vitalization by being together, having a common presence, and having the possibility to keep creating, imagining, and inventing other possibilities. It was also evident, once again, that the small movements, displacements, and actions that are often invisible or that occupy a place of "little recognition" made all the difference so that we could create impossible events (DERRIDA, 2012).

For this, we had to pay, as much as possible, attention to the voice, the tones, the words, and the silences. In a phone conversation or in a meeting with or without the activation of video, we

needed to exercise attention and presence to suspend or sustain judgments and shame, to show and "make fit" the rooms, the beds, the animals, the walls, the windows, the lack of light, the messes, and the different orderings in the environments or worlds of each one. We also needed to conquer a sufficient presence to be able to release our voices, sing, dance, and/or have a class with some family member present there, which was sometimes invited to participate or simply crossed the space, messing up protocols and desires of control or "adjustments." We had to stimulate and activate, perhaps more intensely, other regimes of sensorialities and affectabilities of this multimedia body (KELEMAN, 1992).

Crossed by these and many other issues, we tried, in each meeting held on the remote platform, to think and invent presence-building devices to involve the group. The proximity of artistic practices, different languages, and a work focused on or for the body in its multiple possibilities allowed and pushed us to create and play with all the crossings of this situation.

The concept of presence is associated with another way of thinking about joint attention (CALIMAN; CÉSAR; KASTRUP, 2020; CITTON, 2014). However, in this text, we resort to a dialogue with artists. The presence experiences and performances in the theater scene raise questions about how, when, and by what processes presence phenomena are produced and received. These are lenses that broaden ways of approaching and analyzing acts of presence in which phenomena of self, other, and place are defined. The "presence" that occurs in situated acts not only invites consideration of individual experience but also directs attention to the social and the spatial, provoking an exercise in "co-presence" that interferes with ways of perceiving and inhabiting place. Presence implies a temporality linked to past inscriptions in the present (GIANNACHI; KAYE; SANKS, 2012). Inspired by this idea, the speculations about the production of presence in the online environment make us question how we create relationships with what presents itself as this format's potency.

Starting from a "pop philosophy," to avoid the dualisms that have guided most debates and artistic projects around presence and absence, it may be more interesting to begin with the concept of happening (FERRACINI; FEITOSA, 2017). The category "presence" is almost a dogma for artists, and particularly for performance. The "discourse of demanding presence," the belief that it is easy and possible for humans to settle into the "here" and "now," is quite uncomfortable from a philosophical standpoint because the experience of what many call "pure presence" is inaccessible to humans (FERRACINI; FEITOSA, 2017).

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The objects and animals (in general) around us are present, i.e., available, outside the flow of time, in an eternal "here" and "now," but we are not. Our existential condition prevents us, no matter how much we want to, from being present, which is why it is so difficult to concentrate in a lecture or in a class. And the more we struggle to be fully present, the more we distance ourselves from the immediacy of a situation (FERRACINI; FEITOSA, 2017, p. 109).

The discourse of praising the presence in life and the arts is characterized by a nostalgic desire for eternity as a means of avoiding the flow of temporality, which causes us so much suffering because we know we will die. In this sense, when we manage to "disconnect" our memory from the past and the future, through drugs, the arts, sports, or sex (perhaps even the feeling of "being present"), we feel immense joy and an unusual sense of lightness (FERRACINI; FEITOSA, 2017).

It is also problematic to claim that perhaps the presence "does not exist." The body in physical action in the relationship with the other is sought as the "poetic construction of encounter" from the epistemic field of practical experience (FERRACINI; FEITOSA, 2017, p. 112). Presence can be defined as a force and not an object or attribute, in this case, of the artist, and can only be defined and felt in the relationship between bodies. In the performing arts field, presence is a force that intensifies and potentiates a corporeal relationship that can transform the bodies involved. Therefore, presence is collective, and when thought of radically, it is about establishing a powerful and poetic play relationship, the effect of a zone of forces in relation, amplifying the power to affect and be affected (FERRACINI; FEITOSA, 2017).

We could possibly infer that states of presence can only be possible in relation to other bodies, their porosities, and sufficient openness to the other to "generate collective intensity that narrows the relationship between presence and anthropophagy" (FERRACINI and FEITOSA, 2017).

We also resorted to the idea of events as fundamental to think about presence in contexts when everything seemed impossible and we hoped that nothing would happen; however, when we realized it, the body's state changed. There is something that we apprehend from the look, the voice, the body, and the small gestures that speak of presence. The event is made by an absolute surprise, by something that must fall "into the lap", without a waiting horizon, without predicting or predicting what is going to happen. Because prediction is impossible, it is necessary to remain unarmed in the face of the event's always unique and unpredictable arrival without ceasing to be on the lookout for it. Here lies the idea that talking about the event is impossible, i.e., it is not only impossible, but it is also the condition or very experience of the possible (DERRIDA, 2012).

We can remember the first experiences presented in the text: for example, when Eronides vented to the group, saying that he tries not to remember that he does the practice only with a cell phone

because he feels lonely; when the group of students proposed a collective playlist for everyone to share the songs they listened to in order to endure the pandemic; or when the computer allowed Tania to connect with the group of students and get infected with the music on the screen. The feelings derive from other accounts in which technology is not a villain because it is part of the workshop and connects people with what happens in the experience.

The encounter with the unexpected is produced by a web summoned by diverse presences and mobilizes fixed relations between objects, human and non-human, that compose the landscape of experience. Detecting the plot that accompanies the act of knowing and creating worlds is a way to approach what engenders the personal and the collective, concrete knowledge and its political, ethical, and aesthetic effects. It is a way of acting, knowing, and creating without knowing, in advance, what happens to us. Therefore, it requires open attention to the ongoing processes at the level of experience. The embodiment processes composed of the affections in transit must accompany the formation of this subjective position (POZZANA, 2013).

There is always an action guided by the body that perceives and experiences the situation from a local and concrete perspective. For Varela (1996 *apud* POZZANA, 2012), there is a readiness-for-action regarding the situations encountered, constituting micro-identities and micro-worlds understood as emerging constructions that arise from a situated action and put us in direct relationship with the concrete of the experience. They are dispositions for action, ways of acting and perceiving situations that are not given, anticipated, or taken by general and abstract rules but that produce bridges between the corporeal body and the social dynamics in which we live.

The focus on the invention of practices and devices that activate presence in an online environment is an invitation to a field of experiments that organize the body for the possibilities that present themselves in the encounter between bodies. It is a method of preparing for what is not expected to happen, an invitation that is necessary not only in this environment but in any activity we do. These are pedagogical strategies that are not to be confused with "body practices," "working with dance," or even with activities to "break the ice." They are practices of presence activation that translate a way of thinking about the things of life, of organizing the body to produce an embodied experience that is not only mental. There is no dissociation between the purpose of these exercises and what is meant by "class" or "workshop."

Here, we are interested in thinking, based on the narrated experiences, about how we produce these sensorialities, starting from the assumption that we do not just do anything and not in a careless manner. There is an artisanal way of making things that crosses the sensitive dimension of experience

"I no longer want to think except with my body": practices for grounding and cultivating presence(s) and uses what is available to us. In the workshop "Body, Movement, and Expression," people continued to make the movements in their homes, outside the physical space where the activity takes place, but this was only possible because of the relationship established with technology. Our interest is in understanding how to potentiate that which, in the techno-mediated relationship, allows the workshop participants, such as Tania in the meeting with the students, to stand up and dance. There is a complete activation of the body via intensities and sensorialities that connects to what they are experiencing on the other side of the computer or cell phone screen.

We consider that there is an ambiguous relationship between the prejudices of the remote mode compared to the face-to-face mode. On the one hand, it is argued that face-to-face interactions were much more intense, and that group interactions would be impossible to experience through screens. On the other hand, technology allowed us to invent interesting devices that enabled the collective construction of the experience. We needed to exercise creativity in discovering digital resources and tools that could activate presence for the class to happen because, after all, what we had at hand were technological devices.

In an activity of the Teamwork and Collective Practices class, the students had to present themselves through objects that accompanied them during the pandemic period. Many people chose a computer, an external hard drive, or a cell phone because it served as a conduit for their social, emotional, and professional lives. They reported that if the computer stopped or the cell phone ran out of battery, it was as if their social life stopped as well; they felt incommunicable with the world outside the screen. Technological devices as an extension of the body intensified even more with the pandemic. We are faced with the challenge of incorporating technology into our lives because, during the pandemic, it was an essential tool for meeting, studying, researching, and creating with others.

The danger of remote mode is that it intensifies the mental dimension and erases the body from the experience, considering it only for what appears on the screen, from the arms up, and forgetting the rest of the body as if it were unnecessary to exist. This dissociation can produce a lot of disconnection, but it can also produce a lot of connection. There is a mutation of the body, an adaptation, so that the device becomes a piece of the body itself (FAVRE, 2021).

At the same time, it becomes a frightening process when we talk close to the cell phone, and the device returns everything we are interested in, turning us into data. If there is no going back to the pre-technology world, how can we activate the body without being on the frequency of the machine and the electronic devices? The clue is in the creation—an interval in which one feels that there is not only submission but also pure responsiveness and reactive response. Practices of

grounding and producing presence are key to not just reacting to what we are experiencing. Talking about our current experiences allows us to demonstrate how they are rooted in the body. Moreover, this is not something obvious.

Mapping the regimes of affectability requires a cartographic work built while living the process, not with the intention of representing it but of accompanying it. It demands a kind of presence that is attentive to individual and collective production and to the marks left on the body. A body that lets itself be affected by the world and is open to the sensibilities that run through it can account for the intensities experienced in the encounter. A cartographer's body is built, even if momentarily, from immersion in his field of experimentation and by what makes it vibrate at all possible frequencies. When we ask ourselves what the body can do, following Spinoza's perspective, "we settle in the terrain of sensibilities produced in the processes of subjectivation that define ways of looking, living, and relating with the intention of displacing, problematizing, and creating small and powerful possibilities of approaching the field of corporeality" (LIBERMAN; LIMA, 2015, p. 185).

There is no model and no ready-made formula; however, there can be rituals that prepare the body to enter this state of readiness and presence, i.e., certain porosity, so that the world can go through it and touch it. We propose that the concept and experience of ritual depart from the idea of protocols, which is prevalent in the health field. For us, it means ritualizing some of our devices: building presence, being in a circle, closing our eyes to connect with our own body and environment, using journal writing and narratives in the formative path, and accompanying our students' creation processes, among so many other guides that facilitate the promotion of encounters as events. We place ourselves very far from a "protocol" idea based on automated strategies disconnected from the present and its surprises.

Making rituals is a way of presenting and inhabiting the experience. When Riciere and Castanheira (2016) look back to the origins of theater, they find religious rituals and ceremonies. Seeking to dissociate from this sense, Grotowsky (*apud* RICIERE; CASTANHEIRA, 2016) treats rituality as a system of signs, a collective ritual that happens between the spectators and the actors. Religious ritual connotes sacred, enchanted, divine, a kind of magic, whereas theater ritual is a kind of game. For Richard Schechner (2012 *apud* RICIERE; CASTANHEIRA, 2016), there is an intimate relationship between performance, game, and ritual. Ritual is memory in action, but it is not only

"I no longer want to think except with my body": practices for grounding and cultivating presence(s) connected to a memory of something that has passed; it is also connected to the way the body relates to objects or symbols.⁸

There is a direction that guides actions based on situations and the ability to compose with the configuration of a given landscape, an emergence of common sense, and a way of dealing with the immediate present (LIBERMAN; LIMA, 2015; POZZANA, 2012).

It is a permanent exercise of sensitivity, vitalization of bodies, and vitalization of relationships, with approaches and distances that expand and resize personal, existential, and professional repertoires so that the body expands its affective capacity (LIBERMAN; LIMA, 2015, p. 185).

In group experiences, we recognize that the encounter with otherness causes disturbances in existence and triggers turbulence that can engender new regimes of affectability toward anesthetized and automated processes, giving way to new modes that demand expression. One of the guides of this exercise in vitalization is the affirmation of the potency of the materiality of bodies, which is increasingly urgent in a techno-mediated world captured by technosciences that tend to separate the observer from his or her corporeality. It is about exploring its power to produce connections, encounters, compositions, and worlds. There are no whole and closed forms; there is a relational system in constant self-production, whose activation is caused by intense friction between bodies, between bodies and worlds, and between worlds. Another experimentation guide is to "put oneself on the prowl," i.e., to create approach strategies so that the other becomes a living presence in us. To be on the lookout for events, it is necessary to make landings to activate memories in or on the body that contribute to building a state of presence. Another guide is the invention of practices and devices favoring the establishment of a cartographer's body – a body open to the field of affections and the plane of intensities and, concurrently, attentive to possible lines of escape that work against what anesthetizes it (LIBERMAN; LIMA, 2015). These guides can guide subtle, minimal, almost invisible experiences that mobilize the body for qualities such as attention, presence, availability, and sensitivity, which occur online and face-to-face.

In our experiences, we could see how we invented ways of doing and presenting things that escaped the already known schemes. We understand that the protocols that demand "good behavior" in the online environment restrict the connective capacity of the body itself with the images that

⁸ On the concept of ritual, according to Riciere and Castanheira (2016, p. 26), "there are practices and theories on continents and sometimes with different purposes." Given the issue's complexity, we propose to leave open a further study on rituals and experiences surrounding rituals. For these authors, games and rituals transform the body, which interests us here.

already existed before, such as the ambient smells, the very vision of the body, and what the body can do. The sensorial dimension can communicate in ways other than just visuocentric, and there are other ways of modulating and activating sensorialities. Without making an ode to the remote format, where sensory experiences are accessed only by cell phones, we tense the power of how we use technology to prevent life from being captured and capitalized on by algorithms used for our manipulation. We understand that this capture can occur when technology allows for the encounter, presence, and vitalization that escape.

Our wagers have political significance because they violate protocol regimes. There are other and varied connection paths that are presented now. Several events occur in an online class's chat room in parallel with what happens in the main scene. In a postgraduate class, the students introduced themselves using gestures. One participant made a crying gesture and wrote in the chat, "My dad is hospitalized with COVID." It was necessary to interrupt the presentation and say, "This is happening!" This was an exercise to ground the body and the affections being produced there. In a protocol situation, we would continue the presentation while the chat would be full of solidarity manifestations. In other situations, one could join the game and communicate through chat. The conversation can occur in the back of the room, as a parallel conversation, or as an exchange of reflections and comments visible to everyone, not just an intentional interlocutor. How can we incorporate it into the class, considering that it is part of it, and circulate affections that cannot possibly be expressed through speech? The automated protocols stifle expressiveness and germs that want to sprout. What we are living has to do with the production of new ways of functioning, expressiveness, affectability, and creation.

To escape the protocols, we need to look at what we have at hand. Dive into the experience and continue the connection through other paths. There is a demand for handling the tool that assists in connecting technically. It is critical that the affections guide the experiences rather than the techniques themselves. In some situations experienced by us, the words "*saudade*" (longing) and "solitude" mobilized the group, activated memories, re-signified meanings, brought people together, and produced complicity.

[...] The word is body and, in its literalness, connects a group to the plane of forces; [...] word-image that touches, reverberates in each one, and composes (activates) bodies of sensation. We are not referring to any use of the term, but to the one that is in tune with what happens in bodies and between them, in bodies moving through space and in space inhabited by bodies – affects in transit. The embodied word, like a hand, touches and is touched when shared (POZZANA, 2012, p. 331).

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The formation of this body-word is based on the creation of ways of saying, doing, perceiving, feeling, and knowing that cannot be separated from the world or from the human and non-human objects in circulation. It is a process that occurs at the level of affections, implying that the effects of the practices must be constantly monitored.

Practices aimed at developing presence involve a process of body formation and require the disidentification of habits that are performed automatically, the detachment of given learnings, and the dismantling of responses that are disconnected from experience (VARELA, 1996, *apud* POZZANA, 2012). "Learning is literally embodied and created; it necessitates time and space, as well as breathing, articulation, attention, and openness to the unknown" (POZZANA, 2012, p. 332).

We emphasize that during the formative process, whether online or in person, the body is launched to many different places, as if staying in one place were impossible. The group experience allows the bodies to be present in the encounter. Inhabiting the experience of the event with the body requires putting it down and grounding it in the present. It is an important exercise in dealing with something as unexpected as the pandemic.

We discovered ways of connecting among the groups' participants along the narrated experiences, inventing ways to stay close and near their own bodies with everything happening around them. If before, the connection occurred while holding hands or sitting in a circle, in this unusual moment, it occurs through audio, text messages, and videos exchanged through WhatsApp.

Therefore, we come to the following question: What can we do with what we have? We can produce grounding resources in the environment we are in, whether online or in person.

To conclude and go a little further

Grounding and inhabiting bodies, even with physical distance and, at the moment, primarily mediated by digital technologies, has led us to invent, attentively, experiences of presence and creation through the most diverse dynamics. They always worked as devices to establish ludic states of desire production and the activation of other sensibilities and sensorialities uncommon for many of us. We attempted (and continue to attempt) to navigate through the difficulties while also being carried away by the small but intense surprises of this entire process, qualifying and desiring the nearly impossible.

Grounding is not only necessary when our feet are fixed on the same ground, as in a face-to-face environment. We are interested in more than grounding when we return to in-person activities but in mapping how we can ground our bodies, sustain the intensities lived in the present, and give support to the experience we have. The transition from one format to another cannot ignore the fact that what we are living in this moment is happening right now. Writing this text, in this period of transition, helps us to think (or, at least, ask ourselves) about what should continue and what should stop existing, what works and what does not work in our formative processes. It can contribute to analyzing what is worth pursuing and how to proceed.

A huge amount of learning is still occurring; therefore, we cannot let go of what we have learned and experienced. It is not about favoring distance learning or considering what we have experienced to be "the" experience. We are critical of this format. With the multiple global events, contemporary issues related to university education and the general practices of producing subjectivities and worlds are formulated and reformulated at breakneck speed. The health crisis with the coronavirus is gaining nuances, and we are experiencing a return to in-person activities. However, it is impossible not to remember that it is a crisis within a larger ecological, relational, and existential crisis.

We need to evaluate, individually and in our groups, how to proceed, which gestures need to be barred, and which others continue to be articulated in this world (LATOUR, 2020). It is critical to abandon production as the sole guiding principle in one's interactions with the rest of the world. For us, it is important to follow the effects of what we do and the regimes of affectability that constitute us. There is a way to treat formative experiences that require a willingness to create interests and interactions. The theoretical classes are designed to discuss authors and generate experiences and learn to think with them. It is a way to leave more vitalized and grounded.

The indication that titles this text "I do not want to think anymore except with my body" is inspired by Kuniichi Uno (2012, p. 55). For us, it is a clue to continue affirming vital powers, even if they are germinal, considering that there is always an unexpected future.

As we can see, we have plenty of challenges and questions. In this text, we have tried to map some of them in an attempt to record, expose, assimilate, and elaborate something amidst this ongoing process in order to, who knows, project, and dream other futures, always grounded and vitalized by our (un)encounters and experiences.

"I no longer want to think except with my body": practices for grounding and cultivating presence(s)

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