

The little baby class ballerinas: a discussion about gender through ballet

As pequenas bailarinas do baby class: construções do feminino no ensino do balé

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Abstract

Dance has always been present in the history of humanity. Sacred dances, in their oldest form, have been present in diverse rituals. Ballet has appeared more recently, permeated with fantasy, romance and mysticism, influencing the aesthetic of the ballerina's body and the construction of the image of the ballerina's figure. As a result, the body plays a central role in dance, be it for the study and analysis of movement, for the beauty of dance or for the ideal of the weightlessness and beauty that it represents. The purpose of this article is to outline the body's production in teaching baby class, while this body is crossed by binary grammar of gender in the constitution of territories/female and male practices. This text presents the emergence of dance and ballet, from classical to contemporary, in which the construction of gender makes itself present. Although present-day classical ballet is labeled as a typically feminine dance and the majority of performers are female, it has not always been this way. Even today, in the 21st century, there is still much prejudice that is continuously reinforced and naturalized, helping to maintain these conservative thoughts

Keywords: Body. Dance. Gender. Female. Male. Child.

Resumo

A dança sempre esteve presente na história da humanidade. Na sua forma mais antiga, as danças sagradas foram vivenciadas em diversos rituais. O balé surge mais recentemente permeado

de fantasia, romance e misticismo, influenciando a estética do corpo do bailarino e a construção do imaginário da figura da bailarina. O corpo torna-se então um lugar central da dança, seja pelo estudo e análise do movimento, pela beleza da dança ou pelo ideal de leveza e beleza que ele representa. O objetivo do presente artigo é delinear a produção do corpo no ensino do *baby class*, corpo este atravessado pela gramática binária do gênero na constituição de territórios/práticas femininas e masculinas. Para isso, faz um breve histórico do surgimento da dança e do balé, do clássico ao contemporâneo, para falar deste lugar do corpo na contemporaneidade, no qual a constituição/oposição dos gêneros se faz presente. Apesar de o balé clássico nos dias atuais ser rotulado como uma dança tipicamente/tradicionalmente feminina e os bailarinos serem em maioria mulheres, nem sempre foi assim. E mesmo hoje, em pleno século XXI, ainda há muito preconceito contra meninos que se interessam pela dança e, em especial, pelo balé nas turmas de *baby class*, demonstrando o conservadorismo existente e como os estereótipos de gênero são continuamente reforçados e naturalizados, ajudando então na manutenção do pensamento conservador.

Palavras-chave: Corpo. Dança. Feminino. Masculino. Criança.

The emergence of dance and ballet: from classical to contemporary

The objective of the present article is to outline the production of bodies in teaching the so-called ballet *baby class*, these bodies crossed by the binary grammar of gender in the constitution of feminine and masculine territories/practices. Marked by history, both body and dance are the locus of our gaze in their relationship with the feminine and, more contemporaneously, with the teaching of ballet *baby class* as an environment still markedly feminine. In its opposition, this gaze also helps us to think about how the practice of ballet *baby class* by boys is still the target of prejudice and gender discrimination.

Dance has always been present in the history of humanity. In their earliest form, sacred dances would be experienced in various rituals. Through ceremonies to revere gods and ask for success in hunts and victories in fights, dance accompanied human evolution, transforming its format and its ends. Since the (prehistoric period of human history) Palaeolithic period, men would dance circular dances, phallic dances, funeral dances, embrace dances, mixed ones – with pairs formed by men and women; gallant dancing and belly dancing.¹ “From birth to death, Greek civilization is completely impregnated by dance. Religious ceremonies, Panhellenic or local, civic ceremonies, parties, children’s education, military training, daily life, dance is present everywhere.”²

Dance would form a complete citizen, as it would give correct proportions to the body and be the source of good health. Besides religious dances, the Greeks would use dances as a form of education for war, training their future soldiers from childhood. Classes would contain preparatory exercises of flexibility and exercises where movements would be made rhythmic by a flute player. Dance would also be present at daily life times of Greek culture, such as birth, weddings and banquets, which would have professional dancers. The use of the mid-tip of the feet is of Greek origin – which later shall be established as one of the basic postures of dance, used in several genres, including classical ballet.²

In the Middle Ages (in the history of Europe, the Middle Ages or Medieval Period lasted from the 5th to the 15th centuries), dance suffered a break in choreographic evolution, becoming totally sacred, and it is only in the establishment of lay culture that dance becomes a matter of spectacles and amusement. With the (series of conflicts waged from 1337 to 1453) Hundred Years' War and the black death pandemic in the fourteenth century, the macabre dance (graveyard, from the Arabic *makhbar*), danced by the nobles, represented in death some reason to live according to Christian principles. Later a new genre would show up, determining the ballet-theater, the court jester, where dancers would use masks to dance.

Well established in the fifteenth century princely courts, court jesters already advance ballet element that shall be developed a hundred years later: dancers, singers, musicians, cars, effects of machinery. But it lacks the soul of the spectacle: a coordinated dramatic action.²

In the (earliest manifestation of the general European Renaissance) Italian Renaissance, the (cultural and artistic events of Italy during the period 1400 to 1499) *Quattrocento*^a emerged, some dance that would become an erudite art in which the dancers not only need to know the steps but also to understand about metrics. It is in this context that, for the first time, the professional dancer emerges, moving towards a type of dance technique. Domenico da Piacenza (also known as Domenico da Ferrara, an Italian Renaissance dancing master), the first great master of this type of dance, published a work in which he organized the main elements of the *Quattrocento*: metric, behavior, memory, course and physical appearance. The dramatic choice of man between faith and reason served as fuel for dance at the beginning of the (period in European history, from the 14th to the 17th centuries) Renaissance period, gradually withdrawing dance from the sacred place imposed by the Middle Ages.²

Despite having been influenced by Italian Renaissance, it was in France that the ancestor of classical ballet emerged, the court ballet. With the European context of political successions and

a Cultural and artistic events held in Italy in the 15th century. It was a phase of transition between the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance in the field of arts.

wars in the second half of the sixteenth century, court ballet was created to affirm the royal power as bringing peace and propaganda to the great nobles. After establishing the royal authority, ballet was set to affirm monarchy and as a means of adulating the king. According to Bourcier,² ballet was first and foremost an organized dance in the midst of a dramatic action, with dancers forming geometric configurations: circles, squares, lozenges and rectangles (for ballets were designed to be seen from above) and with plots inspired by mythology.

In the (artistic style) Baroque period, court ballet continued its vast production in the reign of (monarch of the House of Bourbon) Louis XIII who, in addition to appreciating ballets would also act in them. Ballets of this period would have a burlesque tone, where dance would be mixed with other arts such as theater, circus and pantomime, etc., exhibiting a great comic tone in the pieces. From 1600, court ballet, which was the monopoly of the court of France, would be seen in Italy and England, spreading French copies across Europe. The death of Louis XIII marked not only an end to a society but also that of court ballet and this dance genre was outdated and both a new formula of spectacle and a new technique of dance would be sought. “Only thirty years were necessary for a master of the genre, (French choreographer, dancer and composer) Pierre Beauchamps, to be able to define the essentials of this technique.”²

The emergence of classical ballet

Classical ballet has its birth in the sixteenth century in the Italian Renaissance but it was taken to France and enshrined as a dance genre in 1581, the *Ballet Comique de la Reine*. Commissioned to (Italian violinist, composer, and choreographer) Balthasar de Beaujoyeux^b by (Italian noblewoman) Catherine de' Medici for the marriage of her sister, it was the most complete ballet seen until then. Although having in its origins the peasant culture, classical ballet was consolidated as a habit of the elite, because the nobles believed that it would serve to educate the body according to its patterns of labels and gestures.² With the reign of (monarch of the House of Bourbon) Louis XIV, ballet underwent great development in the XVII century. Considered the founder of classical ballet, as well as a dancer, he would maintain a passion for art that led him to invest in the professionalization of ballet with the creation of the *Académie Royale de Danse* (current *Opéra National de Paris*). With the creation of the academy, it was possible to develop gestures for head, trunk, arms and legs that would support the standardization of classical dance.

Ballet was introduced into the opera by (Italian-born French composer, instrumentalist, and dancer) Jean Baptiste Lully, who would employ dance as fun in-between opera acts. With mythological characters facing amorous adventures, opéra-ballet would still remain in the limited

b Originally Baldassare de Belgiojoso [Baltazarini].

circle of high society. In its presentation form and in the costumes, opéra-ballet was still very much related to the legacy of ballet but many masters would point out necessary changes so that classical dance could evolve. In the publication by (French dance notator, publisher and choreographer) Raoul Auger (or Anger) Feuillet, called: “*Choreography or the art of describing dance by characters, figures and demonstrative signs through which one can easily learn all kinds of dance,*” of 1699, more than four hundred steps of the ballet technique are transcribed. According to Bourcier,² it is the first attempt of notation of dance, indicating the initial position of feet, jumps and steps that would serve for the standardization of the classical technique.

In the nineteenth century, (romantic ballet in two acts) *La Sylphide* began the romantic phase of ballet. With a plot about an idealized love between some mortal and some spiritual being, it portrayed the opposition between material and immaterial worlds. Marius Ivanovich Petipa (French and Russian ballet dancer, pedagogue and choreographer) transformed the whole content of ballets using children’s tales and managed to unite these stories with classical techniques, resulting in poetic and dramatic plots. *Sleeping Beauty*, *Don Quixote* and *Swan Lake*, Petipa’s ballets, as well as *Giselle*, *Coppélia*, *Cinderella* (or *The Little Glass Slipper*) and *The Nutcracker*, by other choreographers, brought the magic of princes and princesses, fairies, sylphs and dolls permeated by the difficulty of experiencing their loves.² Typically romantic plots, such ballets have so fascinated the audience that they are still produced presently. With famous titles, the romantic phase inspired many concepts that shall be approached in this work. Permeated by fantasy, romance, and mysticism, romantic ballet influenced dancers’ body aesthetics and the construction of ballerinas’ imaginary figures.

Constructing the body

Brazilian (comprehensive dictionary of the Portuguese language) *Novo Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa* defines body as “all that occupies some space, constituting an organic unity.” But the multiple meanings that permeate corporeality go beyond the body’s biological existence, which comprises all its aspects: physical, physiological, organic bodies, social codes, the inter-relational body, the body of culture, the subtle body of the spiritual dimension, etc. In order to study this subject, it is necessary to take into account each of these characteristics, understanding that the body is established in fullness, in which all the elements mentioned above are inseparable and responsible for constructing the subject’s identity.³

c Original title: *La Chorégraphie ou l’art de décrire la danse par caracteres, figures et signes démonstratifs avec lesquels on apprend facilement de soi-même toutes sortes de danse.*

It is through the body that the individual experiences the world, experiences sensations and communicates in society. Mauss⁴ states that the body is shaped by the environment that it inhabits and at the same time it influences this environment. Analyzing the simple actions of everyday life, such as walking, sitting and eating, for example, it is possible to verify that each community has its specificities, even in the most common habits. This is due to the fact that culture shapes some codes that are crossed during the subjects' experiences in their environment. These codes are so specific that one can observe that the same society has generations that perform their habits differently.

In the current social context, this perception becomes clearer due to the speed of technological advances and the constant changes in people's lifestyle. A generation is taught with certain values and habits that shortly thereafter become obsolete and need to be relearned. According to Mauss,⁴ even in the same society one generation differs from the other. This can be easily observed in some generations who have difficulties with the new lifestyle flooded by technology and machines. This is due not only to age itself but to a whole construction of techniques, values and traditions that permeate such individuals' bodies and are suddenly useless. Rather than learning to live with technology, these people need to unlearn part of their experiments and knowledge to acquire the most current ones.

Culture develops values and principles in individuals that are embodied in the construction of identity. According to Ferreira,⁵ cultural patterns act as organizers of symbols and signs of each culture which, with their specificities, establish their codes of belonging and recognition, creating an environment for individuals to construct their identity and their relationships. By learning these codes, individuals manage to express themselves and to understand, establishing communication with others and with the world, which is essential for the construction of their identities, since men are social beings. Through their gestures, expressions and habits, bodies are being inscribed in a dialogue with what they are, with their culture and society.

According to Mauss,⁴ body techniques act through reproduction, in a conscious way or not, in which individuals imitate gestures of people that they deem successful in a certain field. Thus, individuals do not create their own gestures but incorporate into their bodies several characteristics of other persons they recognize as authorities in some subject to admire them or to expect to achieve the same success as them.

Nowadays, with technology in the field of information, this happens on a large scale. Through blogs, videos and photos, individuals become references in many areas such as fashion, food, physical activity and health, creating an audience of followers not only of their content but also of ways of speaking and gesturing, influencing the corporeality of dozens, hundreds and often millions of viewers.

In Western culture, the media presents aesthetic models that disseminate an idealized body that has become a cultural pattern to be followed by all. The present panorama regards the body as an object, and the individual, instead of being a body, has a body.

The body's objectification view is part of a modern body concept, which brings with it a new way of observing the individual in today's society. In this view the subject, rather than relating to others, tends to isolation, preferring an individual bodily experience to a collective one. The body is seen as a part of man dissociated from himself, being considered a machine that only performs functions.⁶ In current contexts, individuals submit their body to training in order to train their habits to reach the cultural standards imposed on the body in society. In this way, it can be observed that the process of inscription in the body is always in motion in a process of constant change. According to Turtelli,⁷ body image encompasses both the individuals' cognitive side and their memories, intentions, desires and experiences. With multiple characteristics, emotional and physiological aspects integrate with the individuals' experiences, integrating the past self into the present and resulting in a new body image.⁸

Le Breton⁶ affirms that the social, cultural, relational and personal means are responsible for constructing the individuals' corporal image. The body adapts to the social contexts in which it is inserted, expressing a particular way of perceiving the individuals' world, justified by the marks of their experience, which is the construction of their body image and their identity. Besides this individual character, the body image is reflected in the community, in the personal and familiar relations, in the affections and in the vision according to which individuals interpret the world, the others and themselves.⁵ Through the contacts of their bodies and experiences, there are exchanges of experiences among individuals and thus body images go on being donated and aggregated. In social interactions, individuals observe similarities and differences in relation to others and learn about themselves, creating their own identity.

For Turtelli,⁷ the contact among the individuals' relationships happens through movement. The body's communication power makes dance be one of the art languages that establish contact with its audience without words, only with the dancers' gestures. André⁹ explains that body art is the experience of the individuals' affection, pleasure, pain, desire, memory and language when the body is lent to art. As a nucleus of energy where conscious and unconscious structures are structured and unstructured, dance is not only art produced through the body but body is art itself. Dancers on stage not only perform the characters' choreography steps but influence the work with their experiences and particular knowledge inscribed in their bodies, becoming cocreators of the work. When dancing, dancers open up possibilities to be multiple individuals who turn into movement through bodies that are object and space, which are felt and lived, which are infinite and ephemeral.

The feminine in classical ballet

Although classical ballet is nowadays labeled as a typically feminine dance and dancers are mostly women, it has not always been so. As an art that goes beyond centuries, ballet has gone through different types of society, which has directly reflected the way of dancing. At the beginning of the construction of classical ballet, according to Assis & Saraiva,²⁰ men were unanimous in dance, even when it came to playing female roles. They would dress like and play women's characters because women could not act, just watch. Only in the seventeenth century, with the beginning of ballet professionalization, did the inclusion of women in this art take place, more precisely in 1681, with (first female professional ballet dancer) Mademoiselle De Lafontaine (also known as La Fontaine), who inaugurated ballet as art for both sexes (Aquino and Saraiva apud Siqueira, 2012).

The French industrial revolution from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries was characterized by men's low participation in dance, as the body came to be seen as an instrument of production. And with the devaluation of dance at this time, men sought jobs with better remuneration. This panorama was favorable for women, who started to excel in dance presentations, although some dancers would be labeled as prostitutes, as they would accept offers from wealthy men due to not being able to excel in dancing career.²⁰

In the romantic ballet period, women reached the peak of their importance, becoming the main character in plots. Aquino & Schwarz²¹ state that women have ceased to have a pagan image and came to be seen as an angelic being, a figure tied to purity, beauty, delicacy. According to Almeida,²² it was during this same period that men began to play secondary roles in ballet. This characteristic is quite explicit at the time of the (dance duet) *pas de deux*, in which a man and a woman perform a dance duet whose choreography is constructed so that the male dancer is there to support and present his partner, who is the main star on the stage.

It was also in the 18th century that ballerinas' costumes began to change to shorter and lighter outfits, allowing the appearance of pointe shoes and an evolution of the classical ballet technique. Lopes²³ states that the change in outfit can be seen as a point of female liberation, for in the French and Italian courts women would have to dance with heavy costumes and long skirts, unable to perform agile movements. Therefore, choreographies at this time in ballet would be carried out in groups with geometric designs, with small movements of hands and arms. Skirts would be shortened only in 1721 by first (French) dancer, Marie Anne de Cupis de Camargo.

The ballet romantic period would reveal a fascination with supernatural, fantasy and the mysteries of the mind. Through storytelling of fairy tales and melodramatic romances, choreographers would seek magic over the rational aspect, exalting women not in their natural condition as mothers, wives or lovers but in the representation of a dreamed ideal.²⁰ By the time (Swedish ballet dancer) Maria Taglioni climbed on pointe shoes, which later would become the

symbolic element that characterizes classical dance, the peak of women in ballet was established, as such feat would be reserved only for women. Tanglioni became a dancer's reference, not only for her sylphlike body, but also as a female figure, for countless dancers idealizing a tendency to the idolatry of femininity in ballet.

Almeida²² states that there are differences regarding gender in classical techniques. While ballerinas have an image of thinness, lightness and ethereality, characterized by the technique of pointe shoes, tutu skirts, choreography balance, spinning and great jumps, male dancers must demonstrate strength and agility in their movements in conducting the ballerina in the dance. Today, ballet permeates a universe of princesses and sylphs, having delicate, amiable, beautiful, graceful women as main stage characters loaded with archetypal elements.²³ With stories based on fairy tales and unreal worlds, it is appreciated and understood by several people, regardless of ethnicity, social class and age. Perhaps this is why repertoire ballets and ballerinas' images enthrall children so much from an early age.

The construction of a dancer's body

Arts have a unique way of communicating senses and perceptions of the world, whether in visual arts, music, theater or dance. The body is closely correlated with artistic processes – after all, all artists use it to perform their work. According to Tércio,¹⁰ the body welcomes artistic objects, being at the center of the phenomenon of making art. When it comes to dance, the body is not only part of the process of making art, but also becomes the artistic work. André⁹ states that dancers' bodies can not be seen only as an object of art or the result of a choreography. Their experiences are inscribed in such bodies.

Dancers lend their bodies to art. They not only perform the steps but also influence the work with their life story, becoming cocreators. José Gil, cited by Tércio,¹⁰ further states that dancers' bodies exert a certain dazzle on the audience, which is due to the act of dancing and the invisibility of the space danced. Dancers' bodies are lent to the character and the world. In dance, there is a virtual space that transcends the body's external space. Dancers act in construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of their bodies internal and external spaces.

Although each person has their physical characteristics, in dance environments there are certain body stereotypes that are justified by the specific technique for each dance style, often justifying the body pattern in the technique. In *jazz dance*, for example, it is acceptable that the ballerina have thick thighs, thin waist, the muscular biotype that we see so much today. In contemporary dance, because it is a technique that aims at experimenting with their own body, any biotype is welcome. The most rigid dance genre in this sense, perhaps by its time of existence, is classical ballet, which requires a very specific physical type, which is called an ectomorph.¹¹

We then have three types of bodies: endomorph, mesomorph and ectomorph. People with an endomorphic body type have more body fat, are people with broad bones, large hips and thighs and round faces, short arms and legs. They usually have a high waist and small hands and feet. Mesomorphic people have an accelerated metabolism and athletic, lean body, with low waist, narrow and broad shoulders, a square jaw and high cheekbones. Because of their metabolism, they have great ease of losing weight and gaining muscle mass. Ectomorphic people have an extreme thin appearance, with narrow shoulders, waist and hips, a triangular face, difficulty in gaining muscle mass and low body fat level.¹¹

Ballerinas' body type is ectomorph, characterized by being a svelte, thin and light body. According to Anjos,¹¹ this body shape comes as a legacy of the romantic nineteenth-century ballet that had the sylphlike image – thin, skinny, fragile-looking ballerinas – whose aim was to show the purity of the plot character. According to Moura:¹²

Fantastic ballerinas who, on stage, can never reveal the effort necessary to fulfill all those feats that their wonderful bodies perform. A deceptive make-believe aesthetic, but extremely pleasing to the senses.

At that time, Maria Taglioni, who became known in the *La Sylphide* ballet, became a benchmark of a classical dancer.

Ballerinas' biotype has been the same for centuries and different cultures. And while classical ballet is no longer an art targeting the French elite, its globalization has not broken the sylphlike body pattern that is sought and venerated by those who dance. This panorama can be influenced by the reproduction of romantic ballets, the so-called repertoire ballets, as already mentioned, which may justify the search for this lean and fragile body present even today. Ballerinas' body pattern is still based on the Euro–American body, not too curvy and skinny, with elongated and thin limbs, corresponding to the stereotypes of European romantic ballerinas, which is sylphlike, fairylike, princess-like, light, graceful, thin, young, having discipline and determination to make the sacrifice of adjusting such body to such rules.

In a research by Anjos¹¹ with female ballet dancers and classical ballet female teachers, these were able to identify, based on the interview reports, that ballerinas would show great concern about their efficiency in the corporal functionality. This study presents classical ballerinas' bodies as three foundations: anatomy, technique and expression – a concept called the “triad of the body of the classical ballerina.” According to this concept, ballerinas' ideal anatomy would have long legs and arms, with good rotation for *en dehors* (in dance, this term means outward), hyperextension of legs, sharp midfoot, and high mid-tip of the feet, besides muscular strength, balance and motor coordination. These characteristics are seen in ballet milieus as treasures and dancers who do not have them incessantly seek them.

This part of the environment, according to Anjos,¹¹ is associated with individuals' condition, added to body characteristics determined by the ballet culture. According to Haas,¹³ the aesthetic pattern often leads dancers to body image distortions. In her study, dancers interviewed were dissatisfied with their body, even though it was lean and with low percentage of body fat. This excessively lean body building can be detrimental in many ways, leading dancers to eating disorders, low self-esteem, and severe emotional problems. It is essential to educate teachers and students that each one has an anatomical structure that comes from their genetics but even if they do not have this part of the triad, with techniques they can efficiently dance.

The second level of the environment, according to Anjos,¹¹ is within the scope of will, of what individuals intentionally devote themselves due to wishing something, because it is through technique that one can shape the body to improve performance in ballet. It is through it that the ballerina increases her flexibility, builds muscle and strength and learns the exercises correctly. In this way, she develops good performance on stages, being able to carry out ballet steps with dexterity in a precise way, enchanting the audience with the dance.

The third and last part of the triad, the essence, which can also be called “dancing with the soul,” is the ability to act with an artistic sensibility. According to a research by Anjos,¹¹ the essence is in the subjective part of the environment, it is said as innate to the one who dances. Ballerinas are already born with it and it is not possible to construct these characteristics because one can not measure how this can be taught. It is the essence that separates dance from other physical activities because dancers' movement touches the audience, thrilling and sensitizing with their interpretation of the character on stage.

Ballet *baby class* and teaching femininity

Teaching the classical technique, according to Caminada & Aragão,¹ begins at the age of seven, in the first phase of the basic level of ballet, called “preliminary.” At this stage, the child begins to learn the basic fundamentals of the technique, such as the *en dehors*, the five positions of the feet, the positions of the arms, arabesques and *allongés*, with the class being divided into bar, center and diagonal.

Although initiating the technique be recommended from the age of seven, there are today ballet classes for younger children, both in dance studios and in formal education schools. This new panorama may have been modified in the last decades because children start earlier in school environments. The Brazilian Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB, in the Portuguese abbreviation) itself has altered the compulsory initiation of early childhood education from five to four years of age and certainly this factor has influenced the teaching structure of classical ballet for children.

Classes prior to the preliminary stage of ballet education are called *baby class* and receive children from two to six years of age. They can also be called “dance initiation classes.” According to Piaget’s²⁴ theories of child development, each phase is characterized by different forms of mental organization and it is necessary to understand each one so that one can understand children and how to stimulate and develop their abilities.

In preliminary ballet, the child is in the period of concrete operational, which ranges from seven to 11 years of age. In this period, children have the capacity to establish relationships, to internalize their actions, to reason logically, and to have notions of mass, liquid and quantity.²⁴ As for the *baby class*, which involves children from two to six years of age, children are in the preoperational period, when their language use becomes more mature. According to Terra,²⁴ “The emergence of language entails important modifications in children’s cognitive, affective and social aspects,” since they begin to communicate with others and this interaction allows them to develop new capacities, such as the construction of mental schemas, egocentric thinking and symbolic or representative intelligence.

The *baby class* scenario as an initiation to children’s ballet is relatively new, which justifies that there is no institutionalization yet, with rules and norms similar to the other levels of ballet teaching. Like in every area, in the beginning there are field professionals methodologies based on research and studies performed by them, as well as their experiences in teaching ballet to this particular audience.

Bartolo²⁵ has developed the *Prima Ballerina*® method, which aims to teach ballet in a playful way, allowing children to learn self-control, limits, independence, self-esteem, relief from tensions and frustrations, creativity through make believe and refinement and dexterity of movements, awakening their intelligence. This method, according to its author, is based on pedagogy, psychology, neuroscience and psychomotricity. The latter, in particular, has greatly contributed to teaching this specific age-group since it contributes to forming individuals with the aim of encouraging the practice of physical activities in all stages of child development.

Psychomotricity, according to Alves,²⁶ sees men in the psychic scope – developing the social, affective and cognitive aspects. And in the scope of the motor areas of the brain – developing the neurophysiological base and increasing the body’s capacity of movement. It is, therefore, a science that studies people through their bodies in relation to the inner and outer worlds.

It is divided into two main concepts – the relational and the functional ones. Relational concepts facilitate the relationship among individuals and their bodies through desires, frustrations, and actions. Functional concepts are the possibilities perceived through action and the quality of movements. Functional concepts are divided into different areas of motor development, such as: coordination, posture, tone, balance, breathing, laterality, orientation and spatial-temporal structuring, rhythm, perceptions and body schema.

Oliveira²⁷ explains that psychomotricity applied to teaching children's ballet gives children an opportunity to develop to the fullest, making decision making possible, identifying it as producing art and culture, providing recognition of their body in the world.

Alves²⁶ states that the functional concept responsible for forming children's personality and balancing their psychomotor and maturational functions is the body schema. It is through it that children begin to perceive the external world and become aware of their bodies. The author explains that children at first do not differentiate the objects that surround them but as they grows they realize that their bodies occupy some space due to time, being able to capture images and sharpen their perception of smells, tastes, sounds, pain and movements. The body schema encompasses intellectual knowledge about bodies' parts and functions, recognition of the position of muscles and body parts, and the visual representation of the body – that is, individuals' impressions about themselves.

In teaching a ballet *baby class*, the corporal schema is explored in all its amplitude in the perception of sounds and movements, in the discovery of the body placement in spaces, and especially in understanding the ballerina's image because it is an art based on aesthetics and virtuosity. For Souza,²⁸ playfulness must be present at all times in children's ballet class, in songs, exercises and in conducting the class, mainly in the *baby class* age range. Through learning ballet moves in a playful way, the child constructs logical-mathematical and social concepts, according to Bartolo²⁵. As a playfulness resource, fairy tales, which permeate female infant universes, are used in classes. Princesses, fairies and the very image of romantic ballerinas, with the sylphlike biotype, dressed in tutu and pointe shoes, are explored in teaching ballet to children for them to learn aspects of lightness and grace which are characteristic of the technique.

For Santos,²⁹ linking the teaching of ballet to princesses and fairies is based on the principle of *aplomb*.^d And although other types of allusions are sought to be worked out in classes, children do not correspond as much as the images of fairy tales are used. According to the same author, practices in ballet *baby classes* can lead to simultaneously learning the classical technique, as well as the way of being a girl. The author's research explains that ballet is still seen as a typically feminine art, therefore related to femininity. For this reason, even today children's ballet classes are almost exclusively attended by girls, which reinforces in children scenarios the ballerinas' stereotype in classical dance.

Many of the repertoire ballets not only bring the idea of fairy tales but are based on the tales themselves. *The Nutcracker*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* are some examples of classical works created by Marius Ivanovich Petipa. Santos²⁹ states that children ballet teachers must be careful

d Aplomb is a characteristic that every classical dancer must have. It means dignity, poise, elegance of movements, harmony in the dancer's way of dancing.

when following the path of feminine stereotypes and archetypes, since children are already under the media influence on the construction and the role that each gender must have in society. Thus we create the model that there is only one way of being feminine and being a ballerina. As a strategy, Santos²⁹ suggests that teachers should also work on contemporary ballets that are not based on fairy tales so as not to limit being a girl to the order of gender discourse as being raised to be a good mother, a desirable heterosexual object, a competent professional, a real multitasking woman.

Ballet, as an essentially aesthetic art, exalts shape, beauty, grace and lightness, and even some body type more suited to classical techniques. With the triad “expressive body,” “technical body,” and “anatomical body” it was possible to trace characteristics of the classical ballerina’s body. And with ballet history it was possible to understand why it has been linked to the female gender, although in its beginnings it would be danced only by men even when it came to women’s roles. In teaching children’s ballet, it has been shown through studies that it can lead the child to learning to the fullest, in the motor and affective aspects, based on several sciences, especially in psychomotricity.

In the period of dance initiation, which in the present day has been taking place earlier due to several factors, children from two to six years begin their *baby classes*, where the classical technique is taught in a playful way. It is necessary that the *baby class* teacher have a new gaze at the time of teaching children’s ballet, taking care to mediate classes by using various types of references, not just those related to the universe of fairy tales and repertoire ballets. In this way, classical technique and femininity can be taught to girls in *baby classes*, as well as the aspects of aplomb, gracefulness and lightness that are characteristic of ballet, but without generating demands and stigma in the students, working various aesthetic forms of beauty and of being a dancer.

Unfortunately, gender stereotypes are continually reinforced and naturalized in this “feminine” activity. And even if there is an interest from parents in enrolling boys in such classes, we know that the social pressure to maintain traditional models is great. It becomes a very big burden for the boy who simply likes to dance and for the family who shall have the onus of prejudice. They are naturalized values that are almost confused with a natural order, but are forged in the order of culture, aiming at preserving and conserving “values and good customs.”

Final Thoughts

It is undeniable that teaching dance can lead children to learning to the fullest, in the motor and affective aspects, regardless of gender. But social coercion stands out and we may have to wait a longer period of time than one generation to look naturally at a group of boys in a *baby class*. But it is also interesting to note that girls increasingly play sports once considered masculine, such as soccer and skateboarding, without this being used to question their femininity. Why then is the inverse not treated in the same way?

Discussions on gender as an interdisciplinary theoretical field have spread throughout history for innumerable reasons. Displacement of the feminine towards equality and the parity of rights has produced divisions in the solid masculinist hegemony. Transformations caused by feminist movements, the departure of women from private to public environments, from mother-woman to subject-woman, the crisis of the bourgeois form of nuclear family, monogamous and heterosexual, separation of sexuality from reproduction, some homosexuality visibility policies and, more recently, the corporal and nominal changes made by transgenders, transsexuals and intersexuals, are horizons of possibilities that situate the strengthening of this field of studies, research and actions.³⁰

Several authors carry out research to understand the scenario that culture proposes, relating values to the modes/models of being women and men in society. Finco (2003) conceptualizes “gender” as being a social construction within culture, instituting what is feminine and masculine. In one of the best known texts in the field – 1986 paper *Gender: a Useful Category of Historical Analysis* –, Joan Wallach Scott¹⁵ states that: “Gender can be understood as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes. It is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”

Bento¹⁶ states that the construction of gender identity begins in the period of gestation. Parents fantasize about who the child shall be and expectations are numerous. Finding out the gender turns a body that was absolutely abstract into a concrete one, even with the baby still in the mother’s womb. The child ceases to be a baby and becomes a girl or a boy. Thus, gender in childhood becomes a determining factor, marking an identity in the decoration of the room, in the clothes and in the toys. Graciano¹⁷ alleges that feminine and masculine adjectives are directly associated with the biological sex. According to this theory, being a woman would be synonymous with being feminine. And in an antagonistic way, being a man would mean being masculine. Moreover, being a man would mean especially not being a woman, in a direct allusion to the construction of masculinity and virility based on the repudiation of feminine signs and homosexuality (Welzer-Lang, 1991).

In school, children restrict their bodies, according to their experience, inscribing on it the behavioral patterns dictated to their gender. Louro¹⁸ points out:

There is where one learns to look and to look at themselves, where one learns to listen, to speak up and to shut up, where one learns to prefer. All senses are trained, causing each and every one to know the “good” and decent sounds, smells and tastes, and reject the indecent ones, learning what, whom and how to touch (or, most of the time, not touch), causing them to have some abilities and not others...¹⁸

In this way, the construction of identities is influenced by a pattern of values and qualities considered specific to a single gender. While girls must be careful, sensitive, quiet, beautiful and have good manners, boys must be courageous, competitive, aggressive, persevering and have some spirit of leadership.¹⁹

When children do not fit the labels inherent in their gender and go beyond the limits determined by their sex, they are seen as abnormal or deviant from the gender matrix in a Foucauldian perspective. This matrix produces, as part of the normalization process, the so-called “deviants,” resulting in pointing to an ideal behavior and discrimination by their colleagues and teachers due to not following the standard model. This intolerance can be linked to two factors: in one case, it may be related to linking children’s behavior with sexuality, thus interpreting as homosexuals the children who have attitudes theoretically pertaining to the opposite sex. And in a second hypothesis, this intolerance would be related to a threat to social structures, according to Graciano.¹⁷

Gender as constituting the subject is related to the concept of multiple identities, according to which identities cease to be a fixed unit and start having a mobile format. As well as gender, the subject is constructed from its ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, nationality, among other factors that make them who they are.¹⁹ The multiplicity of identities has an articulating character, transforming and constructing the subject according to their knowledge and experiences.

Are boys forever condemned to playing ball and not dancing? Or is it that in the generation of our children and grandchildren this is no longer going to be an issue? To conclude, among our friends and relatives, who would spontaneously enroll their three-year-old boys in a ballet *baby class*?

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