

Realms of Ritual: Waldorf Education in the Corporeal Turn

Paul Hougham, Bath Spa University

The corporeal turn in education and the wider humanities has gradually gathered pace over the past 40 years and in distinct disciplines: Dewey's (1934) experiential aesthetics and Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology laid the ground for notions of embodied cognition, currently informing debates within linguistics and neuroscience; Gardner's multiple intelligences (1982) popularised a diversification of intelligence to include the bodily-kinesthetic; Ellingson's championing of embodiment in qualitative research (2011) brought a critical gaze to normalised notions of the body; Manning's ecologies of experience appreciated how Autistic perception offers a way of living beyond neurotypical systems; an admittance within psychiatry of how the 'body keeps the score' (Van der Kolk 2015) offered a now expanding discourse on body-mind integration as a route to healing trauma; and Ingold's (2021) creativity within anthropology has celebrated the spiritual bodily wisdom of craft and the material.

Each of these cultural streams have served to antidote the Cartesian split of mind and body, build on the disruptive holism of Bataille's 'base materialism' (1945) and birth this corporeal turn from the wider postmodern project.

In parallel, and in part in contrast, Waldorf Education's creative and holistic curriculum of head, hand and heart has consistently held a reputation and claim to be a spiritual education, with deep roots in Steiner's 'spiritual science.'

This presentation will address the corporeal turn with a reading of Waldorf Education leaning into its pragmatism and lived values more than its metaphysics. It will consider the conference theme of The Intelligence of the Body by steering away from artificial intelligence and the 'terrors' of performative teaching (Ball 2003) and towards motorsensory integration and the somatic mindfulness of 'radical presence' (O'Reilly & Palmer 1998).

Through an appreciative and critical inquiry of bricolage and dialogue, an understanding of a spiritual education will be proposed on the basis of embodied aesthetics and ethics rather than the transcendental. The choreography of embodied consciousness in Steiner's phenomenological epistemology will be aligned with the 'realms of ritual' which João Maria-André casts into the socio-political arena of relationality, hospitality and inclusion, and which bell hooks invites as a hermeneutics and pedagogy of love.

From such a pragmatist lens the potential is explored for Waldorf Education to go further than merely avoiding any incommensurability with the philosophical foundations of the corporeal turn, and instead contribute towards the development of the collective metaphors we live by (Lakoff & Johnson 1999) and their application in our schools.