L'IMPROVVISA PRESENZA DEI CORPI E LA RICONFIGURAZIONE DEGLI SPAZI FAMILIARI NELLA SITUAZIONE PANDEMICA

THE SUDDEN PRESENCE OF THE BODIES AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF FAMILY SPACES IN THE PANDEMIC SITUATION

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Abstract

The following article intends to reflect on some of the inevitable social, cultural and educational transformations imposed by the pandemic, among which a new repositioning of bodies within an unprecedented geography of relationship with the Other strongly emerges. The ethics of withdrawing does not only impose distancing, but above all the need to revisit the ways of being in relation to and managing the presence and absence of bodies. The invitation to distance ourselves and isolate ourselves alternates with the condition of the coexistence of joined bodies, which are forced to live together in the family space. The family, seen as one of the places par excellence where bodies meet, precisely because of the exceptional nature of the events that are taking place there, needs to be analyzed with regard to the possible communicative, affective and educational transformations. The question is how bodies experience this closure/protection in family spaces and what forms of relational reconfiguration can arise from it.

L'articolo intende riflettere su alcune inevitabili trasformazioni sociali, culturali ed educative che la pandemia ha imposto, tra le quali emerge con forza un nuovo riposizionamento dei corpi all'interno di una inedita geografia di relazione con l'Altro. L'etica del ritrarsi non impone esclusivamente il distanziamento, ma soprattutto di rivisitare i modi di essere in relazione e di gestire le presenze e le assenze dei corpi. Al cospetto di un invito a distanziarci e isolarci, si alterna, infatti, la condizione della compresenza di corpi congiunti, che nello spazio familiare sono chiamati forzatamente a convivere. La famiglia intesa come uno dei luoghi per eccellenza dell'incontro tra corpi, proprio in virtù dell'eccezionalità degli eventi che la stanno attraversando, necessita di essere analizzata relativamente alle possibili trasformazioni comunicative, affettive ed educative. Ci si chiede come vivono i corpi questa chiusura/protezione negli spazi familiari e quali forme di riconfigurazione relazionale ne possono scaturire.

1. In contact with bodies. Possible critical issues related to the time of the pandemic

The discourse we intend to articulate places the body at the centre of every form of relationship with oneself and with others and focuses, through a reflection on the current pandemic situation, on some possible criticalities accentuated by the condition of isolation/approach. The double and contradictory side of the coin, demonstrated by the extent to which the invitation to social isolation has also led to contact between bodies, which will be discussed later, highlights the need to pause and reflect on the problems, but also on the educational potentials that may arise.

A first level of reflection concerns the fact that such sudden changes require bodies to quickly learn and re-learn new habits and lifestyles, but also to manage the emotional part of the change (Gamelli, 2005), which can be identified, in this specific case, in the fear of the body (of others) and for the body (one's own). The widespread perception is that of the sense of vulnerability that is localised in the body and bears the name of the disease, while the reaction is that of the protection of the body and, therefore, of its closure to the world; these aspects obviously contribute to configuring behaviour and structuring ways of being in relationships that are very different from the past. What in the first moments we considered extraordinary is about to take on the features of ordinariness: privatisation of daily life linked to staying at home, social isolation and reduction of contacts, slowed down temporality and spatiality reduced to the walls of the house, but also different ways of taking care of oneself. With reference to this last point and in relation to the relationship with the body, the practice of hygienisation as a salvific ritual and the attempt to keep it "alive" through activities surrogate to those carried out in the pre-Covid period come to the fore.

It is appropriate at this point to inscribe the discussion on the body within a theoretical framework of a phenomenological kind that can clarify the reflections that follow.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1945), the experience of the body in relation to the world is configured through a process of transcendence that marks the transition from the objective to the subjective, from contingency to personal necessity and that places the individual in an interactive position with the environment, aimed at creating continuity of meanings and mutual influences. According to Fornari (2004) the relationship between body and society can be problematised through two different perspectives: the influence exerted by the body on society and, vice versa, the role that society plays in influencing the body both through cultural modelling and by consecrating it as a place of conflict and power practices. Health interventions - as in the case of preventive quarantine, which in a critical reading can also be understood as a security device and an instrument of power (Zito, 2020) - can be interpreted in the light of a political action of discipline and control over bodies and behaviour (Schirripa, 2020); more generally, just think of how "society influences the body, both through medical and juridical definition and through the conditions of its existence, giving rules for which each of us can be considered healthy or ill, alive or dead, and for each of these circumstances it defines specific interventions and attributions of social status" (Fornari, 2004, p. 83). 83). As we know, in the Foucauldian perspective (1963, 1975, 1976) this exercise of power is a harbinger of further forms of inequality and marginality.

Returning to the principle, i.e. the conception of the body and corporeality that supports this argument, when we say that we are "animals of perception and movement" (Merleau-Ponty, 1967, p. 220) we mean that the body contains the trans-formative potential of existential experience (Cunti, 2010; 2016) and that the cognitive experience of the world originates precisely in the body, in its interaction with the surrounding environment made up of bodies-objects and bodies-individuals. In exploring the ways in which Western culture has constructed its own representation of the body, Fornari (2004) highlights its ambivalent challenge, which can be respectively traced to the unveiling or concealment of truth; it is Galimberti (1987, p. III) who was the first to argue that the body can be at the same time "like this but also like that", as "place and non-place of discourse", as "vehicle in the world [and] obstacle to be overcome to be in the world". Such an interpretative reading of the reality of bodies outlines a precise

educational task, namely to predispose the individual to the search for a sense of the corporeal that transcends all forms of objectivity (Prior, 2016). The only opportunity to feel at home is to be in contact with one's own body, to feel it and to tune in to that subjective experience that can provide a horizon of meaning in the processes of knowledge of oneself and the surrounding world (Cunti, 2015; Gamelli, 2001; Malpeli, 2007; Mannucci, 2003) .

A further level of investigation concerns the relationship between the body and space, understood as the space of life, that is, both in its material and psychological dimensions. We know that the body acts actively in a space not only understood as a physical element, but rather as a place where the body's movement expresses its intentionality in relation to objects and other subjects. Space is a non-neutral condition, precisely because of the emotional, relational and communicative connotations that support, for example, certain ways of educating about the body and corporeity. In this frame of reference, a possible key to understanding the changes linked to the health emergency could be identified precisely in the forms of adaptation of bodies in the reconfiguration of family spaces. The recent report by Save the Children (2020) shows, in fact, that 42% of Italian students live in overcrowded houses without adequate space for the individual members and that con-division represents the determining factor of the new living conditions imposed by the Coronavirus. What some define as the "cruel pedagogy of the virus" (De Sousa Santos, 2020) invites us, as a matter of fact, to concern ourselves with the reverberations of an exceptionality that has now become normality and has drastically broken into the lives of individuals and families. Although experienced, this new normality is still sometimes unnoticed from an educational point of view.

2. The family as a "unified body". The reconfiguration of family spaces and relationships

The understanding of family practices in its aspects of educational relationality is strictly linked to the analysis of some variables that help to highlight the ways of living and being a family. Space, indeed, embodies both in its material and symbolic aspects, an inescapable instrument of the hermeneutics of the family as a dimension that includes and frames educational relationships. The question of the inhabitation of family relationships is based on the principle that the experience of the family is realised precisely from its being embodied in a space, understood as a *setting* that expresses peculiar ways of educating and being in relationship (Prior, 2018). The family itself can be considered a space, in the sense of an educational place in which the individual takes shape (Bellingreri, 2014); the value of identity formation lies, in fact, precisely in the "nexus that binds the world of the subjects to the environmental worlds committed to helping it form itself" (Gennari, 1997, p. XIII), such as the space of the school and the space of the family.

When we speak of space in relation to the family, we are referring to a multidimensional and heterogeneous factor in its interpretations and perspectives, a topic that is the subject of multiple universes of discourse belonging to different disciplinary spheres that, in an integrated manner, have contributed to shed light on the subject.

In order to better frame the issue, it is appropriate to refer to an essential distinction that concerns the practical, symbolic and imaginary meanings of family space (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005). The practical dimension refers to the material aspects of domestic places and their functional uses; the symbolic one refers to the representations that individuals build around the themes of home and domestic space and that most often refer to the concepts of individuality, privacy and centrality of family life; lastly, the imaginative one highlights the meanings that emerge from family biographies with reference to domestic space.

It is inevitable in such an interpretative perspective to turn our attention to the home as an emblematic space of the family, which can be observed in its double ecological-objective and subjective-psychological articulation (Lewin, 1935). If, as a matter of fact, the family space is characterised by its intrinsic geometric peculiarities, these need to be analysed in the light of the people and the educational relationships that qualify it in terms of experiences and meanings. Consequently, it follows that the relationship that individuals establish with spaces, while being

influenced by its objective aspects - materiality of colours, shapes and sizes - is determined by the affective value and mental representations that are constructed while these spaces are experienced. In this regard, think of the family-home as the "first place of education" (Iori, 2003), where the individual's educational history begins to take shape and a certain model or idea of education matures. It is precisely in the space of the family that we learn certain ways of being in relation to the Other that we export to the outside world and that become the ideal image and prototype for future relations. What the relational and affective space of the home symbolically represents responds to the need for protection and recognition of the Self that drives each individual to delimit the spaces of life within safe boundaries; in this sense, around the family space we build representations of protected places and relationships deriving precisely from the contrast with the outside world. In this way, a game of alternations is structured between the intimate, personal and 'inside' dimension of the home and the foreign, public and 'outside' dimension of the external world. The public/private dichotomy draws inspiration from the myth of the two separate worlds, widely discussed in the anthropological sciences, which have highlighted the dialectic between the inside and the outside (Bachelard, 1957; Goffman, 1956; 1971; Munro & Madigan, 1999; Pennartz, 1999), between the familiar and the non-familiar, promoting a more accurate understanding of educational relations in terms of the dynamics of belonging. The concept of the family-home is described by Bachelard (1957) as a place of our intimate being, in its beneficial effects as a place of shelter, of dreaming and of returning from something threatening. And it is precisely in reference to this last aspect that a useful reflection emerges concerning the pandemic situation we are experiencing; the opposition inside/outside the family is in this circumstance more acute precisely in relation to the danger that the outside can represent. Being in the family, understood as the space of the home, is nowadays equivalent to defending oneself from a possible attack on the body incessantly threatened by illness; being within the walls of the home, as never before, has represented being safe and protecting one's body-life. However, the ethics of *withdrawal* (Mihalopoulos, 2020) does not only impose distancing, but above all the need to revisit ways of being in relation and of managing the presence and absence of bodies. The invitation to distance ourselves and isolate ourselves alternates with the condition of the coexistence of joined bodies, which are forced to live together in the family space.

So how do bodies experience this closure/protection in family spaces? The peculiarity of educational relations in the context of the family is identifiable today precisely through the omnipresence of bodies, which is helping to define new scenarios and family balances. It is worth thinking of the parent-child relationship and how much the constant physical presence of the parent raises important questions in terms of educational presence. How does this presence affect, intentionally or unintentionally, the upbringing of children? Does being very present lead to more and better educational time? How do family educational relationships change as a result, with regard to parent-child boundaries and roles?

The changes to which these questions hint concern the everyday life of what we are experiencing, and finding exhaustive answers is complicated. However, it is certainly possible to try to identify some constants that can help us to better understand what is happening in families. An argumentation based on key concepts will certainly make this attempt more effective.

With regard to the *omnipresence of bodies*, to which we referred earlier, it is important to emphasise that the educational experience lived in the family is nourished precisely thanks to the alternation between "full" and "empty", between presences and absences, the latter not being understood exclusively in their negative sense. Being there for the other, as a matter of fact, also implies forms of distancing that can guarantee the child to freely assume his/her own identity, obviously when it is an absence aimed at a specific educational objective; on the contrary, in some circumstances a relational space always full could be less effective. Now, if the everyday life of today's families was characterised by the critical management of absences, in this pandemic situation a turnaround has occurred in favour of the management of presences. In these families, the Other familiar is proposed as a body, as an existence that comes to meet us in

an intersubjective sense, activating a process of educational acceleration. The meeting between bodies, understood by Boella (2006) as an empathic meeting and recognition of the Other, could become in these circumstances a clash between bodies; the pervasiveness of the parental presence requires to be thought and managed in a conscious way, in order not to become intrusiveness between bodies, i.e. violation of psychological and identity boundaries of the components.

Another element on which the pandemic situation calls for reflection is *educational exclusivity*. As a matter of fact, the time devoted to the educational care of the new generations, normally divided between family, school and extra-school, in this emergency has suddenly become an exclusive prerogative of the family, losing its characteristic of alternation. The spaces of life are reduced, therefore, to the family microsystem and consequently not only the educational impact related to activities, roles and relationships of other microsystems of life decreases, such as the school one for example, but also the possibilities of mesosystemic interactions that are functional to the structuring of processes of co-responsibility (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The co-presence of other educators supports and gives direction to parents' actions: what teachers say or do at school conditions family communication, confronts the parent with positions to take and choices to make. In the pandemic condition, the family's educational action is, on the other hand, more inward-looking and proceeds alone. The trait of parenting in the pandemic era could therefore be traced precisely in the solitude of the educational role, understood as a direct consequence of an excess of family privatisation and the impossibility of accessing social networks.

When discussing family spatiality, the question of roles and positioning is also brought into focus. The geometric configuration of the parent-child relationship provides us with information on the structures and forms through which the educational relationship is conceived and acted out. In recent decades, there have been numerous discussions about a tendency towards *horizontality* that sees parents and children placed on the same level in a condition of role encroachment; the adolescent family described by Ammaniti (2015) is an emblematic example of the reduction of distances between parents and children. By virtue of what has already been said, one might think that the proximity and assiduous presence, to which family members are now subjected, could further push towards a condition of fluidity that places the parent and the child next to each other, cancelling any form of relational verticality. This change certainly expresses a certain fatigue of educating (Cornacchia & Madriz, 2014; Mariani, 2014) and is linked to educational responses that are more purely unbalanced on the affective side. Interchangeability and "confusiveness" of roles can be defined as the peculiarities of this time and if it were possible to take a picture of the current family, the image would certainly be that of an agglomeration and a "single body".

Lastly, a final question arises on the meaning of family time, on the perceptions and meanings it has assumed for parents and children. It is possible to detect a profound *change in family time*, linked to a sudden and unexpected counter-trend to the epochal erosion around which family pedagogy was questioning itself. Family time has actually become limited, or at least apparently so, and it recalls more incisively the weight of its use and the sense of being "hostage" to it. It is certainly a time that needs to be organised, especially in terms of reconciling work and school activities that take place in the same spaces. It is a time that has lost its characteristic of sequentiality - in the sense of alternating work time and family time - to take on that of overlapping. There has long been a desire for a family with *slow* rhythms and an expansion of the time spent together, but the conditions in which this increased time can be spent do not offer any great possibility of creative change in family patterns. The rigidity of the family's living spaces during the health emergency could lead to a further rigidity in the perception and use of family time, which would be qualified by a concentration on the present, on the rapid succession of events linked to the pandemic, on the situations to be faced and the emergencies of the moment.

The omnipresence of bodies, the educational exclusivity, the horizontality of roles and the distortion of time represent, therefore, some of the useful categories for a deeper understanding of family educational relations in the present, but above all of the important critical points

that certainly require the family to creatively redefine its own schemes. The space occupied by bodies is increasing, but their omnipresence and familiarity risks making them undifferentiated. The sudden discovery of the presence of bodies does not translate directly into the premise of their liberation, if not through responsive educational actions oriented to the authentic recognition of subjective experiences and intersubjective interweaving that regulate family interactions. The pedagogical question, in short, concerns the possible educational potential connected to the family scenarios described and the identification of new forms of educational thinkability.

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