

**A. Boissière, *L'Art et le vivant du jeu*, Presses Universitaires de  
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Anne Boissière's last book, *L'Art et le vivant du jeu* inscribes the study of the experience of playing within a methodological challenge: to take seriously the "aesthetic" nature of philosophical inquiry, namely its emergence from our "way of feeling". Offering descriptions rather than definitions, perspectives rather than theories, Boissière undertakes a philosophical "gesture" which, instead of imposing a "conceptual cage" on the subjects analysed, assumes the affective origin of language, and thought. Indeed, it is the feeling of the "lack" of the pathic dimension of experience within contemporary society that leads Boissière to focus on the "living" dimension of the experience of playing (*le "vivant" du jeu*), in a way that rehabilitates this dimension from the very way in which the philosophical study of it is carried out. This begins with a way of writing – characterised by the use of the first person and other stylistic choices – through which she "claim[s] the necessity" of a way of doing philosophy that is not "guided by rational argumentation", but by the "situated" nature of the reflexive and writing experience – an experience that includes that of being "a woman in a theoretical universe, that of philosophy, that is almost exclusively shaped by men".

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The *perspective* on the experience of playing offered by Boissière follows Theodor Adorno's "micrological" approach, which is characterised by an orientation "to the concrete", despite the "logic of system that subjugates and homogenises"<sup>3</sup>. Hence the detachment of Boissière's investigation from the dominant – masculine – tendency to reify play valorising only its connection to rules. Boissière's focus on the "living" dimension of playing is one of the most effective ways of defusing this philosophical approach *tout court* because it allows philosophy to escape from the "paradigm of knowledge". This way of doing philosophy evolves together with the study of a subject that "resists cognition and technique"<sup>4</sup>, thus emblematising the irreducibility of experience itself. This manifests itself in the relationship between playing and rules. Although playing is concerned with rules, it escapes the "crystalising" grip inherent in

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<sup>1</sup> A. Boissière, *L'Art et le vivant du jeu*, Presses Universitaires de Liège, Liège 2023, p. 14, our transl.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ivi*, p. 121.

French structuralism, where playing is a combinatorial art of pre-given elements that interact one another according to a system of rules. Subtracting play from the “rules syndrome”<sup>5</sup> means recognising its irreducibility to the tactical, predictable action of a rational deliberative subject relating to the world in a competitive manner.

Boissière’s criticism of the increasing use of the concept of interaction shows the ineffectiveness of the linear, causal conception of the relationship with the world expressed by the “telegraphic metaphor” based on the exchange of information between an (active) sender and a (passive) receiver, which underlies the concept of interaction. The reference to the studies of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, who associates play not with the competitive dynamics of struggle, but with the “peaceful” representation of beautiful forms, allows us to see in the irrationality of playing its belonging to a logic alternative to linear causality. The forms staged by playing, in fact, are realised thanks to the delineation, through them, of an “aesthetic” order established by them “from living bodies and their spatiality in movement”<sup>6</sup>. These forms, in fact, arise together with the sense of freedom elicited by moving with easiness in a “living” spatiality that comes to life together with a “living” body that finds itself “moved”, “played” by spatiality itself. Irreducible to a “mere doing”, playing manifests itself in the playing body’s experience of being forced to step outside himself, of “escaping” from his habitual way of feeling and being.

Surprised by new ways of feeling and being, the playing body shows that the relationship with the world is not of the order of interaction but of encounter, marked by a spontaneity that Boissière does not refer to instinct but rather to childhood. The child’s playing body symbolises how the disinterested nature of playing establishes an attitude of openness. Hence the child’s view of the world, imbued with wonder and curiosity, which makes him a bearer of a critical potential towards the “serious” world of adults. The study of the living dimension of playing, from the child’s experience of “playing”, therefore contributes to “rescuing” the seeds of critical spirit contained in the once idealised, then demystified and now neglected childhood, which is instead a bulwark of humanity.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 59-63.

<sup>6</sup> *Ivi*, p. 93.

The pivot of the experience of “playing” is the experience of “being seized”. Appeared for the first time in Erwin Straus’ notion of “pathicity” and named by both Frederik Buytendijk and Huizinga as the experience of “seizement”, this experience is linked to the sense of detachment from oneself and the absence of intentionality that one feels while playing. To be seized means to be involved in a dynamic that makes us move according to movements of which we are not the masters, but which could not take place without us. They are generated by a constitutive “otherness” of playing; this is the case when we go on a swing whose regular movements cause “the arms and hands to find their own impulse and regularity”<sup>7</sup>. This is how rhythm is created: between the forward and backward movements of a swing, a regularity is established that is shared by us and by the swing itself, giving a “living”, “animated” form to the pulsating movement that runs through the swing and to the movements that it generates itself.

Boissière’s analysis of the relationship between pathicity and rhythm, based on certain works by the dancer and choreographer Françoise Dupuy, shows that it is precisely this relationship that lies at the origin of the link between play and art. This link is based on the idea – introduced by Émile Jaques Dalcroze, the inventor of “Rhythmics”, to whom Dupuy herself draws inspiration – that the “a-rhythm” of our lives can be countered by an education in rhythm, a true education in “feeling”, since it is based on the study of the different combinations of the units of space, time and energy that inform our bodily movements. Arts such as dance, music and theatre seem to be shaped by such an education – for which the relationship with architectural space is also essential (see the still little-known connection between Dalcroze and the theatre director Adolphe Appia, which Boissière points out instead).

The way in which the education in “feeling” operates at the level of artistic playing seems to concern the way of relating to artifice, that constitutive “otherness” implied by playing and already present in child’s play of disguise. “Drum, foulard, costume, mask” guarantee the “distancing of the playing body from itself”, immediately turning it into a “scenic body”<sup>8</sup>. This brings us to one of the most original theoretical points in the book: Boissière relates this “distancing from oneself”, in which the dynamic of the play consists, to Helmut Plessner’s notion of “eccentricity”, starting from Plessner’s thesis – expressed

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<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, p. 109.

in *Zur Anthropologie des Schauspielers* (1948) – according to which acting, understood as “playing a role”, is constitutive of the human being as a living being. Central to this thesis is man’s relationship to his own body: he inhabits it and is at the same time external to it. This state of “exteriority to himself”, which is replicated from the relationship to his own name to that to the social figures he embodies, refers to an element of artificiality that turns out to be constitutive of the human condition itself. It is the actor that, through “artifices” – from masks to costumes – exhibits and amplifies this continuity between nature and artificiality through a performing body that becomes the spokesperson for the “primitive” need to become “other than oneself”<sup>9</sup>. The way in which this is a source of unprecedented affective-expressive and artistic results is manifested in a remarkable paragraph dedicated to the use of costume in Carolyn Carson, in which the use of the first person singular, descriptive, metaphorical and metonymic language, and a “rhythmic” use of punctuation, make it tangible to the reader that to dance is to participate in playing that takes place between the body and the artifice, acting as a “mobile frontier” between one and the other.

This boundary testifies to the “distance from the self” which is constitutive of playing and which it is therefore necessary to “maintain”, as we can see from Boissière’s rich analysis of the notions of “holding”, “trust” and “potential space” which the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott sees as conditions for the possibility of playing. In fact, one only plays when one feels “held”, as a mother does with her child, demonstrating her ability to “be there” for it, and thus giving it the feeling of trust that allows it to open up to existence. It is only when this trust is established that playing can begin, as soon as we feel that something is giving us the support we need to “detach” from ourselves. In this way, the space between the self and the other opens up before us: a “potential” space, the “void” in which the bird lets itself fall between one beat and the next without ever falling.

Thanks to the section *Moment d’expérience: le tracé libre de la voix* – also based on the author’s first-person experience of playing with her own voice – that the reader fully understands that this is the basis of the expressive-artistic dimension of playing. By following the “journey” of a voice – for which the author creates the neologism “voilage”, formed by the union of *voix*, “voice”, and *voyage*, “journey” – that floats in the air thanks to the “support” of a “listening” body, the reader understands that the creative power of

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<sup>9</sup> Cfr. *Ivi*, p. 114.

playing unfolds thanks to the body's ability to become "acoustic". This means entering into a state of openness that favours the body's detachment from itself thus becoming itself the stage on which its transformation into a "playing" body is represented.

This phenomenon occurs against the background of Winckelmann's "stillness" (*Stille*), in which the state of listening places: that absence of movement and voice which heralds the almost mystical appearance of the "living" form of play. The latter eschews crystallisation in a physical form and impregnates itself with the dynamism of nature, i.e., the dynamism with which children connect through imitation allowing them to move in an "animated" world that invites to a complicity that expresses itself in a continuous rediscovery of one's own way of feeling, moving, and being. This is the dynamism that gives art its "living" character, which is what brings to life, e.g., Alexander Calder's wire puppets and the furniture in Calder's studio.

This is also the dynamism that runs through a "living" philosophy that joins art in "rescuing" the way of relating to the world that is typical of childhood: a way that is an alternative to violence, a way that is traced by the "living" experience of playing.

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