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The transformative dance of the crisis to resignify social educational work: auto-ethnographical reflections on a cooperative enquiry in Northern Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

This contribution proposes an autoethnographic reflection on a cooperative enquiry involving social workers, volunteers and family members of people with intellectual disabilities in Northern Italy. The author, a social worker and doctoral student, recognises the complexity of her own positioning and reflects on the educational work that takes place in the social sphere, on the risks connected to a technocratic logic and on critical, and transformative possibilities offered by the crisis. The author proposes a systemic reflexivity that challenges the dominant discourses, connects the micro, meso and macro levels and promotes different ways of knowing. The dynamism of the body, linked to the author's experience in the field of contemporary dance, becomes a symbolic way to decolonise the posture of social workers and open it up to the transformative potential of a sensitive, conscious and incorporated social educational work.

Keywords: Bodily dinamism, cooperative enquiry, COVID-19, crisis, social work, systemic reflexivity

Introduction

I am a social worker and I am in charge of design and innovation in social education for people with disabilities in a social cooperative in Lombardy, Northern Italy. I am also a third-year PhD student in “Education in Contemporary Society”. I am doing a workplace

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doctorate that is based on an agreement between my company and the university starting from a need or problem arising from the field.

In this contribution, I will present an autoethnographic reflection (Adams et al., 2015) on the educational work that takes place in the social sector. To do so, I will refer to a cooperative enquiry (Heron, 1996) that involved myself and a group of social workers, volunteers and family members of adults with disabilities in the area where I work.

First, I will contextualise my contribution, rooting it in my personal and professional experience and I will then try to build a connection between the meso and macro levels of social educational work. Next, I will explore the concept of crisis as conceived by complexity theories (Morin, 2016; Alhadeff-Jones, 2021) and I will investigate its critical and transformative potentials, starting from the cooperative enquiry carried out during the months of the pandemic crisis. The narrative material I interacted with, my field notes, and excerpts from my research journal, become objects of autoethnographic reflection and suggest a further way of interpreting the data based on corporeal and aesthetic sensitivity. The bodily dynamism connected to my experience in contemporary dance is proposed as a possible transformative metaphor for the professional posture of the social educator.

Beyond the usual choreographies in social educational work

> We were very concerned about the situation. We were the largest social cooperative in the area, with over thirty-three years of experience. Yet, we felt several alarm bells were ringing. Local public authorities and families were asking for more. (...) It was as if the wind was changing. Some parents of young people with intellectual disabilities, recently released from school, did not want to enrol their child in standard socio-educational centre. Others were critical of activities that did not take into account the age of their children. Others were concerned about their children losing the learning they had acquired at school. (...) We felt we were being pulledin many directions, but internally it is as if the mechanism capable of setting in motion a real transformation has not yet been triggered.

This narrative extract is a recollection from my research journal. In it, I explore the feelings that had led my decision to start the PhD. It does not claim to "outline a context". On the contrary, I intend to try to contextualise the educational work that operates in the social sphere, attempting to con-textualise levels and meanings from a specific observational perspective, my own (Von Foester, 1982).

Without the identification of a context nothing can be understood; however, there is a dimension of power and risk in any contextualisation (Formenti, 2018). Indeed, the art of contextualising always carries the question: "What happens if I change my posture or something unexpected happens?" (ibid.). In the above extract I refer to ‘alarm bells’: they can be seen as ‘a difference that makes a difference’ (Bateson, 1979) in the relationship between me, services, families and local public authorities. These differences seem to bring a new rhythm to the complex web of relationships. What does not yet seem to emerge is meaning.

Let me take a step back. I started working in social cooperatives in 2006, after obtaining my degree in Clinical and Community Psychology. Following my graduation, I realised that the clinic was not my path and instead I was interested in community social work. I started off as an educator in services for people with disabilities managed by the social cooperative where I currently work.I delved into the history of Italian social cooperatives that, in the 1980s, succeeded in creating innovative social services starting

from the needs and goals of the territories that had generated them (Berzacola & Galante, 2014). Over time, the services have become the subject of national and regional laws and social cooperatives have made considerable efforts to adapt to the demands of these regulations (ibid.).

In services for adults with disabilities, there has been a progressive classification and standardization of the needs of people with disabilities followed by the definition of specific professional services. The segmentation of interventions and the bureaucratisation of practices have led to little consideration being given to the life history of people, their developmental trajectories, their wishes and aspirations. Moreover, the professionals' continuous training has mainly focused on the acquisition of observational and operational tools based on a technical-instrumental rationality that has flattened the educational work, reducing its ability to read complexity.

This growing bureaucratisation of social educational practices has affected not only the Italian context but also the international one. It has led services to place excessive emphasis on instrumental responsibility. This has generated approaches that have sought to validate the wisdom of practice (Fook, 1999; Parton & O'Byrne, 2000) but has also highlighted potential risks of oppression (Freire, 1972; D'Cruz et al., 2007). All this has confirmed and increased the gap between professionals, holders of technical knowledge, and users, who are increasingly deprived of speech and power to address the important issues in their lives.

The reductive and technocratic vision of social educational work risks tightening the game between the parties and confirming the power relations present in society (Foucault, 1975). Using the narrative extract above, the 'alarm bells' are as if they have interrupted the usual relational choreographies to introduce unexpected variations. I trace back these choreographies to what Mezirow (1991) calls ‘habitual patterns of action’. However, I feel the metaphor of choreography is closer to a systemic view of social educational action. Indeed, choreography presupposes someone who imagines, improvises and composes sequences of movements, alone or with others; it presupposes dancers who embody and interpret, each in their own way, the choreography; it presupposes a scenic space that is never neutral and that constrains and offers possibilities for movement; it presupposes a whole, a 'scenic body' that emerges from the previous elements. Finally, the choreography always takes on new meanings in the relationship with the significant gaze of each spectator.

Transferring the metaphor to my professional field, the educational action that is contextualised in the social sphere is a complex dance of interacting parts (Bateson, 1979). The usual choreographies of social educational action often bring with them premises that aim to make the unexpected familiar. From this perspective, disability can be seen as an unexpected personal experience which makes the person experiencing it socially unexpected. The process of progressive bureaucratisation and standardisation of practices, and its attempt to make the unexpected familiar, tightens up the dance between the parties in rigid choreographic schemes which colonise the imagination (Latouche, 2003) and reduces the image of the other to stereotyped codes and canons which are reinforced over time and hinder a lively listening and reciprocal recognition (Honneth. 1996).

The alarm bells and the sensation of ‘feeling pulled in all directions’ that I refer to in my research journal is as if the usual choreographies had been thrown into crisis and their rhythm interrupted.

Exploring evolutionary and transformative ways in the crisis

> After many years, I am back at university, but I am profoundly different now. Today I have fifteen years of work experience, I am married and a mother of two. I wonder how this affects my work. I feel the responsibility of my position and the need to find a connection between the demands and expectations of my working environment and those of the scientific community. In between there is me as. a learner, my enthusiasm, my concerns. It is not easy to find the right balance and I feel entangled. There are personal aspirations, my desire to be useful to my colleagues, families and the people with disabilities who I interact with every day. And then, the fear of not having enough time to dedicate to the PhD, the guilt for the time I take away from my family.

In this narrative excerpt, I find the feeling of 'being pulled in several directions'. This is compounded by a sense of entanglement, where multiple elements of my personal and professional life overlap, throwing the very rhythm of the research into crisis.

The crisis ran through the whole research process. It affected my personal experience, as a worker-student, wife and mother of two, my work context; it manifested with the 'alarm bells' from families and local public bodies, and then also the wider global context, with the arrival of the COVID19 pandemic. According to Morin (2016):

> there is no sector or problem that is not beset by the idea of crisis: capitalism, society, couples, the family, values, youth, science, law, civilisation, humanity... But this concept, as it has become more generalised, has been emptied of meaning. Originally, ‘krisis’ means decision: it is the decisive moment in the evolution of an uncertain process that allows a diagnosis to be made. Today crisis means indecision. It is the moment in which, together with a perturbation, uncertainties arise. (ibid., p. 21, translation mine)

The Greek root 'krinein' unites the word 'critic' and the word 'crisis'. Originally, crisis meant ‘to order, to separate’ and also ‘to classify, to arrange, to organise, to decide and to judge’ (Alhadeff-Jones, 2010, p. 480). At some point, crisis lost its decision-making quality that led from uncertainty to certainty. Similarly, the concept of 'critical' no longer coincided only with the capacity for judgement and discernment. In social educational work, for example, we often speak of ‘critical incidents’, as events that interrupt the predictability of habitual actions that had worked until then. Critical incidents are thus events that put one in crisis, but also occasions for reflection, where they allow one to return to the breaking point and understand what did not work.

The crisis can be seen as an event, where one focuses, in retrospect, on the factors that generated it, or as a process, where it is recognised as a product of cumulative tensions and dysfunctions (Roux-Dufort, 2000; Morin, 2016; Alhadeff-Jones, 2021). Its outcome is not necessarily evolutionary: it can be reabsorbed into a return to the status quo. However, the crisis also brings with it the characteristics of evolution. Alhadeff-Jones (2021) considers crisis as a transitional experience in which there are flows that need to be represented, understood, anticipated, contained and accompanied.

Starting from the recognition of the transformative potential of the crisis, I wondered which ways of crossing it would allow the negative features of complexity, given by disorder and uncertainty, to dance with the positive ones, given by the common texture in which the one and the multiple, the universal and the singular, order, disorder and organisation are bound together (Morin, 2017). ‘The best way out is always through’, goes the line of a poem by Robert Frost (Frost & Lathem, 1969).

I chose to use a cooperative enquiry methodology (Heron, 1996) as a way to connect both sides of complexity and to promote an holistic knowledge in my workplace. Cooperative enquiry is a type of Action Resarch that goes beyond data collection and

analysis and that is used to sustain change in social action, 'with and for people, rather than on people' (Reason, 1988, p. 1), Heron and Reason (2001) wrote:

> In co-operative enquiry (…), all those involved work together as co-researchers and as co-subjects. Everyone is involved in the design and management of the inquiry; everyone gets into the experience and action that is being explored; everyone is involved in making sense and drawing conclusions. (…) All the active subjects are fully involved as co-researchers in all resarch decisions – about both content and method – taken in the reflection phases. (ibid., p. 180)

The research process followed an emergent and, at the same time, deliberated design. The arrival of the pandemic in Italy, a few months after the beginning of my doctoral studies, generated an interruption of the ordinary activities of the services in my territory, a sense of disorientation in social workers, volunteers, people with disabilities and their families, improvisational actions in the constraints and possibilities offered by the situation and a reorganisation of social educational actions in new and unusual ways (Cuppari, 2021a).

The prolongation of the pandemic emergency over the months made me and my colleagues aware of the need to find ways to inhabit uncertainty but also to reflect in systemic way (Jude, 2018; Formenti & Rigamonti, 2020) on the premises underlying the usual choreographies that, until then, had characterised the social educational work of the services. What differences and choreographic variations were brought about by the crisis? Which variations could have become evolutionary and transformative ways of professional postures and choreographies linked to the social educational work of these services?

In this contribution I will try to explore possible ways of answering these questions. To this end, I have selected and related the narrative, autoethnographic and ethnographic material collected during four different research-training courses carried out in the territory in which I work together with social workers (Cuppari, 2021b), coordinators (Cuppari, 2021c; Cuppari, 2022a), volunteers and family members of people with intellectual disabilities attending social educational centres or involved in independent living projects (Cuppari, 2022b). Some participants took part in more than one research-training course, others only in one. The courses were carried out between October 2020 and July 2021.

For these paths, we followed a method called 'spiral of knowledge' (Formenti, 2017); it is based on complex, layered, shared knowledge and a recursive proceeding of stages: authentic experience, aesthetic representation, intelligent understanding and deliberate action (ibid.). Authentic experience is based on embodied sensoriality. Aesthetic representation contextualises learning against the changing scenery of metaphorical and abductive thinking (Formenti, 2018). Intelligent understanding composes a satisfying and shared theory from the emergence of a Collective Mind that conceptualises and composes information and definitions. Finally, deliberate action is an educational, social and political action that creates new contexts and is guided by the principle of enaction (ibid.).

In all of these pathways, the use of cooperative enquiry methodology enabled participants to become communities of research (Heron & Reason 2001) and practice (Wenger, 1998). The sharing and co-construction of a participatory pact constituted an important moment of negotiation of meanings around expectations, questions and research objectives. The validity of the research was guaranteed by the recursive proceeding of reflection and action and the process continued until saturation, as established by the participants/co-researchers. For the analysis of narratives collected during the meetings, I referred to the dialogical approach proposed by Merrill & West

(2009). In it, subjects are encouraged to think of themselves as active participants in interpreting and making sense of narratives, as partners in a learning relationship.

My complex positioning in the field, as researcher but also social worker, necessitated rigorous attention to the taken-for-granted assumptions present in me and in the cultural community of social workers that I was a part of (Adams et al., 2015). For this reason, I also described and analysed my personal experiences with the purpose of understanding cultural experiences of social workers. I journaled and recorded my insights and experiences during the research process and I documented my thoughts, feelings and questions. During the research-training meetings, I wrote field notes and memos and I used them to promote a process of meta-thinking (Crittenden & Woodside, 2007). It allowed me to develop awareness of my prejudices and to be open to data that opposed my preconceived ideas (McGhee, Marland, Atkinson, 2007).

The following reflection attempts to look again at the set of research-training paths carried out and to tune in to them through a sensitive and aesthetic way that has drawn on my experience in contemporary dance. From this operation words have emerged that belong to the bodily dynamism of choreographic research and composition and that I believe can enrich the lexicon we usually use to describe social educational action.

Dancing the crisis to resignify social educational work

My relationship with dance has been discontinuous and has changed a lot over the years, accompanying me through the different phases of my life: ballet in childhood, modern dance in adolescence, and then contemporary dance and dance theatre in adulthood. Today, dancing is for me not only a way of expression and personal communication, but also an artistic and performance outlet: for ten years I have been part of a contemporary dance group that has produced several choreographic productions.

According to Bateson (1991) every living being embodies its own constitutive metaphor, ‘our own metaphor’, which is the metaphor that we are and that is one with what we know. This metaphor is indispensable for us to live, it gives meaning to what happens, to interactions with others and with the context (Formenti, 2017). Through this shift in context, thought constructs itself, creating connections that show similarities but do not eliminate differences.

While the metaphor of dance and my experience in choreographic research and composition have provided a way to explore the transformative potential of crisis in the context of social educational work, I am also aware of how each metaphor simultaneously illuminates and obscures. Metaphors, in fact, are always partial: they offer a linguistic space that can be inhabited through creativity, which highlights certain aspects without exhausting them in an explanation (Bella et al., 2014).

Starting from the re-reading of the material relating to the four training research paths, I tried to come into sensitive contact with the data collected: I took notes of my feelings, opening my imagination also to autobiographical memories and building connections between my personal and professional experiences and those shared by the participants. Our ability to listen is modulated by the openness of our senses to the world (Le Breton, 2006). In some moments I also allowed my body to move. Allowing the body to act teaches one to move from one area (cognitive, affective, symbolic) to another, forcing one to see oneself more globally from several points of view (Gamelli, 2011).

The result of this sensitive approach to research data has allowed me to bring attention to three possible strategies of crossing and transforming social educational work starting from the experience of the crisis. These strategies can be traced back to some

techniques and awarenesses that are widely used in the field of research and choreographic composition in contemporary dance.

Micro level: falling to feel the 'weight' of one's vulnerability

> How do you do it? What is the horizon now that the tsunami has hit us? How can we create a new way of thinking about welfare and social educational work? How can we do it if certain paradigms have collapsed but a new culture is not ready?

I still remember these questions uttered by a manager of my cooperative during the first exploratory enquiry (Cuppari, 2021a). Even now, they take the form of real disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991); a 'tsunami' that destroys everything. When everything collapses, there is only one dominant direction: the fall. This transience affected not only the organisational level of services but also the professional posture, as expressed by this coordinator:

> Each of us had to deal with the fear of contagion. (...) We saw how much we were like them in this situation. The role of the educator went beyond the usual tasks. There was a closeness given not by the role but by all being in an emergency situation.

The verticality of the role therefore had to give way, at least temporarily, to a horizontality brought about by the emergency and shared by operators, volunteers and families.As the crisis continued over the months it accentuated the feeling of precariousness, in addition to the fatigue of being in an uncomfortable position, in constant dialogue with the developing situation. Another coordinator says:

> This emergency forces us to see things from other points of view, we need to reinvent ourselves. (...) I feel a bit drained (...) and tired. So sometimes I say to myself: 'I will go with the flow'.

The postural geometry imposed by the crisis has not allowed social workers to place themselves on the axis of verticality, but rather according to multiple contextual, contingent, intermittent and sometimes even random directions (Cavarero, 2013). The idea of a subject who supports himself, and denies his own vulnerability and condition of dependence, is counterproductive (Butler, 2004).

The first transformative way I see in the crisis is the possibility of a professional posture that renounces the fixity and verticality of the role and becomes aware of its own transience and weight. Below is a narrative excerpt from my own bodily exploration of this theme:

> I am lying on the floor and my attention goes to the points of contact with the ground. The solids, the voids. The ground supports me. I feel the breath, its undertow. I feel the fluids of the body. I am still, yet I am in full movement. I feel like a body in free fall, saved by this hand that holds me, the floor, that invites me to dance. I turn my head to the right and my knees fall to the left. (...) I hang, I sway, I dance on the edge of gravity. The dance continues on my side, my hands become levers to carry me to my seat. The head is heavy. I can choose to leave weight or add tension. Rolling, sliding, jumping, falling to the ground take place. Everything is connected: I touch and am touched by the ground, I move a shoulder and the pelvis responds. I am one, I am multiple. I am in continuous transformation.

Leaving a habitual posture can be a challenging transition, as the quote from the last coordinator reminds us. However, being aware of one's caducity also allows one to explore professional postures that are more flexible and able to correspond (Ingold, 2015) to the context. It is a temporary and provisional renunciation of the vertical plane that allows one to change direction, wait and recover energy. This awareness is a critique of that form of problem solving which renounces to stay in the uncertainty and is often present in social educational work.

Verticality evokes an idea of autonomy, like the toddler who stands up and starts walking. The autonomy of the toddler who takes his first steps is, however, an autonomy that is aware of the risk of falling. Within a reductive and technocratic vision of social educational work, the professional often considers himself or is considered an expert, who knows everything. Yet, even the professional exists in relation to someone he takes care of and who relies on him and his competence. How can there be an educator without an educand? Verticality, then, is not a posture that manifests itself in vacuum: it is possible starting from a relationship between the force of gravity, which invites us to fall, and our resistance to it, through the thrust of our feet.

Falling can be an accidental event, as in the case of a pandemic that disrupts the usual organisation of socio-educational centres, but it can also be an exercise to be pursued. In the training of the contemporary dancer much time is spent in exploring the infinite ways of falling and reaching the vertical plane. In social educational work this can translate into a shift from mastery in understanding others to a politically bold personal responsibility and cultural humility (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). Recognising one's own transience is thus the first step in embodying a more conscious and dynamic verticality, constantly in relationship, first and foremost, with the ground that sustains us.

Meso level: disequilibrating power relations through dissonance and displacement

> That is it for now. I take up some of the participants' reflections and read out a quote from a scholar. It talks about addiction and disability as universal conditions that can arrive unpredictably in people's lives and should therefore be seen as part of a "common welfare". I had thought of this closing sentence as a passage that could help practitioners, volunteers and family members to find common ground despite their different perspectives. It seemed to me a good way to close the meeting. After the reading we started to say goodbye. X, Y's sister (a person with a complex disability), intervened and exclaimed: "This is utopia, you know that, don't you? In the evening when the door of our house closes, we are alone as families. I will still continue to be at these meetings but that is what I think". I remain speechless. We are all tired and it's late. (...) Over the last few days I've been thinking a lot about X's words and the sense of loneliness her words evoked in me. A discordant note compared to the premises that have led me to choose that quotation.

This excerpt is taken from my research journal and refers to a research-training meeting with social workers, volunteers and family members of people with intellectual disabilities involved in independent living projects. In it I recount the final moment of that meeting, the reaction of a participant, the sister of a person with complex disabilities, and what followed. If, on the one hand, I perceived the sentence said by the participant in the context of that meeting as discordant, on the other hand also the quote I had chosen was "discordant and distant from the woman's experience.

The choice to read that quote was based on a tautological premise of mine. A tautology, for Bateson (1979) consists of a body of propositions strung together in such a way that the links between the propositions are necessarily valid. In social educational work the presence of a significant tautological component is a real risk. The categorisation

of social needs and people creates a chain of logical prepositions that often end up as taken for granted ‘perspectives of meaning’ (Mezirow, 1991). In the specifics of this story, the choice to read that quote was based on the assumption that considering disability as a common good would make everyone feel more united. However, the participant's reaction immediately took me outside the framework of my assumptions, leaving me 'speechless'.

Here is a second example, taken from a research-training course aimed at volunteers of associations offering sports and leisure activities to people with intellectual disabilities:

> Three days ago I held a research-training meeting with volunteers from disability associations in my area. I had planned it carefully and was interested in hearing their views on the year of crisis that had just passed. I am a little ashamed to say it now, but I was surprised when I "discovered" that among the thirty-three volunteers present were several family members of people with disabilities. (...) I was taken aback because in my mind the volunteer and the family member were two different things.

In this case I report a feeling of displacement that made me feel 'out of place'. However, displacement can open up new possible worlds. How can my way of being in the relationship change when I become aware of the limits that I use to frame the world? How can my relationship with that volunteer change now that I know he/she is also a parent of a person with disabilities? Dislocations and dissonance can be seen as movements of discomfort that force one out of one's "comfort zone" and can be ways of decentralisation and imbalance.

Disequilibrating power relations is also a goal underlying a problematising and dialogic education (Freire, 1972). This implies abandoning the limiting view provided by social categorisations to recognise the intersectionality aspects that make up people's multiple identities (Davis, 2008). Bateson (1972) speaks of ‘bisociation’ to refer to that conversation between two incompatible habitual patterns of action that make up a meaningful unit. Bateson (1979) writes:

> We commonly speak as though a single ‘thing’ could ‘have’ some characteristic. A stone, we say, is ‘hard’, ‘small’, ‘heavy’, ‘yellow’, ‘dense’, ‘fragile’, ‘hot’, ‘moving’, ‘stationary’, ‘visible’, ‘edible’, ‘inedible’, and so on. That is how our language is made: ‘The stone is hard.’ and so on. And that way of talking is good enough for the marketplace (…). But this way of talking is not good enough in science or epistemology. To think straight, it is advisable to expect all qualities and attributes, adjectives, and so on to refer to at least two sets of interactions in time (ibid., pp. 60-61)

Social categories are stable forms of knowledge which, however, can lead to social mechanisms of exclusion. Moreover, they tighten relations between people and their social roles. On the contrary, the decentering caused by a displacement or a dissonance induces one to be lightly flexible and open to the exploration of new meanings.

In contemporary dance, disequilibrium is not only a way of falling but also an exercise in dynamic, ecological, relational balance. There are partnering exercises in which the couple of dancers look for a way out of their own body axis in order to find a dynamic balance: a third axis of balance given, precisely, by the relationship. This requires continuous reciprocal listening and the ability to know how to constantly dose one's own thrust and strength.

In the social educational work, together with the awareness of one's own constitutive, cognitive and operative vulnerability, disorientations and off-key notes can become useful ways to search for forms of dynamic equilibrium in which the power to build theories and actions around social problems is shared.

Macro level: composition process as a method of social educational design

> It is as if the pandemic has given a boost to the process of de-institutionalisation from the service which we have been working on for some time. Our centre functioned as a centripetal force, as if it had to be the container for everything. Now the service as a physical structure is closed. And so everything is starting again from the beginning, from the home and the family. What I am experiencing with operators, users and families is a return to observing what can be known, discovered and re-evaluated about the person with disabilities in their own home.

Through these words, a coordinator reflects on how the constraints created by the crisis encouraged an agency (Bandura, 1997) that could produce unprecedented realities. Faced with the impasse of a solution that could not be found, what was possible was action. 'Try to act so as to increase the number of choices.' is the ethical imperative of Von Foester (2003, p. 295).

In contemporary dance, choreography is the result of an overlapping of different phases that follow each other in a way that is not necessarily linear: improvisation, repetition, composition. In the improvisation phase, the constraints established at the beginning of the practice are important because they delimit the field of action of the dancers. They can be themes or limits in the possible movements. These constraints are functional to open possibilities of movement, to introduce creative novelties in the patterns of action and to open the doors to the imagination of the dancer and choreographer. This allows the emergence of sequences of actions interesting for the choreographic work: pertinent differences (Bateson, 1979) in the undifferentiated magma of improvisational research that are then selected and repeated. This work of repetition serves, in the slang of the contemporary dancer, to "clean" the sequence, to eliminate what is not needed and to add what is missing to make the sequence clear and comprehensible.

When the material collected is sufficient, we move on to the composition phase. Composition encompasses both process and creation (Formenti, 2017). In it, the individual level (the individual dance), the relational level (the collective dance), the conceptual level (the meaning of the whole composition) interconnect and coexist in patterns that connect.

Looking at the research-training paths that have progressively composed my research design, I recognise a process that has had a compositional and linear quality at the same time. The crisis situation gave rise to new educational and social practices in the services examined by my research. The repetition and sharing of these practices within the research-training paths allowed them to be repeated in different contexts. This produced further variations and differences which were then subject to critical and systemic reflection. In the same way, in the research-training oriented to the co-construction of housing autonomy projects, the opening of the process to volunteers and family members allowed deliberate actions to emerge as the result of a dialogue between different perspectives.

I do not therefore intend to propose here a planning method that is antagonistic to the linear one. Rather, I would like to present a new possibility offered by the crisis that allows different ways of planning to coexist in uncertainty. In contemporary dance, these two methods naturally participate in the composition of a choreography, as is clearly shown by the words of Giorgio Rossi (2021), contemporary choreographer of Sosta Palmizi, one of the most recognised contemporary dance companies in Italy:

> When I propose work on the poetic art of movement, I believe in the relationship with one's own sensual and consenting dancing body (always attentive to the senses, to one's own simple falling to the ground, where every movement is based). I feel close to the gardener, who brings an instinctive wisdom and in direct contact with nature, but I do not forget the watchmaker for his rationality and planning. At the end of the day, it is a question of tendencies and not absolutes. The dancer, like the musician, must unite the imaginative side with the mathematical and architectural side in space and time.

The reflections and proposals of the research participants in the research-training courses carried out during the crisis were also collected in a document that became the object of discussions with local public authorities and the Lombardy Region. This contributed to the issuing of a regional law (Regione Lombardia, D.G.R. 5320/2021) which recognises and supports the transformation taking place in the services. It states:

> Since February 2020, the services (...) have been organised and coordinated in order to deal with the health emergency in progress, in an attempt to protect service users and guarantee, at the same time, family support interventions. (...) There was a new and unusual way of being close to families and disabled people (...). These methods have enabled the operators to see skills and resources in the families and in the people which were not perceptible in everyday life before the lock-down and to personalise the choice of tools, times and contents. (...) Today, more than ever before, there is an important opportunity to experiment with a new reorganisation of the services on offer, through the creation of pathways and individual projects in response to the diversification of the needs of people with disabilities (...). (ibid., pp. 1-2, my translation)

Conclusion

Foucault (1975) states that the supposed objectivity and neutrality of the human sciences is heavily subordinated to their being techniques of normalisation and control. The pervasiveness of technology in the social and educational professions only increases the gap between professionals and users, reducing and stiffening relational choreographies. Within this scenario it becomes difficult to conceive spaces for transformative social action.

The crisis understood as a potentially evolutionary process (Morin, 2016; Alhadeff-Jones, 2021) and the possibility of setting up spaces of thinkability in uncertainty have put in the field investigated a process of systemic reflexivity (Jude, 2018; Formenti & Rigamonti, 2020) that involved the micro level (the individual participants involved in the research-training paths), the meso level (the relationships between the participants) and the macro level (the laws).

Re-reading the research material a few months after the end of the fieldwork, being questioned and moved by it again, allowed me to connect with the data in a more sensitive way. I recognise how my identity, life, beliefs, feelings and relationships have influenced my approach to the research and the conclusions I have reached (Adams et al., 2015).

However, I believe that the recovery of an embodied and sensitive dimension of social educational work can be a powerful antidote against the colonisation of the imaginary (Latouche, 2003) and the excessive technicalisation and bureaucratisation of practices. The acceptance and exercise of one's own transience, the awareness of one's own weight in the relationship, the search for dynamic balances that are continually negotiated with the context, and the exploration of design methods that flank linearity with compositional design paths, can constitute paths capable of moving social educational action towards transformative horizons, on a micro, meso and macro level.

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