

TRIBUTE TO TWO GREAT MASTERS OF BRAZILIAN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

By **Alberto Reinaldo Reppold Filho*** 

<alberto.reppold@ufrgs.br>

* Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

In October 2024, as I was preparing this special issue of the *Movimento* journal, dedicated to sport ethics, I was struck by the sad news of the passing of two outstanding figures in Brazilian physical education, Silvino Santin and Adroaldo Gaya. Their contributions to the development of knowledge in the field and to the professional practice of physical educators are invaluable and form a lasting legacy. The editors of *Movimento*, as well as myself, deeply felt these losses and immediately embraced my request to honor these two esteemed colleagues by dedicating this special issue to them, on a topic that so intrigued and delighted them.

These two academics held distinct and sometimes radically opposing views on physical education. However, both shared intellectual courage and critical depth in their analyses – qualities that made them essential figures in Brazilian academia. I am certain that everyone who had the privilege of knowing them and benefited from their teachings joins in this heartfelt tribute. May their contributions continue to echo, inspiring new reflections and promoting transformative practices in the field of physical education.

Silvino Santin

(1937 – 2024)

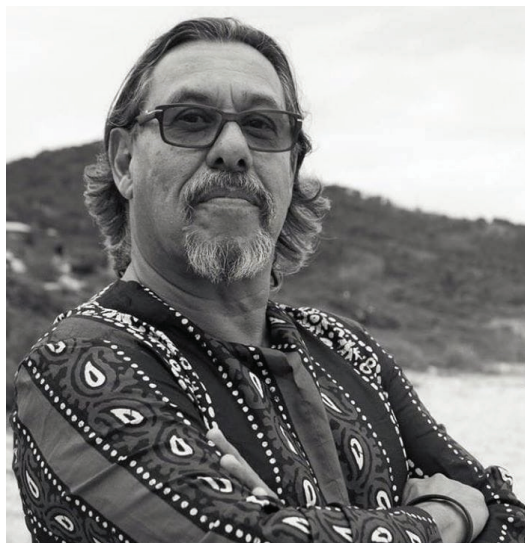


In the first week of October 2024, in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Silvino Santin passed away, a pioneer in the philosophy of physical education in Brazil. Born in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul, in a region deeply influenced by Italian immigrants who arrived in Brazil at the end of the 19th century, Santin spent his childhood and part of his youth in a rural setting. He held many fond memories of this period, which, I believe, left a profound imprint on his life, and he always had stories to share about those times.

He graduated in Philosophy from the University of the Northwest Region of Rio Grande do Sul (UNIJUÍ) and once shared, about the start of his philosophical journey: “I majored in Philosophy, more by opportunity than by conviction. Life showed me that it was worth it. I got it right, by getting it wrong.” This statement summarizes the essence of his journey: a constant willingness to start over and an ever-open mind to new ideas. He described this journey in an

Adroaldo Cezar Araujo Gaya

(1950 – 2024)



In the second week of October 2024, Adroaldo Gaya, a renowned academic and pivotal figure in Brazilian physical education, passed away in Tubarão, Santa Catarina. He was near “his Garopaba”, as he liked to say – a beach he had frequented since his early years in the physical education undergraduate course at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Garopaba, where he spent many summers, was also where he chose to spend his retirement. This coastal town, called the “boat cove” by indigenous people, became his last intellectual refuge. Despite being retired and facing a serious illness, Gaya never gave up his role as a teacher, continuing to teach and supervise students until shortly before his passing.

His scientific training began during his undergraduate years, something uncommon in Brazil in the 1970s, when physical education faculties were few, and their courses lacked a strong scientific foundation. Gaya was part of the first group of students to intern at the newly established Exercise Research

autobiographical piece published in the *Motrivivência* journal in 2009.

In the early 1970s, Santin moved to France, where, with the support of a French government scholarship, he pursued his master's and doctoral studies in the field of philosophy of language. In 1972, he presented his master's dissertation, titled *Parole, Écoute et Réponse chez Heidegger* (*Word, Listening, and Response in Heidegger*), at the University of Paris X – Nanterre, under the supervision of renowned French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas.

The study was co-supervised by François Laruelle, a young French philosopher, just a month older than Santin and then an assistant to Levinas. Laruelle pursued a career at Nanterre and became known in French philosophy for developing the so-called “non-philosophy.” Writing these lines, I couldn't help but imagine that Santin and Laruelle might have been good friends. I wonder what conversations these two young men, barely in their 30s, from such different worlds but united by a fascination with philosophy, would have had in a politically and culturally vibrant Paris still resonating with the echoes of the 1968 protests. That era inspired a critical and challenging view of the world, likely influencing their perspectives and reflected in both their thoughts.

Remarkably, Laruelle passed away just days after Santin's death. Both were 87 years old. I don't know if they kept in touch after their time together in France, but I like to imagine them now talking about the experiences accumulated over their successful careers and philosophizing about topics that, in some way, touch us all, such as: finitude, transcendence, and the meaning of life.

Laboratory (LAPEX) at ESEF-UFRGS. This experience provided him with knowledge and research practice and the opportunity to train with Maurício Leal Rocha – one of the pioneers in physical activity and sports training research in Brazil – at the Exercise Physiology Laboratory (LABOFISE) at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. As he recounted on many occasions, this initial phase of his education was decisive for his entire future career as a professor and researcher.

After graduation, Gaya taught in the Physical Education Teaching Program at the Faculty of Cruz Alta (currently the University of Cruz Alta) in the country area of Rio Grande do Sul. Upon returning to Porto Alegre, he focused on exercise for rehabilitation, likely becoming one of the pioneers in developing exercise programs for heart patients in the state.

In 1978, he joined the ESEF-UFRGS faculty, where he built his entire career, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses (such as physical and sports training, basketball, research methodology, epistemology, among others). He guided students (in scientific initiation, master's, and doctoral programs), conducted research and coordinated community outreach programs. At ESEF, Gaya also served as coordinator of the Postgraduate Program in Human Movement Sciences and Director of LAPEX, where he had begun his scientific training as an intern.

His early career was marked by an interest in physical and sports training. In the late 1970s, he co-authored his first book, *Foundations and Methods of Physical and Sports Training*. This work, along with books by Lamartine Pereira da Costa and Manuel Gomes Tubino, was

In 1974, Santin presented his doctoral thesis, *Être et Langage chez Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Being and Language in Maurice Merleau-Ponty)*, once again under Levinas' supervision, this time at the University of Paris IV – Sorbonne. He set himself an intellectual challenge by choosing to focus on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, one of the leading figures in contemporary continental philosophy. Those who were acquainted with Santin know he was not one to shy away. On the contrary, he saw intellectual challenges as fertile ground for personal and professional growth. With his intellectual discipline and philosophical rigor – qualities he deemed essential for an academic – he fulfilled this task with absolute excellence.

Upon returning to Brazil, Santin after worked at UNIJUÍ, established himself at the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM), where he spent most of his teaching career, lecturing on philosophy in various graduate programs. It was during this period that his relationship with physical education began and deepened. I believe that one of his earliest writings, resulting from this closeness to the field, was published in 1982 under the title *Philosophical Reflections on Physical Education*. His major works from this period include *Physical Education: a philosophical approach to corporeality*, published in 1987 by UNIJUÍ, and *Physical Education: other paths*, released by EST Publishing in 1990.

The Kinesis journal, published by the UFSM Physical Education and Sports Centre, gave special prominence to his ideas, publishing his articles over the years. I remember that, in the early 1990s, this academic journal launched a special supplement featuring his work,

among the first to address this topic more broadly and systematically in Brazil.

In 1980, Gaya entered the master's program in Education at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, where he was mentored by Prof. Juan José Mouriño Mosquera. Academic interaction with Mosquera, a renowned educator and researcher, significantly influenced his education, broadening his perspective to other academic fields such as pedagogy and psychology. His master's dissertation, titled *Self-Image in Middle-Aged Adults with or Without Ischemic Heart Disease Undergoing or Not Systematic Physical Training*, reflects this new perspective, aiming to establish a more integrated understanding of human beings by connecting their biological and psychological dimensions. For Gaya, physical training also possessed an educational dimension. He was deeply convinced of this idea, classifying his dissertation within the fields of physical training and adult education.

In 1991, Gaya moved to Portugal, where he began his doctorate under the supervision of Prof. Jorge Olímpio Bento at the Faculty of Sport Sciences and Physical Education at the University of Porto (now called the Faculty of Sport). The excellent study conditions offered by the faculty, combined with interaction and exchange with Portuguese academics and those from other countries, provided the ideal environment for him to fully dedicate himself to his studies in the epistemology of sports sciences, a theme he had been maturing over the years. This journey culminated in his thesis, *Sports Sciences in Portuguese-Speaking Countries: an epistemological approach*, presented in 1994. Gaya frequently expressed his gratitude to Prof. Bento

titled *Democratic School and Physical Education*. At that time, there was considerable debate about the role of schools and physical education in shaping a democratic society. This discussion unfolded amid Brazil's political reopening after 20 years of military dictatorship and within the context of the newly approved 1988 Constitution by the Brazilian Congress. Santin was a philosopher attentive to the social and political issues of his time, dedicating part of his writing to exploring the connection between these issues and physical education.

After retiring from UFSM in 1991, Santin joined the faculty of the Postgraduate Program in Human Movement Sciences at the School of Physical Education – ESEF (now called School of Physical, Physiotherapy and Dance – ESEFID) of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), where he taught courses in the philosophy of physical education and supervised master's and doctoral students. Additionally, he contributed to various other institutions, teaching courses, giving lectures, and participating in academic conferences both nationally and internationally. Two works stand out from this period in his career at ESEF-UFRGS: *Physical Education: from the joy of playfulness to the oppression of achievement*, published in 1994 in partnership between ESEF-UFRGS and EST Publishing; and *Physical Education: ethics, aesthetics, and health*, released by EST in 1995.

Santin left a vast legacy of contributions through articles and books and an indelible mark on the understanding of sport, playfulness, and corporeality. His works introduced a critical approach and established solid

and Prof. Antônio Marques, who warmly welcomed him to Porto, a city he came to consider home, alongside Porto Alegre and Garopaba.

Gaya was a speaker at countless scientific events, organizer of congresses, member of editorial boards, reviewer for numerous scientific journals, member of scientific committees, and a supervisor of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral projects – he performed with excellence all the roles expected of a great academic.

In addition to publishing more than two hundred articles in national and international journals, Gaya left us important works in scientific methodology, one of his favorite subjects. Among them are *Experience Report: guidelines for writing degree completion projects*, co-written with his daughter, Anelise Reis Gaya, and published by CRV Publishing in 2018; and *Human Movement Sciences: introduction to research methodology*, published by Artmed in 2008.

In one of his most well-known texts, *But After All, What Is Physical Education?*, published in a special issue of the *Movimento* journal in 1994, he states:

It [Physical Education] is defined as a journey between philosophy and science, in which the former is not a starting point, nor the latter a destination. Between them, there is neither opposition, confrontation, nor separation, but rather correlation, dialogue, and integration. (Gaya, 1994, p. [s.n.])

Gaya's academic trajectory was marked by his relentless pursuit of a scientific and philosophical foundation for physical education, making a decisive contribution to consolidating it as a legitimate and necessary field of knowledge in Brazilian academia. He was also deeply concerned with the

philosophical foundations for studying these themes. Through his reflections, he explored the epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of physical education, broadening the view of this field.

In his article *The Body Simply Body*, published in the *Movimento* journal in 2001, Santin reflected on corporeality and took on the challenge of uncovering, through the arts (dance, music, and literature), the “alphabet of the body’s language.” In this essay, Santin gifts us with an almost poetic language, inviting reflection on how, at times, science and philosophy distance us from the experience of the “living body”. He writes:

Perhaps the body is not a machine, nor a refining crucible of the soul, nor a container of the psyche, nor a support for reason, nor a mathematical equation, nor a chemical formula, nor a mechanical organization, but a work of art, a melody. Then, its story is probably not the one we tell. The story we tell is the one that narrates the treatment rationality gave it. If the body is a melody, we need a musical ear. (Santin, 2001, p. 58).

His writings lead us to reconnect with the body, celebrating it as a means of expression and knowledge. With this vision, Santin inspires us to listen to the body with sensitivity, recognizing it as a living work of art. His intellectual legacy remains a fundamental reference for us all.

ethical foundations of school physical education, a topic that appears frequently in his writings. In his 2014 book, *Physical Education: Order, Chaos, and Utopia*, published by Casa da Educação Física Publishing, he addressed several of these issues. Throughout the year preceding his passing, he dedicated himself to a new book, in which he reviewed his own ideas and explored other perspectives on physical education in Brazilian schools, giving particular emphasis to ethical issues. Unfortunately, he did not have time to complete this important project.

A keen critic with an inquisitive and creative personality, he was always in search of new ideas, and his enthusiasm for spirited debates never went unnoticed. His ability to see both virtues and flaws, without filters, was an expression of his authenticity. Beneath his critical temperament was a man of deep convictions, someone who genuinely believed in everything he advocated.

Gaya was a person who sought to live intensely – and I believe he lived the life he chose, without concessions. His career was marked by dedication and commitment to the advancement of science, inspiring generations of researchers and leaving an intellectual legacy that will continue to influence physical education. May his memory inspire us to look beyond appearances and to be courageous in the pursuit of what we believe in.