

Pedagogy as a Poetic Gesture of Language

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ABSTRACT – Pedagogy as a Poetic Gesture of Language. The essay addresses the relationship between the experience of language and poetic imagination based on the reflections by Agamben, Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard as a strategy to expose the tensions within the problem of temporal discontinuity that weaves the fabric of ‘linguagely’ alterity in the meetings between small children and adults. It claims the pedagogic understanding that it is only by interacting poetically with the world, by triggering times of presence, and by assuming our attempts to project singular meanings onto the collective, and not by keeping an analytical distance from it, that we can pursue language as a gesture unfettered by any kind of instrumentality. The pedagogical question that emerges is not about the freedom rooted in the individual, but about living together.

Keywords: Childhood. Experience of Language. Imagination. Poetic.

RESUMO – Pedagogia como Gesto Poético de Linguagem. O ensaio aborda a relação entre experiência de linguagem e imaginação poética a partir das reflexões de Agamben, Merleau-Ponty e Bachelard como estratégia para tensionar o problema da descontinuidade temporal que tece a alteridade linguageira dos encontros entre crianças pequenas e adultos. Reivindica a compreensão pedagógica de que é interagindo poeticamente com o mundo, desencadeando tempos de presença e assumindo tentativas de plasmar sentidos singulares no coletivo, e não dele distanciando-se analiticamente, que podemos perseguir a linguagem como gesto desvinculado de qualquer instrumentalidade. A questão pedagógica que emerge não é a da liberdade enraizada no indivíduo, mas a do viver juntos.

Palavras-chave: Infância. Experiência da Linguagem. Imaginação. Poético.

Introduction

This essay emerges from a dialogue we established during the last years based on our interest in bringing together studies that focus on the intimate relationship between poetic imagination and the experience of language in the education of small children in times and spaces of collective life. In our experience of thinking and sharing ideas, we can only start from where we are; and we are in the middle of experience: between daydreaming and thinking, between the sensible and conceptual. As Gaston Bachelard puts it (1994, p. 95), “[...] nothing is fixed for the man who alternates thought with dream”.

The option for being intentionally situated at this place *in between*, at this place of movement between daydreaming and thinking, between what we can feel and think and what we still do not feel and think, has as its objective to place ourselves between different forces that promote openness to contradiction and to discussion, and therefore to the intention of exposing the tensions within ideas more than to defend them.

For that, we have often found the power of pedagogic reflection outside pedagogy, for example, at the crossing between poets' reveries and the speculations of philosophers. Education has to do with this *in between* that brings together philosophy and poetry, since it relates to the force of thinking. Without a simplistic opposition between them, but also avoiding the destructive fusion of their historic specificities, the way they exert such force establishes the distinction between thinking *about* the world, inherent to philosophical reflection, and thinking *in* the world, inherent to poetic production. The link bringing the two together is language.

Education has also to do with the *in between* that emerges from the matches and mismatches between youngsters and the elderly, between children and adults, in other words, between ways of feeling and thinking at different times. To Bárcena (2012), without this experience of the difference between times, without this temporal discontinuity between generations, there is no possibility of pedagogic transmission. Insertion in time and in language requires education of the human, that is, it makes the human educable. Both the experience of time and that of language relate to the transfigurative power of the human. The experience of time emerges from the becoming of the narrative, and we inhabit the dimensions of language in many different ways.

In order to examine the 'linguagely' alterity that emerges from a relation between different times, we take as a philosophical assumption that the link between education and childhood – like the one between poetry and philosophy – lies in the temporality of the experience of language, in a relation always mediated by language itself. The term 'linguagely' is here employed in the sense given to it by Merleau-Ponty

(1991, p. 94) when saying that “There is a ‘linguagely’ [*langagière*] meaning of language which effects the mediation between my as yet mute intention and my words, and in such a way that my spoken words surprise me myself and teach me my thought”. Thus, to Agamben (2008), the idea is neither a metalanguage nor the vision of an object outside language,

[...] *but vision of the language itself*. Since it is language that mediates for man every thing and knowledge, it is itself immediate. The speaking man cannot reach anything immediate, except mediation itself. A similar *immediate mediation* constitutes for man the only possibility of achieving a principle liberated from all presuppositions, including the presupposition of himself; [...] What unites men among themselves is neither a nature nor a divine voice, nor yet the common prison in the signifying language, but the vision of language itself and, therefore, the experience of its limits, of its *end* (Agamben, 2008, p. 37).

Thus, the interest in bringing together our studies, readings and writings in the field of the education of childhoods is not one of elucidating the pedagogic problem posed by the learning of the many modes of being and living in language on the part of children in Early Childhood Education. What drives us to write is the challenge of learning to interrogate the education problem posed by the temporal discontinuity that inhabits the linguagely becoming between adults and small children. That is, to face the education question posed by the temporal discontinuity in the logic of reading, interpreting and acting based on that which sets us in a common world: the linguagely experience and its poetic power to project singular meanings onto the mundane collective.

It is not the case of presenting models or of judging the adequate and the inadequate, but of claiming to Early Childhood Education the pedagogic understanding of the temporal alterity between adults and children in their linguagely modes of participating in public life. The pedagogic challenge lies in considering that in this alterity it is the adult who cannot incorporate language: children are always the first to learn (Agamben, 1999).

Perhaps, the biggest challenge posed by small children to pedagogy comes from the situation in which before transmitting anything adults have to transmit language (Agamben (1999). To Bárcena (2010), the act of transmitting goes beyond communication, because it relates to the presence-producing experience, to someone who gives and someone who receives, and not just to the mere interpretive production or reproduction of meanings. If transmission “[...] contains the presence of a *who* in incarnate words, every pedagogic relation is resolved in making us present in what we say, in what we do and before whoever we say and to whomever we speak” (Bárcena, 2010, p. 36).

To consider this production of presence in the pedagogic transmission supposes an ethical and aesthetic responsibility towards the

experience of language that implies the refusal to fragment it into watertight languages, since no dimension of language exists independently of the action of the body that inscribes it in the world, and that gives it meaning in common life. It then becomes important to consider that pedagogy,

[...] beyond the historic constitution of educational models rationalized upon principles coherent with its practices, gives shape to knowledges that require actualization in the debate of its ethical choices, political decisions and practical actions, since its intentionality does not mean to format or shape humans, but to interact with them in the world (Murillo, 2013, p. 14).

To propose a reflection that brings together the themes of poetic imagination and language in the field of Pedagogy as phenomena that emerge in and from the experience between adults and children, requires learning to think about themes impossible to be frozen into fixed answers, because they relate to the experience of coexisting, and the latter can be reduced neither to concepts nor to previous categories. It implies considering with George Steiner (2003, p. 355) that “[...] human exultation and sorrow, anguish and jubilation, love and hatred, will continue to demand shaped expression. They will continue to press on language [...]”.

The pedagogic challenge consists in accepting that language can be interrogated but not unveiled. We shall always be face-to-face with the same fact: “[...] language remains an enigma only to those who continue to question it, that is, to speak about it” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 197). Between the speakable and the unspeakable, what can be said happens within language and not outside it (Agamben, 1999).

Here, therefore, there are no defined paths to a happy ending that could soothe us, only the possibility of sketching a methodological strategy to afford us an approximation to the temporal discontinuity and to the languagely alterity between small children and adults, not as distance or separation, but rather as a time present *by the presence*, a time that is constituted by a language that produces and contains *presence*, that which promotes and amplifies the existential density of the real.

Thus, as methodological strategy to face the challenge posed by small children to the ethical and aesthetic responsibility of adults of making decisions when living in the times and spaces of Early Childhood Education, we opted for the approximation between three approaches to childhood as three modes of bringing tension to the problem posed to education by the languagely alterity between small children and adults: childhood and poetic imagination in Gaston Bachelard, childhood and operative sensible body in Maurice Merleau-Ponty and childhood and experience of language in Giorgio Agamben. Three thinkers, three ap-

proaches as different as they are potent to think about *childhoods*. At the center of each of these reflections and analyses of childhood – in its differences – we find language. The intention here is not so much that of gathering the thinking of these authors, but rather of pursuing in the particular way each one of them formulates and talks about childhood, the possibilities to think about it as poetic power of the human to become language.

Childhood and Language: experience of the ineffable

To Agamben (2005), childhood is neither a period localized in chronological time nor a psychosomatic state independent of language, but rather a limit-dimension interior to language. Therefore, to reach childhood is to find language. Language and childhood are in constant becoming, and for this reason there is no chronological beginning, an origin identifiable in time, a *before* language or a pre-linguistic subject. Freed from the subjective conditioning that defines the origin as a point in a chronology, as an initial cause splitting time in a before and an after, origin “[...] cannot be *historicized*, because it is itself *historicizing*, it itself founds the possibility that there exists something as a ‘history’” (Agamben, 2005, p. 61).

If childhood and language coexist as “[...] a priori limit and structure of every historic knowledge” (Agamben, 2005, p. 62), it is in this circularity – childhood as origin of language and language as origin of childhood – that the place of experience emerges as the infancy of the human, as experience of language that is consummated in and through language. The existence of a *childhood* as a fact of the human means that the human cannot be identified with the subject (something subjective), or with the language (something natural), since it must appropriate language in order to constitute him/herself as subject. One must say *I* in order to become subject of language (Agamben, 2005). In so doing, the possibility of history is opened to one.

Here we can only talk about experience, in and between humans, on the basis of this distance interior to the language, between itself and childhood. Otherwise, language would be the place of totality and truth, but not the place of experience. Experience is not the past cause, but the disquiet of making oneself in the present, since it is what will emerge and, at the same time, what guides this emerging. For this reason, Skliar (2012, p. 67) says that experience inaugurates thinking, because “[...] thinking is not previous to experience. It is its attainment, its pursuit, its becoming”.

“As man’s childhood, experience is the simple difference between the human and the linguistic. That man has not always spoken, that he was and still is *infant*, this is experience” (Agamben, 2005, p. 62). Experience not submitted to linguistics or to the Science of Language,

when it relates to the “[...] pure existence of language, independently of its real properties” (Agamben, 2008, p. 66), that is, in its *exposure*. This *experimentum linguae*, this existence of language as the content of experience, was described by Wittgenstein in his only public conference:

And now I shall describe the experience of wonderment before the existence of the world, with these words: the world thus is experienced as a miracle. I am now tempted to say that the correct expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, albeit as expressing nothing *within* language, is the existence of language itself (Wittgenstein apud Agamben, 2005, p. 17).

What is at stake in this presupposition of the *pure existence of language* and of its opening of the thinking to the *pure existence of the world* is “[...] the excess of language with respect to science” (Agamben, 2008, p. 78), that is, the impossibility of its reduction to the logical-grammatical rules, because something in language exceeds the tongue and must remain unthought. This is the mystery of the human becoming.

Both language and imagination, childhood and education, are between the speakable and the unspeakable, between the thought and the unthought, as an excess, always a bit further from the point where we believed to have reached them. There will always be, beyond and beneath our statements, more life than they can place under our purview. Thus, for Agamben (2008, p. 38), “[...] every comprehension is founded on the incomprehensible”.

It is precisely this incomprehensibility – this ineffability of being *in-fans* (speechless) –, this ineffable existence of language, this finitude, this silence of muteness, which promotes the openness to the *dialectic journey* of the thought (Agamben, 2008). The sphere of childhood as the arche-limit in language is manifested as experience of the ineffable, that which cannot be named or described. This experience, “[...] the *mystérion* that every man institutes by the fact of having a childhood” (Agamben, 2005, p. 63), is not a psychic reality beneath or beyond language, but the unanticipatable and unrepeatable that transforms a life. The limits of language relate to the poetic experience of rearranging the world as given, to the exposure to the unknown that makes us speechless and demand the production of meaning in order to be signified. For poet Octávio Paz:

There are no colors or sounds in themselves, stripped of meaning: touched by the hand of man, their nature changes and they enter the world of works. And all works end as meaning; whatever man touches is tinged with intentionality: it is going toward... Man's world is the world of meaning. It tolerates ambiguity, contradiction, madness, or confusion, but not lack of meaning. The very silence is populated by signs. [...]

The differences between the spoken or written language and the others – plastic or musical – are very profound, but not so profound that they make us forget that all are, essentially, language: expressive systems endowed with significative and communicative force (Paz, 2012, p. 27-28).

It is proper of poetic action to make something visible, to show, to produce presence by remaking the world, by rearranging it, retelling it, fictionalizing it. Language action of reordering the appearances that affects radically the configuration of our temporal experience because it articulates our practical understanding. Rearrangement and disarrangement of appearances that points towards the confusion of life that has to be transformed into experience and be narrated to the others. Plurality inhabits the singularity of poetic experience, because it relates to the power of thinking.

In Bachelard (1988, p. 14), imagination – or our reveries – makes us “[...] create what we see [...]” and, therefore, the image comes to the real and not from it. It means that it is from our fictions, from our storytelling, that we extract our world configurations, our *real*. The poet is the artisan of language who engenders and configures images through the single means of language. The images imagined are not reduced to random production, but prompt the thought to decipher them into another language. Here, the past is not relevant, what matters is its actualization.

The values, in their actuality of valuing in the same movement of realizing something, make inert everything that derives from the past and, thus, all memory has to be reimagined, that is, retold or dramatized at the moment of realization. Bachelard (1991) credits to the perception and to memory a reproducing imagination that is completely different from poetic imagination, that institutes the daydreaming by mobilizing the operative body upon the materiality of the world in order to narrate it in language. The ideas dream in the act of retelling and remaking the world through the collision between thought and reality to make it intelligible. Daydreaming engenders realities through language, instituting them and transforming them. In this sense, poetic language relates to the ambiguity of the real in which and through which it is precisely manifested the condition of reality.

The human is historic exactly for not coming into the world already speaking, but having to engender speech and the spoken being from their immersion into a history. The lack of language is the condition of its emergence (Agamben, 2005) and, thus, the trajectory of its learning is the same for all children: they all have to learn to speak (and to project visions) from others. It is because children have to learn to imagine, that is, they have to learn to operate and transfigure the world through language – making it present, turning it into presence – that childhood acts and is constituted in language by being exposed

to the same language, that is, exposed to the experience both of lack of and search after language, deprivation and openness, at the same time exposed to the emptiness and to power. This childhood vocation of language, this limit-dimension interior to language, between it and childhood, has a name for Agamben (1999, p. 95): “[...] thinking, that is, politics”.

To Agamben (2006; 2008), we are destined to power. For him, that means to say that we are “[...] fated and abandoned to it, in the sense that all its power to act is constitutively a power of not acting, and all its knowledge, power of not knowing” (Agamben, 2006, p. 20). The political dimension of acting in the collective emerges from the possibility of appropriating the poetic dimension of language – not of language to say this or that as communication – while also appropriating certain virtuality of the saying and not saying. The power of both is the same. “Man is the animal that has the power of his own impotence. The greatness of his power is measured by the abyss of his impotence” (Agamben, 2008, p. 294).

That is how, for Arendt (2004, p. 17), the nativity, in which the action in the sense of beginning is rooted, of imparting motion to something “[...] may constitute the central category of political thinking [...]”, since being born is both to begin oneself in the world and to begin a world in the historic simultaneity of the continuity of a world already constituted. Here the almost insurmountable pedagogic challenge is to understand the sensible and operative body as primary source of significations that we constitute implicated in a common world by imbuing it with our reveries, our groping and hesitations, producing meanings incarnated from the inexhaustible languagely exploration that the world offers.

Operative Body in the World and Language

The openness to the experience of language engenders a particular historic process by emerging as experience in the temporalization of the body. Time happens in the body and changes it. That is the only reason why, for Agamben (2005), we have a childhood: because we are not born already speakers and we must learn to install in the body a languagely history. It is only under this condition that history cannot be the continuous progress of the speaking humanity through a linear time: it is interval, discontinuity, eruption of thought, of becoming, because we have to learn the plasticity of the doings of the body that signify the mundane existence. Each time for the first time.

We are historic becomings, we are constituted in a historic perspective in which we are the time and the space that compose a narrative: the coexistence between humans. Historicity emerges from the awareness of a future and from the remembrance of a past, which implies constituting a narrative of the living together inhabiting language. It is in the existence, living, that we constitute and impart meaning to

personal and collective phenomena. Here, collectivity – the common dimension – is not the sum of objects and/or individuals, but a dimension of permanent existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a). Historicity is con-substantial to the intersubjective field. Therefore, the world as body relates to the *in between*: there is no world for the human that is not an *inter-world*. Because that is where we are situated, “[...] we are condemned to meaning, and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 18).

In the Cartesian tradition the verb to exist implies only two meanings: either something exists as a thing or as consciousness. However, the experience of one’s own body exposes the ambiguity of existence. Because the body is not an object, its vital processes cannot be linked among themselves and to the world through relations of causality, “[...] all of them are confusedly taken up and implicated in a single drama” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 269). The experience of one’s own body is opposed to the reflexive movement that, by detaching the object from the subject and the subject from the object, offers us only the body in idea, as it is conceived by the understanding. Nevertheless, the world is not merely causal and factual, but rather the place where we live, we are in the world, we are surrounded by things and their happenings. And “[...] it is through my body that I understand the other, as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 253).

We inhabit the world, and to inhabit is to signify, this open and indefinite power of apprehending whilst communicating a meaning, through which we transcend ourselves towards modes of acting, towards the other, towards thought itself, through our body and our speech. Here, “[...] neither the world nor the meaning of the world is *constituted* by consciousness” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 539), because speaking is not evoking verbal images or articulating words according to the model imagined. The word is not an object recognized by me in a synthesis of identification, but rather “[...] certain modulation of my body as being in the world [...] first of all the aspect that the object assumes in a human experience” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 540). The signs, the morphemes, the isolated words, just like the isolated sounds and traces, the isolated movements and gestures,

[...] signify nothing; they succeed in conveying signification only through their assembly, just as communication passes from the whole of spoken language to the whole of understood language. Speaking is spelling out at each point a communication whose principle is already established. It may be asked how this is possible, since, if what we are told of the history of the earth is well founded, speech must have had a beginning, and it begins again with each child (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 84).

This beginning of the child in the already begun adult, this circularity of a temporal discontinuity “[...] according to which language,

in the presence of those who are learning it, precedes itself, teaches itself, and suggests its own deciphering, is perhaps the marvel which defines language (Merleau-Ponty, 1991, p. 39). In Merleau-Ponty, the thought is nothing *interior*, it does not exist outside the world and outside the words, outside language. In this sense, there is no such thing as *the* thought or *the* language, since the expressive operations take place between the thinking word and the speaking thought: speech does not translate in the speaker an already made thought, but consummates it (Merleau-Ponty, 1991a, p. 242). To be constituted in language, under this perspective, is to plunge both into the human historic experience and into the experience of common life.

In the Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, language presupposes a knowledge of language, a thinking that deciphers the happenings in and of the body, since every encounter with language is an encounter with an unfinished happening, language itself being a part of this happening. Thus, Merleau-Ponty (1999a, p. 537) can say that “[...] language acquires meaning to the child when it *constitutes situation* for her”, since the child lives an existential and undivided body, she is in the mundane collective and in her body, simultaneously in both media without any difficulty.

Such coming out of oneself towards the world exposes the world that is also to be made. The world is not given and ready: “[...] the whole world is inside me and I am wholly outside myself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 546). We become the simultaneity that the world becomes to us and to the others. In this temporal experience of ourselves, imagination emerges as image incarnate that incarnates the world, a *gap* in the body in its mundane openness where “[...] things go through us, just like we go through things” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999b, p. 121), and are not reduced to the figure-like: it is valuation of the lived.

To the flexibility of imagination what matters are the values extracted from the world by the poetic images and not their perceived characteristics, since “[...] for the imagination, the world gravitates around a *value*” (Bachelard, 1989, p. 177). Imagination acquires a particular reality in so far as it is a generator not only of forms, but of values and qualities that appeal to the sensuality of the encounter between body and the world. It is what Merleau-Ponty (1999a, p. 211) refers to when he says that the apprehension of a signification is done by the body: by the *I can* in its implication with time (now) and space (here), and not by the *I think*. It is through imagination that I exert this power of taking initiative and acting.

Imagination here is very close to Bachelard's conception when he says that matter is a means for the realization of imagination: image comes to the real and not from it; it is body and world intertwined and not polarized. In Merleau-Ponty, the enigma of the sensible emerges associated to the mystery of vision as “[...] openness of our flesh immedi-

ately filled by the universal flesh of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1991, p. 16), capable of – in the most private intimacy of our lives – making us simultaneous with the others. In this sense, our gazes are not *acts of consciousness* – in which we could claim an indelible priority – but synchrony and co-presence where the sensible “[...] is precisely that which, without leaving its place, can assail more than one body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1991, p. 15). Co-presence that makes us witness the metamorphosis of the visible into viewer, since “we could not possibly touch or see without being capable of touching or seeing ourselves” (Merleau-Ponty, 1991, p. 16).

The world comes to imagine itself in the operative body at the instant when it becomes gesture. Because the world is not what *I think*, but what *I live*; it is not given, but becomes. A movement that configures worlds in the movement of transforming it, that is, of restarting it. The world does not want to remain quiet: *dis-quieted*, it disquiets us, forces us to touch it, to move it, to make it world in us. This coming out of ourselves towards the things requires action from our body: acting is giving oneself to inaugurate meanings. A power intimately associated to the decision to initiate something in the world.

A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its “world”, and to move one’s body is to aim at the things through it, or to allow one’s body to respond to their solicitation, which is exerted upon the body without any representation. Motricity is thus not, as it were, a servant of consciousness, transporting the body to the point of space that we imagine beforehand. [...] Thus, we must not say that our body is *in* space, nor for that matter *in* time. It *inhabits* space and time (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 193).

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology interrogates philosophy’s own experience by turning to the mystery that fertilizes the thought: the openness to the world or better yet, the *there is* of the world. In *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, Merleau-Ponty (1991, p. 199) affirms our impossibility of suppressing either the things that gravitate around us or the living beings with which we coexist, since our birthplace is the Earth – “[...] ‘soil’ or ‘lineage’ of our thinking and of our life”. We are made of its flesh, matrix both of our time and of our space where we share “[...] our proto-history of carnal beings copresent in a single world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1991, p. 199).

His work, marked by the search for the mundane character of reality, inverts radically the cornerstone of Western thinking by affirming that the world is the means of realization of consciousness, and that we cannot, as Descartes would have wanted, constitute the world by the *I think* formula. It denies the purity of a thought disincarnated from the world, to affirm the strange re-crossing of exchanges between body and world as the beginning – the previous of the *there is* – of all knowledge.

While the Cartesian tradition affirms our sensible experiences of the body as a source of error, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges in them a generative or creative power of knowledge.

Therefore, the central motif that disquiets and permeates the thinking of the French phenomenologist is that of interrogating the mute experience of our insertion in the world. An interrogation focused on the privilege attributed to the mediation of the thinking in the I-world relationship, submitting the cogito to a radical critique by bringing it to a previous sphere: the immediate experience of the body in the world. In his own words (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p. 9), “The true Cogito does not define the existence of the subject through the thought that the subject has of existing, does not convert the certainty of the world into a certainty of the thought about the world, and finally, does not replace the world itself with the signification ‘world.’” The operative body – the *I can* – is not open to itself except through its openness to the other bodies and to the world. A pure acting would be contradictory. The mundane experience institutes me before I think it, or before I represent it. In the Merleau-Pontian thinking, I do not represent the world, I am adhered to it; there is no coincidence between my perception and the things themselves, since the world is constituted as perceived.

That the world is a perceived implies turning oneself towards the domain of the lived, of the pre-reflexive, of the immediate: the body as exemplary sensible. Not as starting point or endpoint, but the body and its power to be affected by the sensible as the center of the whole problem. The whole body gives the measure and the dimensions of the world. That is why the poetic language signifies the world. It is through the body that the meaning is perceived therein. The world such as it exists outside me is not in itself touchable; it is always, and primordially, of the order of the sensible: of the visible, of the audible, of the tangible.

The sensibility to the world and to the other is our first link to the world. In Merleau-Ponty, the body is no longer dependent of the sovereign power of consciousness (I think), but now exerts the mediation with the world, marking its presence in us. The phenomenologist insists in emphasizing the *relation* between the *things* and my *body* to affirm that there is no perceptual coincidence. The perceptual experience is unique, unpredictable and *shared*: “[...] it is what makes me sometimes remain in appearances, and it is also what sometimes brings me to the things themselves; it is what produces the buzzing of appearances, it is also what silences them and casts me fully into the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999b, p. 20). It is the body enacting the world: vivifying it.

Rhythmic life, linked to the temporal dialectics of rests and actions, of the possibilities of repetitions, of the freedom of the beginnings, of the active and polymorphic grouping of the realizing incidents (Bachelard, 1989). That is why Agamben (2005) can affirm that there is no fully adult human. Childhood does not leave him because this is the name and the task of thinking.

Poetic Language and Pedagogic Gesture

To claim that children should inhabit their childhoods in Early Childhood Education, no longer beings in nascent state, latent, imperfect, undeveloped, to emerge in their languagely power as the *other*, different from the adult in the interplay of transmissions and alterities that mark the encounter of two experiences of time, which installs the beginnings and presents the already begun, exposes the tension we face as researchers and educators to dream and think pedagogical processes with small children. The complexity of the intention to deal with the poetic dimension of language in the processes of learning to live together, calls for the emergence of contradictions, of ambiguities, of paradoxes as a condition to face this theme, pointing towards the impossibility of simplifying the questions.

To claim the pedagogic consideration of an experience mediated by language that helps both the children and the adults to become present in what they do and in what they are, relies on a given encounter with and in the world. An encounter that looks for the presence of the present, here and now, an existential density capable of dislodging the previous determinations towards the indeterminate chances through the interstices of the instants of pedagogic action. It should be an experience capable, at the same time, of producing a presence not reduced to the simplification of meanings through the instrumentality of a premature schooling. It should be an experience of language as a gesture that recognizes the power in which language finds support, a *return to the childhoods* of thinking, in which language recovers its gestural character of *pure means*, that is, unencumbered by any other finality (or of its instrumentality). “The linguistic gesture, like all others, sketches out its own sense” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 253).

Lastly, it should permit the pedagogic understanding that it is by interacting poetically with the world – and not by distancing oneself from it to analyze it and explain it – that we, adults with the children, can constitute and impart meanings to the phenomena at once singular and collective. It is in existence, by living, that we learn together to appropriate the alterity of what we can do by thinking and think by doing.

Alterity – in this essay, the one between small children and adults – emerges not as distance or separation between two subjectivities rooted in an individuality, but as experience of the intercorporeality, founder of intersubjectivity in an interminable exchange and crossing in the living together (Merleau-Ponty, 1999b; 2012). In the perspective of Skliar (2012, p. 138) when he writes “[...] the poetics of the other makes me other”, that is, not to conceptualize him or abstract him, but to accept him as the other in us, other time, other way of being in language, other way of perceiving and acting. We should point out that these *others* do not refer only to other people, but to the concreteness of the places we inhabit, to the listening of processes in the collective, their traditions, to the listening, ultimately, of the lives that are lived in them.

It implies accepting an encounter of the meanings *in time*, and not just in spaces. To disengage time, a rupture in the real. Here, reality is not representation or identity, it is not something beyond or beneath me or my action in the world, but the existence of a me in the world with the other, which implies and engenders languagely action of rearranging, redoing, reinventing and recreating the lived from the meanings that we constitute, institute, confer to the experience of coexisting and of inserting ourselves – participating – in the common world. To Bárcena (2012), to live is nothing but being in the very existing, since life is not something that can be explained. Therefore, “At each instant, I weave dreams around the things, I imagine objects or people whose presence here is not incompatible with the context, and yet they are not confused with the world, they are out in front of the world, on the stage of the imaginary” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 6).

The presence in time presupposes a languagely encounter in the time of the other, a rift in the real – that makes the real more real – by the listening and attention to the singularity of the time constituted by that which in experience is unrepeatable, and that relates to the paths of access to the poetic (poetry, painting, drawing, dance, singing, music, cinema – in short, everything that relates to the craft of senses and meanings that produce presence in the world). The poetic, in its power to make be what is not, produces visibilities, it is production of presence as transformative action of the operative body in the world, that is, in its power to transform and metamorphose ways of acting into language. Experience is poetic when a singularity recognizes itself in the other’s experience. We thereby signify ourselves in the collective experience. Here, poetic language teaches the thought – and pedagogy – how to deal with the temporal discontinuity and with simultaneous temporalities.

The movement that ensures the power and spontaneity of the poetic making resides in the expressivity of the gesture, in the opening between words, in the silence between musical notes, in the emptiness between the traces and the blots, in the movement. The poetic experience in this sense, more than the objectivity of an action, is a mode of action in the world. Mode of action which, for being movement of the body in the world, implies to Merleau-Ponty (1999a, p. 229) “[...] a primordial operation of signification in which the expressed does not exist apart from the expression [...]”, since “[...] expression is the language of the thing itself and is born out of its configuration” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 432) and, therefore, there is no need to command the movements. The expression itself organizes the body. There is a large difference between saying that *I express myself through the body* and saying that *my body expresses itself* and, therefore, we shall not talk about expressing something *through* a gesture; in the expressive gesture we find an indivisible totality between language and body. The unique and unrepeatable of the vital confluence between temporal experience and poetic experience emerges from the transformative doings of the body, which promote the propagation of the sensuality of feeling.

The poetic as a mode of action of the expressive body in the world emerges in the childhoods as playing, accepting and feeding from various repertoires that emerge from the intimate relation between the tension of the game and the joy and fun of rejoicing, to express the need to launch the body towards the sensibility of speaking, outlining, sounding, moving, coloring, laughing, singing, modelling, constructing and destroying objects. Learning to imagine has to do with the insistence in resisting (Bachelard, 1989), with the action of trying, insisting, doing and redoing in the sense of roaming, of the erratic experience of groping for the real.

Attempting is groping for something, to imagine why, to project movements and, therefore, the attempt owns its time, its rhythm, its value. It either works or does not work. And it is only successful when it allows its author to keep learning, projecting and moving, to keep imagining and weaving an unpredictable map of alliances with other attempts. To keep breathing. It requires trusting oneself and the world. To attempt is to play, playing is doing, and doing takes time. The attempt requires time for the body to generate possibilities of successful results.

Successes require taking into consideration a principle of distraction and of vertigo which is our body. However, “[...] our body does not have the power to make us see something that does not exist; it can only make us believe that we see it. [...] Inattentive perception contains nothing more and indeed nothing other than the attentive kind” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999a, p. 55). Perhaps herein lies the force of poetic experience. Concentrated we do things, distracted we see in the things we do an increase that exceeds our limits, subverting the character of things. Concentrated on what in the others provokes distraction, we reach them. To Octávio Paz (2012), distraction is an attraction by the reverse of this world. The inattentiveness with respect to one world is concentration with respect to another.

When we glimpse the existence of another real, the inattentiveness to one of them is concentration on the other. It is the *seeing as* of the apparition. One attention, one *lingering over something*, that provokes a disjunction that engenders an inattentiveness – a distracted attention – capable of energizing images that make us feel and make felt something that seems to be there. Presence that has as its protagonist the languagely becoming that brings together distant appearances, that promotes the participation and co-emergence of senses. Presence that makes what is not be in the act of dramatizing worlds-realities in order to transfigure them.

To the school rationality, distracting the look is to see without attention, it is to see and not see. The *amused* look, because it is *superficial*, suffers from the mundane allurements, requiring constant correction to *stick to the real* and *deviate from the imaginative*: a look educated to see well because it *knows how to see* the distinction between *attention*

and *distraction*. The look attentive to reality becomes the effort of this education.

However, we have conquered reality and we have lost the dream. No one gropes for the world anymore, no one probes the obscurity of the formless material of language, everybody works, and everybody carries out tasks. However, living one way or another in language is not trivial.

It then becomes important not just to consider and to accept, but fundamentally to trust children and to accept their times of attempting, exploring, experimenting, learning, recognizing, inventing, groping for the real, fiddling with the world. Poetic imagination relates to the investigation, to the examination of experiences not previously known. "Hence, the process of poetic production is a movement of questioning and groping in which the identification of each new element modifies the others or eliminates them, because every poetic language is knowledge 'in the making'" (Valente, 1994, p. 22). Here, to explore, to investigate, to try to arrange and disarrange the real is something that children know very well how to do since they were babies.

The artisan sensibility of the pedagogic gesture relates to the power of the distracted attention to the things offered to the senses and to the imagination, to the way in which we are affected by what we are not still, to the way in which we can be affected by what we have already projected in us. A force that makes inhabitable the present. In other words, to the power of being sensed, looked, thought and imagined by the world. The way in which we put ourselves listening – in resonance – to the echo of things in us, the way we remember them, think them and dream them form a single fabric. The world that stops me in the instant of my gesture with and upon it. This stoppage-listening of mine, what in me did not know it could know how to realize amazes me, makes me get out of myself because it passes and passes through me, transforms me in the act of transforming this passage into meaning, so that I learn to transform this instant in thought by animating things and endowing them with a poetic existence. This plastic power of language remains in us as an inexhaustible source of new beginnings. Childhoods.

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