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Aesthetics of the ludic

Playing as *Poiesis*

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Abstract

The ludic is part of human nature, we learn to read the world and create new possibilities for it while we play with toys and games. This research aims to investigate games, toys and playthings in students' childhood memories as poetic narratives that contain aesthetic experiences, understood as a poetics of existence itself. In this way, to think of the ludic in art and education is to seek in the roots of this development process that permeates the formation of the human being in their constant interaction with the surrounding environment, their individual and collective constructions. The initial results point to the importance of inserting discussions about ludic culture in the training of teachers, seeking that future teachers are more sensitive to these activities as legitimate forms of learning, which strengthens the construction of dialogues as bridges between the broader education field and the university.

Keywords: Ludic culture; art education; teacher training; poetry; aesthetic

In the beginning, there was play

Playfulness is part of human nature. Huizinga (2001 [1938]) and Caillois (2017 [1958]), along with other authors, allow us to make this statement as they research games and play in their historical, anthropological, sociological, and even philosophical aspects. For these authors, social phenomena should be understood within the human interactions that materialize in the fields of language, art, work, education and/or play, which are manifestations of continuous communication among social actors.

Paulo Freire, in his book *The Importance of the Act of Reading* (2021 [1983]), offers us a poetic description of his literacy memories, narrating to the reader the process of his learning to read and write. Before deciphering the code, the author reminisces about the sensory environment in which he was immersed, describing what he calls “reading the world”, an expression which is very characteristic throughout his work. Therefore, thinking about playfulness in art and education is to seek in the roots of this process the development that permeates the formation of a human being in their constant interaction with the surrounding environment, their individual and collective constructions, and thus, to seek the aesthetics of life, thinking with the derivation from the Greek word *aisthesis*, in the radical sense of “feeling with the senses” in poetic elaboration, on a daily basis. In this sense, the educational environment, whether school-based or non-school-based, is permeated with playful actions that, from the earliest age, have centrality in human interactions.

In light of the above, this project aims to investigate games, toys, and playing in the childhood memories of students and teachers at the Institute of Arts of UERJ, as narratives of poetics that encapsulate experiences and aesthetic experiences, understood as poetics of existence, marking a time that is often dreamlike in the sense of memory, when people try to recall these experiences.

Reaffirming the university as a privileged space/time for the construction and exchange of knowledge and wisdom, thinking about playfulness as a theme of study/teaching/research proves to be a fruitful path for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary dialogue, as the studies about toys and ludic encompass various areas of knowledge. In the research environment, systematizing these studies methodologically contributes to the formalization and structuring of a referential field for study, teaching, research and extension for various courses, including the Bachelor degree in Visual Arts.

Taking into account educational aspects, materials, and practices designed for childhood development in general, they should seek to consider, in their

development, playful elements because it has already been proven that playfulness greatly assists in school learning (Wajskop, 2001; Kishimoto, 2002; Brougère, 2002).

Furthermore, beyond this mode of learning, we could say that playfulness works on the learning of life, in the constant dialogue of continuously building and rebuilding oneself, a poetic action.

This is how, according to Castro (2018),

‘poiésis’ is the flourishing of mediation as a measure of everything that is and is not. The flourishing of the measure was called ‘logos’ in Greek, with a possible translation to the Portuguese language being ‘language’. Therefore, ‘poiésis’ becomes, in art, the measure of every work, as it operates to manifest the reality and the humanity of every human being in and as a dialogue.

Establishing and interrelating dialogues is part of the poetics of existence in the sense that Castro points out, and playfulness is one of the components that permeate the ways of being and existing in the world. Faced with this continuous construction of human existence as poiesis, some questions arise for investigation:

- How do childhood memories of games, toys, and playing intersect with the poetics of existence of each individual, both individually and collectively?
- How do the traces of these memories materialize in playthings and other objects?
- What are these ludic objects that carry aspects of art within them?
- As expressions of culture, what do these memories and objects say about social places?

These questions, among others, inform the project's conception and will guide the search for understanding and support for future research on related topics.

According to Peralta (2007, p. 5), “memory cannot only be conceptualized from an ‘instrumental’ point of view but should instead be understood as a system of meaning that develops over time”. In other words, social memory permeates and is constructed from individual pieces that are woven together, creating recollections and memories that can be studied in the present.

Entering the palaces of memory, as described by Francis Yates (2008), recalling games, toys, and playfulness is to bring collective traditions to the present that were and still can be shared as a common substrate of formation, an amalgam that unites the poetics of existence since they are experienced both collectively and individually.

The project intends to work with the concept of “sites of memory”, as described by Nora (1993, p. 13), in relation to games, toys, and playfulness: as

remains, as places that are born and thrive from the feeling that there is no spontaneous memory, that archives must be created, anniversaries must be maintained, celebrations organized, eulogies pronounced, minutes notarized because these operations are not natural.

Seeking a deeper understanding of this notion of “sites of memory”, Neves (2000) advances on the subject, drawing our attention to the importance of operating with the idea that a site of memory always belongs to someone, something, and a certain period, at least. Thus, thinking about a site of memory also means being able to individualize and personalize memories and recollections because “what we remember, as individuals, is always conditioned by the fact that we belong to a group” (Peralta, 2007, p. 6).



Figure 1. Meninos Soltando Pipas (Boys playing with kites) – Candido Portinari, 1941. Available at: <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/19420/meninos-soltando-pipas>

Research pathways

The research adopts a qualitative approach in which data will be analyzed in light of the theoretical framework of Content Analysis, as prescribed by Bardin (2015), with the construction of analysis categories based on the collected data. It's essential to emphasize that in Bardin's proposed Content Analysis, both the unit of record, which marks the quantity of recurrences and/or absences in the collected material, and the unit of content, which indicates the categories that will be formed, strengthen the analysis.

Interviews and questionnaire answering sessions were conducted, with the completion of the Informed Consent Form presented by the researchers and attested by the respondents. The group discussions were documented through photographic records of the activities that were conducted.

Our goal for the first year of the research was to collect information about games, toys, and playthings using data collection instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, group discussions, and the collection of play objects. Digital materials were collected, analyzed, and organized in a drive for consultation and sharing according to the demands of each research stage.

Current Status of the Research

In the current stage, as an extension of the initial project, we are working on curating an online collection of paintings and other artworks that present playfulness and ludic as a part of their poetics. This collection will serve as educational material for the teaching of arts and will be made available for free in an e-book format for elementary school teachers.

We have listed potential artists who will be featured, and we have selected the Brazilian modernist painter Candido Portinari as the first to have his works analyzed. The choice of the artist coincided with the centenary celebrations of the Week of Modern Art in Brazil, enabling field research at various events and exhibitions commemorating Brazilian modern art. Candido Portinari was also the artist who created the panel "War and Peace" (1957) at the United Nations in NYC, which makes this choice even more symbolic considering the present times.

Games, toys and children are frequent themes in Candido Portinari's works, which is why we have used a curatorial strategy to select paintings that mention playthings that share something in common with those cited in the questionnaires

applied at the Institute of Arts of UERJ (in the 2018-2020 stage). We also focused on a set of images that represent the artist's style and color varieties to highlight different possibilities of aesthetic expression.

To select images for the collection, we employed the following curatorial selection criteria: (i) we chose paintings that presented playthings and games in common with those mentioned in the questionnaires applied at the Institute of Arts of UERJ in the first stage of the research; (ii) we chose a set of images that present the artist's pictorial variety and possibilities of aesthetic expression; and (iii) we focused on representations that encompass the diversity of gender, race, and economic background of the individuals depicted in the paintings (Fig. 2).

The first catalog is already available for digital sharing, and we have organized a first book as material aimed at teachers and those interested in Portinari's artworks. To understand a work of art, it is important to open a dialogue with the observed object. So, in this material, we presented a script as a suggestion for reading the artworks, listing some questions that can help the pedagogical practice with images:

- What is the title of the work and who is the author?
- What is the technique and what are the materials used in the work?
- What is the theme or the subject of the work?
- What are the main colors, shapes, lines, and textures in the work?
- How is the composition and the distribution of the elements in the work?
- What is the mood or the atmosphere of the work?
- What is the message or the intention of the work?
- How does the work relate to the historical, social, and cultural context of its production?
- How does the work relate to the personal experience and the worldview of the author?
- How does the work relate to the personal experience and the worldview of the viewer?

The initial results point to the importance of inserting the playing and the ludic in teacher training, seeking a formation that make future teachers more sensitive to its particularities and attentive to the learning processes of reading and writing of the other as legitimate forms of learning.

The games and play activities that are represented in the artworks which were curated for the book include: pets and nature, kite, balloon, seesaw, swing, trap,

slingshot, doll, soccer, piggyback jumping, backflips, hopscotch, playing tops, wheel, windmill, diabolô (devil sticks), circus, popular dances and others¹.



Figure 2. Menino com diabolô (Boy with devil-sticks) – Candido Portinari, 1955. Available at: <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/17953/menino-com-diabolo>

To Infinity and Beyond

By proposing different research lines having as a common denominator the playful culture and the training for playing at all ages, the project “Aesthetics of the ludic’ contributes directly for the training of undergraduate students and other

¹ The gallery with the works of Candido Portinari which were curated and organized by the project can be accessed by the following link: <https://artsandculture.google.com/favorite/group/KgKiMwfK4RbNJg>

professionals, expanding perspectives and knowledge for and with diversity and inclusion.

More specifically, the project is directly aligned with the commitment to sustainability and social and environmental responsibility as a promotion of better quality of life in the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015), in terms of “ensuring a healthy life and promoting well-being for all, at all ages” (Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] number 03) and “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all” (SDG number 04).

Many master pieces of Portinari were curated in terms of their representation of toys, games and playthings, and they are available in high quality on official platforms with reliable technical information, including free and open access, for instance on the database of the Portinari Project². A book was published featuring these artworks, including a guide with questions that can improve the analysis of the imagens and their use in classes.

The next steps of the project will comprise the establishment of partnerships between research and teaching projects; the possibility of dissemination in academic and scientific events; the possibility of contribution to the area of art education and related fields with free access of the material to those who are interested.

New surveys, now featuring works by the artist Djanira da Motta e Silva, have been initiated for the second volume of the educational material, and now the challenge is to find accessible sources for these works with good digital quality and reliable technical information about this Brazilian artist. The second catalog is in the curatorial research phase and will soon be available for broad access. The project also plans to make workshops and exhibitions about games, toys, and playthings under the curation of the research team.

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² Available at: <http://www.portinari.org.br/#>

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