

Theater for/with babies and corporeity in performance games in the play Linhas

Teatro para/com bebês e corporeidade em jogos performáticos na peça Linhas

Teatro para/con bebés y corporeidad en juegos escénicos en la obra Linhas

Elenira Peixoto Silva¹



<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3265-3655>

Patrícia Dias Prado²



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8790-1594>

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta análises de pesquisa de mestrado em Educação sobre as relações intercorpóreas entre bebês, crianças pequenas, artistas e materialidades cênicas, focando nas experiências da Cia Zin, de São Paulo, na peça *Linhas*. De inspiração fenomenológica, a partir dos Estudos da infância na interface com o Teatro, a investigação questiona como o mesmo pode ser feito para e com bebês, reconhecendo-os/as como cocriadores/as que desafiam as concepções tradicionais de Teatro, observando suas formas de linguagens e corporeidades em jogos performáticos, criando distintas experiências públicas e compartilhadas que transformam o significado do papel de espectador e promovem compreensões ampliadas de Arte, Educação e infância.

Palavras-chave: Teatro para/com bebês. Jogo performático. Educação e Arte.

Abstract: This article presents an analysis of my Master's research in Education on the interbody relationships between babies, young children, artists and scenic material, focusing on the experiences of Cia Zin, from São Paulo, in the play *Linhas*. Inspired by phenomenology and based on childhood studies at the interface with theater, the research questions how it can be done for and with babies. We recognize them (babies/small children) as co-creators who challenge traditional conceptions of theater, observing their forms of language and corporeity in performance games, creating different audiences and shared experiences that transform the meaning of the role of spectator and promote broader understandings of Art, Education and childhood.

Keywords: Theater for/with babies. Performative play. Education and Art.

¹ Specialist in Art Languages, CEUMA-USP. Student in the Education Master's Program of the Education College of the University of São Paulo (FEUSP). E-mail: elenirapeixoto@usp.br.

² Post-PhD in Scenic Arts (ECA-USP). Professor at the Education College of the University of São Paulo (FEUSP). E-mail: patprado@usp.br.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta análisis de una maestría en Educación sobre las relaciones intercorporales entre bebés, niños pequeños, artistas y materialidades escénicas, centrándose en las experiencias de la Cia Zin, de São Paulo, en la obra *Linhas*. Inspirada en la fenomenología y basada en los estudios de la infancia en interfaz con el teatro, la investigación cuestiona cómo éste puede ser hecho para y con los bebés, reconociéndolos como co-creadores que desafían las concepciones tradicionales del teatro, observando sus formas de lenguaje y corporeidad en los juegos escénicos, creando públicos diferentes y experiencias compartidas que transforman el significado del papel de espectador y promueven comprensiones más amplias del Arte, la Educación y la infancia.

Palabras-clave: Teatro para/con bebés. Juego performativo. Educación y Arte.

Introduction

At the airport, the boy asked:
- What if the plane stumbles on a bird?
The father was distorted and did not answer.
So, the boy asked again:
- What if the plane stumbles on a sad bird?
The mother felt tenderness and thought:
Are absurdities the greatest virtues of poetry?
Isn't nonsense more loaded with poetry than common sense?
When feeling less pressured, the father reflected:
For sure, we learn freedom and poetry from children;
and started to be (Barros, 1999, s/p, our translation).

What can we learn from babies and small children in theater? This article is part of an ongoing Master's study, in the Graduate Program of the Education Faculty of the University of São Paulo (FEUSP) and the Research Group called CORPINFÂNCIAS³, which focuses on babies' and small children's (from 0 to 6 years old) relationships with scenic works produced for this age group, from the experience of Cia Zin⁴, from São Paulo, using one of their plays for babies, *Linhas*⁵. Cia Zin has been dedicated to investigations into scenic art languages for small children since 2009. The research group has sought, among other issues, to know and question interbody relationships and corporeity among babies and small children, artists and scenic materialities.

This article aims to investigate theater for babies, mainly their relationships as spectators with the play *Linhas* by Cia Zin, realizing it as an opportunity for reflection upon education and contemporary arts. Babies and small children provoke us to think of a different theater which is conceived in the

³ Grupo de Pesquisa e Primeira Infância: linguagens e culturas infantis (Research Group and Early Childhood: Children's Languages and Cultures) (CNPq), coordinated by Prof. Patrícia Prado, PhD (FEUSP). Retrieved from: <https://pesquisaepimeirainfanciainguemeculturasinfantis.wordpress.com/>. Accessed on: March 15, 2025.

⁴ Retrieved from: <https://ciazin.wordpress.com/>. Accessed on: July 11, 2024.

⁵ Link to watch a short video of *Linhas*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0GswqVhHtA>. Accessed on: July 13, 2024.

tension of what occurs in contemporary theater as language and aesthetics, and the relations established with them.

This study is based on two questions: what kind of theater can we do for/with babies and small children? Can the relations established be considered performativity? How does this theater promote other relationships with spectators?

Focusing our view on relationships built between scene and reception, this theater produced for early childhood shakes the traditional meanings of theater.

This is an attempt to create a relationship with spectators in early childhood and observe their reception. In what ways do babies and small children provoke us to enter the doing/thinking theater? Babies radicalize the experience as spectators, broadening their perception and awaken us to the notion that being a spectator is to dive completely into the theater experience (Prado; Oliveira, 2021) as co-builders of the scene.

Research on theater for babies is recent in Brazil, as well as scenic creations for early childhood. Over the first decade of the 2000s, the first academic research on “theater for babies” appeared in the country (Pereira, 2014; Cabral, 2016; Silva, 2017; Moura, 2019; Zurawski, 2018, Coelho, 2023). It is worth noting that the first national artistic works also appeared around the same time, which probably shows a context that enabled the first artistic creations to be allied to the initial research on the theme.

Astonishment and the defense of cultural programs destined to that age groups seem to motivate some research, as well as the desire to reflect upon outstanding artistic works. Therefore, the field is a work in progress, and it is important to broaden and deepen research in this area.

When searching research that discuss theater for babies in Brazil, we found five Master’s dissertations, as follows: *Teatro para bebês, estreias de olhares* (Theater for babies, premieres of looks), by Luiz Miguel Pereira (2014), *Teatro para Bebês: Processos Criativos, Dramaturgia e Escuta* (Theater for Babies: Creative Processes, Dramaturgy and Listening), by Fernanda Alvarenga Cabral (2016), *Teatro para bebês: desafios em cena para as artes e a educação na primeiríssima infância* (Theater for babies: challenges in scene for arts and education in the very early childhood), by Adriele Nunes Silva (2017), *Avoa(r): uma poética para os primeiros anos* (Fly(ing): poetry for the first years), by Cirila Targhetta de Moura (2019), *Investigações acerca do protagonismo infantil nas produções do Eranos Círculo de Arte* (Investigations on children’s protagonism in productions by Eranos Arts Cycle), by Sandra Regina Coelho (2023); and a Doctorate study, *Tramas e dramas no teatro para bebês: entre significações e Sentidos* (Plots and Drama in theater for babies: between senses and meanings), by Maria Paula Vignola Zurawski (2018).

The titles of the works enable the understanding of some starting points considered by the

different authors: the relationship with early childhood education, the idea of theatrical poetry, babies' first looks, listening and the possibility of building up meanings that occur from the meeting between babies, artists and scenic art language.

The cultural context of theater for babies dates back to the 1980s in some European countries such as France and Italy, marked by the promotion of festivals such as *Visioni di Futuro*, *visioni di Teatro*, in Bologna, produced by La Baracca Testoni Ragazzi⁶, linked to Small Size (organization dedicated to the dissemination of performative arts for early childhood worldwide)⁷. In Brazil, this movement really started with certain initiatives and productions, among which the Spanish-Brazilian group *La casa incierta*⁸ outstands and together with the group called *Sobrevento*⁹, presented the first productions.

Cia Zin marks its history as one of the first Brazilian groups to dedicate their work to this type of theatrical production and in 2011 organized an Exhibition with the Curatorship of the Cultural Center of São Paulo called *Conversas poéticas entre arte e bebês*¹⁰ (Poetical talks between arts and babies), where they premiered their first work, *O que eu sonhei?* (What did I dream about?), which was the research corpus of the dissertation produced by Adriele Nunes Silva (2017) and the doctorate thesis by Paula Vignola Zurawski (2018). Currently, Cia has five theater plays in their repertoire, all dedicated to early childhood, and is part of the *Vincular: Red Latinoamericana de Creación Escénica para los Primeros Años*¹¹, which gathers scenic art professionals from Latin America who research scenic language for early childhood, with over twenty groups from diverse countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil. This shows a field that despite being still in construction and presenting gaps inside the country and abroad, is being consolidated in its productions.

This also shows the importance of academic research and articles on the theme since they provoke some thought about this type of artistic creation for broadening and deepening the dialogue and look into theater created for/with babies and small children. Great part of the research developed is in the education field, thus highlighting a fertile interface to think education in its relationship with arts and vice-versa, creating two fields in contact and whose friction broadens the meanings of arts, theater, education and childhood.

⁶ Retrieved from: <https://www.testoniragazzi.it/>. Accessed on: Feb 17, 2025.

⁷ Retrieved from: <https://www.smallsizenetwork.org>. Accessed on: Feb 12, 2025.

⁸ Retrieved from: <https://veroteatro.com/theatre-for-babies/la-casa-incierta-2/>. Accessed on: Feb 12, 2025.

⁹ Retrieved from: <http://www.sobrevento.com.br/>. Accessed on: Feb 17, 2025.

¹⁰ Video explaining how the exhibition was planned. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivTVmxmGWNk>. Accessed on: Feb 10, 2025.

¹¹ Retrieved from: <https://redvincular.wordpress.com/about/>. Accessed on: Feb 17, 2025.

Some studies have focused on theater for babies, evidencing its contributions to early childhood education and reflecting upon the specificities of this artistic language. This study proposes an investigation of how the observation of the spectator babies' corporeity might transform our understanding of both theater and education processes. The sensitive and expressive relationship that babies establish with the scenes challenges us to rethink concepts of presence, interaction and cultural insertion. Therefore, we consider that there is a lot to be learned when looking into babies' aesthetic experiences, recognizing them as subjects who have the right to culture from the first moments of their lives.

Intergenerational relationship in the spectator babies' experience

From the understanding that there is no theme restriction to relate with babies and that this communication is born from the desire of meeting, we set a venue: the theater where we would meet. In other words, when adults create for early childhood, they do not have to be limited to or approach a specific theme, they must have thematic freedom. Just like creating for adults, creating for early childhood is born from the desire to establish a relationship of "saying" something. As art professionals, we intend to think a theater that is born from restlessness, discovery, going through the willingness to communicate and establish relationships regarding some theme.

Therefore, there is no thematic restriction. Any subject if worked well and thoroughly can be the theme of a creation. But, how is it established? Which ways do we build to weave a dialogue? What provokes us and echoes this thought to other ways of making theater; and in the dance of meanings, theater for babies enhances notions of listening and presence. Listening as understood in this work goes beyond the biological act, it is a meeting in which one is permeated by the other, one that modifies both.

In Cabral's (2016) dissertation, listening occupies a central place to think sounds in the dramaturgy construction, establishing the "dramaturgy of listening". It is possible to expand and think how it is entangled in the very construction of the play, taking into account the spectators' presence. A dramaturgy of listening that goes beyond the sound-musical composition refers to the way of building up the scene and creating it. Establishing listening is paramount in the construction of a relationship with this audience, thus emphasizing a common practice of creators for early childhood, which is the observation of babies in early childhood education.

The theater for babies appears from the desire to whisper, unknown words which when pronounced in the onomatopoeic game that contain them, communicate with the audience. Sound dramaturgy, as a creative component in the elaboration of a theater play, becomes an adventure in the poetic

imagination pursued, where the narrative non-linearity of the work starts to dialogue with its scenic-musical construction. In the rhythmic-poetic construction, in the play with words and its rhythm, the scenes appear (Cabral, 2016, p. 223, our translation).

We can also go past that idea of sound dramaturgy to think the whole of acting, or even the moment the play is performed, since the relationship that babies and small children establish with the play changes the actors' actions in scene, which might result in a sound produced by the audience, imitating a gesture, or playing with the sounds their bodies and objects produce in a dialogue with the audience.

Regarding presence, it is one of the fundamental elements of art and actors, being in the core of the theatrical experience and the link established between performers and spectators. Presence in theater implies attention quality, availability and surrender. The literature on theater and performance presents some works focusing on the presence as an actor's technique.

Barba (1993) emphasizes that the actor's presence is not a natural gift but rather something built: "in a situation of organized representation, the actor's physical and mental presence is shaped according principles that differ from those of daily life. The extra daily life use of body-mind is what is called "technique"" (Barba, 1993, p. 23). Lehmann (2007) discussed the post-dramatic theater and also highlighted the performer's presence as a central element in contemporary scenic communication. The scenic presence overcomes the need for fictional representation, placing actors in a state of being on stage, rather than only interpreting. It becomes art in itself, a game of forces between body, voice, intention and the relation with space and spectators.

In theater for early childhood, the scenic presence shows a broader dimension, one that goes beyond the theatrical technique since it demands the performers' refined listening shared with spectator babies. The way of acting requires availability to establish a non-verbal dialogue, which is profoundly communicative¹². Presence becomes an invitation to a joint aesthetic experience, where actors' expressiveness not only captures attention, but also allows the understanding of theater as experience. The art of presence in theater for early childhood values subtleness, availability and the ability to respond to the unexpected.

The relationship with spectator babies invites us to deeply rethink the notion of theater, challenging traditional conventions of the scene and broadening the limits of scenic presence. The babies' attentive look, their spontaneous reactions and their own ways of interacting with the world

¹² In several plays created for babies, the presence of verbal language is observed, even with long texts. This is not a rule. However, in the play *Linhas*, Cia opted for using non-verbal language, using sounds and onomatopoeia. The body and dance language, the relationships established with the materialities of the scene make up the play's dramaturgy.

around them require from actors a state of listening and surrender that transforms the theatrical act into shared experience. Therefore, presence in theater for early childhood is not only a way to call attention, but rather an element that redefines the very essence of theater as meeting, exchange and collective creation. Theater is a collective experience.

Understanding that this theater is marked by an intergenerational relationship, that is, adults dedicated to creating and thinking theater plays for children, is essential to understand how listening and presence are fundamental for this language. This is about displacing the look and listening toward a theater that is built in a non-hierarchical way between adults and children.

Therefore, the conception actors have of childhood is fundamental to understand the structures anchoring their aesthetic choices (Silva, 2017). “To create plays that meet small children’s and babies’ aesthetic and poetic sensitiveness, it is necessary to know them with a non-hierarchical or childish look, much less one that is adult centered” (Prado; Silva, 2021, p. 199).

The childhood conception of those who create works for children influences directly their formal choices of creation for this specific audience. If the relationships established only aim at teaching them things, potential possibilities of learning with them and their poetic abilities are excluded. It also impoverishes the construction of artistic, professional and human formation of adults and the processes of creation of artistic work for/with them as spaces of sharing, public experience, collective experience and being with.

Babies and small children show us different possibilities of experiences where we support their relationship with the world, where we are mediators rather than guides, or at least, this would be desirable.

Thus, thinking theatrical language for babies and small children is to update one’s own conceptions and the preset idea we have of this type of art, thus establishing a dialogue with the conception of theater. Theater comes from the Greek word *theatron*, which means a “place where we see”, but what do we see? Endless things, art weaving narratives, images about human existence and our relationship with the things of the world, dialogues with the aesthetic production of a space and time. And, what do we see in theater for babies?

We have understood that theater is, first of all, an aesthetic opportunity created in space and time that can be offered to a given audience with the purpose of putting them in resonance with the world. It is, as suggested by etymology, a place to see the existing complexity in life. We have sought to be away from a closed idea of theater understood as a narrative to understand the experience of going to the theater as a way of existing, of being and living in the world (Fochi, 2017, p. 68, our translation).

Theater for/with/from babies, it is difficult to choose the right preposition, in which “from” refers not only to the reference to age group, but the idea that babies place us in a perspective to look at theater from their look. A theater from babies.

This is a space to give new meanings, new names to the theater we refer to, since this art changes with time; in this case, it would connect us with the very experience of theater. A theater seen as a public experience and a doing closer to its origin, linked to ritual (Ligiéro, 2023). This is theater as experience. But how can we talk about theater and babies? If, as stated by Fochi (2017, p. 69, our translation): “We still do not know exactly if we are talking about theater for babies, with babies or from babies. Given its fertile novelty to be discussed from arguments that are not naturally intertwined...”.

In the perspective of looking at this type of art from babies’ standpoint, a fertile field is established to think the very function of this art. Theater from the babies’ point of view, the idea of a meeting between babies and theater. Trying to give it a name using the preposition “from” is quite relevant because “to” gives the idea that this is an offer from the adult world to babies. The preposition “with”, has been used frequently because these plays are usually interactive and babies also occupy the scenic space.

However, thinking about several productions currently found in Brazil, we realized that not all have an interactive structure in the performance. Regarding the play *Linhas*, at the end of the performance, the scenery is transformed into an installation, and babies and small children are invited to interact with the scenic elements and the space. However, the preposition “from” marks the space of meeting between babies and theater, thought taking them into account.

Such relationship occurs in active way, that is, there is no illusion of passiveness in the relationship with the audience:

The participative audience is the one that during the performance demands for every moment of the performance not being unjustified, which does not mean that it is necessary to manifest or interfere directly to take part in the event. Its presence is consolidated in the complicity established with the stage, in the willingness to make a pact with the event, in the attention to the scenic proposals, in the attentive attitude and active eyes (Desgranges, 2015, p. 31, our translation).

Therefore, going beyond the idea of children’s protagonism, we understand that spectator babies are part of the performance, even if on the margins of the scene¹³, their experiences reside in realizing the acting with their whole corporeity, and the actors in the play put themselves in an inter-

¹³ Since the audience sits around the stage and the scenic space.

body relationship with the audience, thus creating a dialogue that occurs in the perception field (Merleau-Ponty, 2018).

Spectator babies in *Linhas*

Turning our look to the spectators on the margins of the scene in the play *Linhas*, which sometimes fade and blur, a dialogic relationship between the work and its reception occurs.

The first aspect discussed here is the appearance of the term spectator and an attempt to define it by Patrice Pavis (1999, p. 140, our translation):

[...] for a long time forgotten or considered quantitatively neglectable, spectators are at the moment, the favorite object of study in *semiology* or aesthetics, the *aesthetics of reception* [...] It is not easy to grasp all implications since we cannot separate the spectator as an individual from the audience as a collective agent.

We have noticed certain difficulty in reuniting several conceptions of spectator in different areas of knowledge. Despite being difficult to separate the notion of spectator from that of audience, we will adopt the principle that audience is linked to the “collective agent” in a more numerical relationship, while the term spectator refers to the act, where something can happen to them, in a particular way during the artistic event. Thus, we refer to the concept of “emancipated spectator” by Rancière (2012), in the observation of the agency of the one who watches the play as the center of the work meaning, the one who builds oneself dialogically.

This is not about the dichotomy between interactivity and passiveness, that is, understanding interactivity as action or presence of babies’ bodies in the acting, but rather realizing the relationship between spectators and the scene in a different way. Moreover, as Desgranges (2015, p. 27, our translation) points out, in the text *A Pedagogia do espectador* (The Spectator’s Pedagogy): “the observer’s look at the performance sustains the very game of theater”.

The theatrical mediation is originally thought to create points of convergence between spectators and the play, in a perspective of not guiding looks towards a single type of understanding, but rather to think the entrance of spectators in the artistic work. Here, mediation is seen in a mixed way, intertwined with the play structure, in the way it relates to the audience.

According to the understanding of spectators with their corporeity in dialogue and there is a delicate space “between” relationships, since the events in the audience are multiple, there is a constant attempt to get closer, either in the actresses’ movement¹⁴, or in the way the audience is welcomed, or

¹⁴ The creators of the play *Linhas* are two women.

even the way to act during or behave before the performance. Therefore, the idea is that the scene meaning is not previously set but rather developed in the relationship with the audience (Desgranges, 2017), that is, the audience updates the scene and gives it meaning.

Even if in this article the understanding of theatrical mediation is established in the very way of making theater, the experience of Cia Zin and some other Brazilian theater companies with works destined to this audience shows some approximation strategies.

In Cia Zin plays, there is a welcoming space in the theater hall, a rug with some objects on it. Regarding the play *Linhas*, the welcoming space has a large piece of paper where children can draw. The actresses go to that space to talk to the audience before starting the performance, understanding the novelty and possible first time of many babies as theater spectators. In this brief encounter, they communicate the next steps, such as the audience entrance, placement in the scenic space, and possible events occurring in that space.

While performing, other approximation resources are also included such as the positioning of the audience in that space. This strategy aims at calming adults that accompany the babies and validate each one's own experience, favoring both the singularity and diversity of each spectator.

In the play *Linhas*, the performance unravels with the audience sitting at the same level as the two actresses performing. There is a transgressing invitation to call the audience to the stage (when the play occurs in traditional theater spaces, with the Italian stage). The audience sits around the actresses, and in certain way, creates layers to watch the play (Zurawski, 2018). Spectators are also seen and become part of the dramaturgy with their corporeity, remarks, reactions, babbling, smiles, screams, cries, or even speeches.

Such dramaturgy is noticed by everybody occupying the same space, that is, adults noticing babies, and babies noticing each other and adults.

The dramaturgy axis of the play *Linhas* is to investigate the cracked drawing of the discovery of their hands for a body that draws in the space and the creation of the first lines, the first marks. These marks are represented by colorful wires that are transformed into animals and other objects in a non-referential way. The trace is shaped by the performative gestural scenic game of manipulation of those objects. The scenery is a large white cube with the actresses inside it, and by means of gestures, they create several games and movements, which slowly create drawings and transform them.

The play is a mix of dance and theater since the narrative is built up of gestures as in a choreography. The actresses dance lines in space, creating drawings with their hands, drawing with strings on the scenery floor. These lines hang from hooks and gain three-dimensional forms in space being entangled as in small children's drawings. Gradually, the lines are transformed gaining another consistency and with wires create forms (not figures) in the actresses' hands. As if the paper, that is,

the white cube shape, were covered with several stories drawn with lines. The drawing becomes a great play with movement, colors and lines in space. The colorful wires in the shape of small children's drawings are fixed in the scenery, as a rainfall of lines made up of strings in different colors, transforming the white metal cube into a drawing of several dimensions, becoming an installation, which receives the spectators within the scene at the end of the performance.

In *Linhas*, the audience is accommodated on the four sides of the white cube, thus creating some mirroring, that is, when looking at the scene, they also see the audience on the opposite side as their own reflex in a mirror. As pointed out by Merleau-Ponty (1980, p. 278): "(...) the enigma resides in this: my body is at the same time watchful and watched. It looks at all things and can also look at itself and recognize in what is seen the "other side" of this watchful power. It realizes its watchfulness, touches itself, becomes visible and sensitive to itself".

The bodies take part in the act of looking and this is a paradox. Being watched and watchful means becoming aware of one's corporeity: "reversibility makes things deeper and places the body, not as the support of a cognizing consciousness, always confirmed by a subject (...), but rather presents a reflective body" (Nóbrega, 2000, p. 102, our translation). But how can one look? There is no look outside the body.

Therefore, this results in bodies in dialogue. Babies and small children in completeness are positioned as spectators. The actresses performing observe the babies at one time, creating dialogues, understanding the theater as a place of power of perception for a theater of the other, where the observation of the children's gesture is the conducting thread. Thus, according to Benjamin (2009, p. 117), "all children's performance is guided not by the 'eternity' of products, but rather by the 'instant' of gesture. As an ephemeral art, theater is children's art".

Theater and Game

Here, reception becomes an investigation axis by understanding it as a two-way road, a reconstruction marked in the present (Zunthor, 2000). Therefore, scenic arts create a unique relationship with spectators because

If we take into account a picture, a drawing, or the dialogue established between the receiver and the artwork, years or centuries might separate it from the moment of its creation. In theater, this dialogue occurs at the exact moment when the artistic act actually occurs. If this reveals its ephemeral character, it also characterizes the intensity of its relationship with the spectator and the audience's importance in a performance, in this live contact occurring between stage and audience (Desgranges, 2015, p. 31, our translation).

At this point, we reach another layer, that is, the relationship established with spectators (Rancière, 2012). Theater for babies leads us to think about the way we relate with spectators who are inserted in that experience, to create from what they see in the performance and establish their own relationships, ways of looking and acting in a circular movement. It anchors the theatrical event since:

[...] The spectator also acts like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way - by drawing back for example, from the vital energy that it is supposed to transmit in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she has had read or dreamt, experienced or invented. They are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them. (Rancière, 2012, p. 17).¹⁵

In *Linhas*, a space is created between spectators and the actresses in the performance, even with a previous script, a gestural guide and a sequence of actions, what occurs in the audience finds, supports, and changes what occurs inside the scene. It modulates and gives the tone for the construction of the play.

Spectators are understood not only as a projection in the creation space but rather as builders at the moment of action. To see in fact, changing the angle that is usually seen in the theater event, also changing the relationship established with what is considered knowledge, changing the game and transmuting our view of rationality, “it was necessary to outline the general model of rationality against whose background we have become used to judging the political implications of theatrical spectacle” (Rancière, 2012, p. 8)¹⁶. In fact, the theatrical event should be seen in a different way.

When thinking about creating for early childhood, one might rethink all the ways of understanding knowledge. Many times, the question “do babies understand?” appears. It is necessary to resize all knowledge understanding. Babies are there with their whole bodies (Prado; 2015), immersed in the theater experience. Therefore, thinking new ways of knowing becomes relevant. In the article, “*Corpo e Espanto na Filosofia de Merleau-Ponty*” (Body and awe in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty), those authors explain knowledge as “the knowledge we refer to was not systematized, it has not been presented in words yet. It refers to a bodily knowledge, about which it is not always possible to talk, or explain it” (Zimmermann; Saura, 2019, p. 119, our translation).

¹⁵ <https://imagemdisenso.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/the-emancipated-spectator-2009.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://imagemdisenso.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/the-emancipated-spectator-2009.pdf>

For this reason, a central question remains: Why should we make theater for babies? The first point to be considered is the understanding of babies as beings with rights and early childhood as a social category. The second point is not to create such theater with a utilitarian character, but rather as a poetic creation for human beings who have their first contact with culture in the construction of a more sensitive society.

When asking why making theater for babies, in fact, we question the validity of such art for that audience. Many times, the question is “can babies understand?”, which reveals a conception of babies, understanding and theater. What is understanding? Is it something rational? Does it come from the concept order? What appears as a reflection upon spectator babies is that they are spectators in their singularities. They are culture producers from birth (Prado, 1999), they are agents (Sarmiento, 2008; Qvortrup, 2010), subjects with the right to access cultural productions (Pereira, 2014) and fully able to enjoy humankind’s intangible property. For this reason, we must believe in the poetic capability established between them and performers.

This perspective of looking at children from their own eyes is relevant. Childhood as a social category (Qvortrup, 2010) and Sociology of Childhood as a field of creation of research lenses, looking at babies and small children from a singular perspective, that is, without assuming who they are, but observing and relating with them in the way they present, inverting the look to see from their own standpoint. This reference helps us understand them as complete beings who question the world (Tebet, 2013).

Among several unresolved issues, one of them is that there is a link between the appearance of theoretical assumptions from sociology of childhood in Europe and the appearance of theater for babies in the 80s/90s of the last century. However, theater for babies appeared as a consequence of social achievements, where babies started to be recognized as social beings, able to interact from birth; and this perspective occurs from the achievements of political movements in society (Pereira, 2014, p. 41, our translation).

In opposition to this way of seeing childhood, it is usually placed in a spot of certain invisibility, since childhood is understood as a way to get to the adult phase of life, that is “becoming a being”. But, what is childhood? This way of understanding childhood emerges at a given moment:

Therefore, I question and doubt what is seen as natural and universal, that is, childhood as a period in human development, which starts at birth and goes up to adolescence. Such questioning leads to the problematization of understandings of childhood we hold and make me undo the ties of what seems to be obvious [...] childhood – as we see it – corresponds to a Western historical and social construction, which is open to variations and constant changes (Moura, 2019, p. 22, our translation).

What theater for babies reveals is that the relationship between spectators and the scene, how we establish this relationship of a “dramaturgy of listening” (Cabral, 2016), understanding such spectators as builders. There is no idea of passivity. In the artistic field that seeks a rupture with the adult-centered approach, children are always building something, they are co-creators (Prado; Oliveira, 2021); but how do we boost this space of creation for children? Regardless of the proposal being one of direct interaction or not, the entrance in this corporeity of the scene, the issue presented is how the surroundings of the scene provoke us in relation to what is going on inside the scene and how we establish this relationship from the inside out.

Issues from contemporary art and theater for babies as a performance game

The history of contemporary art provokes spectators to reflect by summoning them to take part in the work. Here, we focus on realizing at the time of the scene construction, a bodily presence occurring as a performance game. Such understanding is a broadened sense of mediation, in the exchange of knowledge, knowledge-body-presence, which does not seek to reduce the understanding distance by approximating the first intention, that is, what of the adults who created the show “wanted to say”, but one that gives new meaning to the “between” of relationships.

Therefore, the idea of theatrical mediation moves towards the understanding of the theatrical event as a meeting with the artistic language that forms and transforms everyone immersed in that experience, one that is not based on hierarchy of knowledge, but rather broadens meanings, in a dialogue with education, since it sees education in the space of meeting and exchange. Thus, as stated by Coradesqui (2018, p. 15, our translation): “If we talk about different types of knowledge, we understand that mediation does not occur only inside projects that aim at audience formation, it is also present in projects that aim at spectator development”.

Spectator babies create with their ways of being in a state of playing with what happens on stage, understanding game as performance, in the field of Education-Theater: “an activity accepted by the group, limited by rules and a group agreement; entertainment; spontaneity, enthusiasm and joy accompany the games; they occur simultaneously to the theater experience” (Spolin, 2005, p. 342, our translation).

The work structure by Viola Spolin (2005) is based on the game for the construction of the scene. In the game, the theatrical language is established, however, the presence of a shared rule is what sets the base of the theatrical game, different from the dramatic game (Pupo, 2010). Following the French conception, “the game facilitates a kind of experimentation without the risks of reality, in

which the child is deeply involved. It is characterized by concentration and engagement (the player is a type of awoken dreamer)” (Ryngaert, 2009, p. 39, our translation).

In the English interpretation, dramatic games refer to the children’s fantastic creation while playing (Koudela; Almeida Junior, 2015). Nevertheless, when observing the different meanings of the word game, in the context of acting and drama, this seems to escape from what really happens in the relation with spectator babies and small children.

What is seen is that babies and small children enter the game, in the exchange of looks, in inter-corporeity, in their entry in the scene, and their ways of being theater spectators. Approaching the performer child, “(...) children’s lives are full of moments of theatrical action and drama, situations that involve them in such a way that their bodies adhere to situations: the experience is lived with vigor and intensity, as proposed by performers of different artistic languages” (Machado, 2011, p.121-2, our translation). Thus, babies and small children intertwine in the theatrical performance, establishing performing games, and definitely modifying the performance with their presence. More precisely, they become a founding axis in the performance.

Therefore, why do we recognize the way babies are spectators as performers? When deepening the concept of performance, one observes what bases language, “performances require the spectators to do something, even if this something is doing nothing. Each performance anticipates its ideal response. The fourth wall asks the spectator not to interfere, thus keeping distance and remain sitting to observe the development of the artistic work” (Taylor, 2023, p. 88, our translation). The language of performance¹⁷, which gained this name in the second half of the 20th century (Glusberg, 1987; Cohen, 2002; Goldberg, 2006; Taylor, 2023), is marked by the rupture with the ideal of character, the intimate relationship with the life and presence of a border art.

Taking as study point the artistic expression *performance*, as a *border art*, in its continuous movement of rupture that can be called “established art”, the *performance* ends up penetrating paths and situations that were not previously valued as art. Likewise, it ends up touching the subtle limits that separate life and art (Cohen, 2002, p. 38, our translation).

Spectators mark the show with their bodies, in gestures and movements, thus creating performances.

Looking into the construction of the theatrical show, those spectators are inserted even before the play starts since it is from the hypotheses of who babies are that the play is created. But they remain

¹⁷ There are marks of the performance language dating before the 1960s, such as the manifestations of dadaists and other artistic manifestations.

as enigmas because great part of what is built can only occur predicting the unpredictability of a relationship that is built in each session. Babies remain a mystery since in a show structured on relationships, first hypotheses are not always confirmed, since each baby is an individual, and they come from different contexts (social, cultural, economic, etc.), when watching a theater play.

When a baby is born, a human body enters the world. Then, body and world start to exist – the body in the world. This body does not bring any prejudice, no *partis-pris*, unchangeable ideas, certainties or intransigence. It does not support a football team and is not linked to any religion. It does not make philosophy nor buys values – it does not know values: it is just a human body (Boal, 2006, p. 189, our translation).

For this reason, babies and small children are seen as enigmas that cannot be unveiled, but must be felt and respected in their completeness, “children, these strange beings we know nothing about, these wild beings that do not understand our language” (Larrosa, 2017, p. 229). The same author provokes us to think that despite the countless theoretical attempts to look at children from psychological, sociological, philosophical studies which try to define childhood, we look at them as objects not as the other, never going beyond an attempt to capture them, but they always escape since “(...) it is not a point of fixed power, but what marks its decline line, its limit” (Larrosa, op.cit, p. 232, our translation).

The prefix “*infans*” (infant) means the one that does not speak, however, we understand that the absence of speech forces us to find other ways of communication, as presented in the poem by Malaguzzi (1999), the play with words ‘sem’ (without) and ‘cem’ (a hundred) to give the idea that it does have a hundred languages. In other words, communication must be understood in an expanded meaning and in inter-body dialogues.

The play *Linhas* does not have verbal dialogues, not for believing that babies would not understand them, but for believing that there are many other ways of communicating and for understanding that bodies are sources of languages. Each gesture in the action guide in the play is thought, creating dramaturgy that is not supported by the text, but rather by the body. It gets really close to the dance language. The dialogue with visual arts is seen as a reference in creation, but also as a possibility of creation of a visual dramaturgy: an image that leads to another image.

Another relation is to understand the place of performativity and how this notion broadens the theatrical language and aligns to more contemporary relations, thus connecting itself to another theater (Ligiéro, 2023), more linked to a rite. Therefore, Cia Zin has noticed corporeity also as performance (Prado; Silva, 2020) in the relation of spectators as *performers* in the scene, as the actresses. However, how can these possibilities and relations be created?

Final considerations: performer-spectator babies

In the text by Machado (2010), the idea of performer child is developed from the phenomenological view by Merleau-Ponty (2018) and the Sociology of Childhood, based on Sarmento (2008), that is, a way of looking at small children presenting an idea of corporeity within that perspective.

Corporeity is a phenomenological notion that does not separate “I” and the “world” and, if we insist in the parallel or in the translation of “I” into “corporeality”, we impoverish the conception of body as proposed by Merleau-Ponty, thus incurring in unnecessary simplification. Corporeality is a fundamental notion in the phenomenological perspective: an environment that gathers and shuffles biological, cultural and inter-relational aspects; we are our genetic heritage and our factual history, and, therefore, we will never know exactly what results from that and what is culturally given; children learn from being immersed in certain culture and “almost dramatic” ways of imitation. First, there is a way of being that is polymorphic and fills the body, the thought, the expressiveness, the relationships with the world and with the other: all happening in a dynamic way, in situations lived (Machado, 2010, p. 125, our translation).

The word corporeality is close to the idea of corporeity¹⁸, as used by the author Terezinha Petrúcia da Nóbrega (2010, p. 35, our translation):

Corporeity, understood in epistemological terms as a field of knowledge of the body, emerges from the interpretive capacity of live beings from cellular and molecular levels to symbolic and social aspects. This is incorporated knowledge, unfolded by perception, configuring sensitive language. Therefore, a corporeity is considered as a field of experience and reflection, from which epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, social and historical possibilities unfold.

The corporeity notion helps us to think the theater experience as something lived to the full and provides us with a new way of understanding knowledge. It leads us to the understanding of performativity as a kind of inter-body dialogue between babies, small children and the scene.

Therefore, it is fundamental to observe spectators’ actions and reactions as an essential part of the theater experience, they give us clues about the reception of that work and even, in a more radical sense, they build up and sustain such performance.

One of the perceptions in the context of the relationship with spectator babies is that there is a gestural echo in several moments. What happens in the scenes is echoed by the bodies that are around it. More than imitation or reproduction of the actresses’ gestures (which very often happen), echoing means reverberating. Just like waves that leave the bodies that are on stage and spread

¹⁸ There is a distinction between the terms corporeity and corporeality. We use the corporeity notion in the phenomenological approach (Nóbrega, 2010), even if Machado (2010) employs the term corporeality.

throughout the spectators, who return them to the scenes. In a constant movement of coming and going. Thus, the need for another image of body in the state of playing is observed, with a participant spectator who dialogues by echoing movements of the scenes and creating something that reverberates and is configured in their gesture.

There is a variety of bodies around the scenic space, some are moving, others reproducing sounds or gestures, and others responding to the games within the scene. There are others that sometimes enter the scenes, and great part of them look at everything that is occurring very attentively, almost without moving. The event spreads, and it is not only limited by the scenic space, but spreads around it, as mentioned before, bringing to the inside what was seen as belonging to the outside. Inside and outside are seen to be in a dialogue.

Bodies are challenged in the experience of sharing “watching” and “doing” in a pendular movement, deepening and broadening our concept of performing games.

Theater from babies teaches us that it is necessary to look at the relationships established with spectators that update the idea of theater and dialogue with contemporary art, presenting hybridism, bordering languages, and a central relationship with spectators as proposed in several contemporary works,¹⁹. Once more the discussion enters the field of performance since “lastly, within such initial contextualization of performance, it is relevant to discuss the hybridity issue” (Cohen, 2002, p. 29, our translation). The play *Linhas* presents a bordering language between theater, performance and dance, and composes with the spectators arranged around the scene a unique play at each session.

Therefore, taking these perspectives into account and anchored in the experience of the event called theater for babies and small children a conception of education is consolidated, one that evokes the freedom of theme and an exchange between human beings, who can be babies, adults or children, and also an understanding of looking at its own aesthetics that is built in the making of theater that is established as a shared experience, and as a public experience.

Furthermore, *Linhas* has confirmed and updated radical territories in the ‘between’ of art, life and childhood, education and culture (Prado, 2017), of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2009), in artistic ways that give importance to different relationships that promote the world, new values of experiences, other kinds of sociability and everyday utopias, in their extremely political meaning since babies are placed in public spaces.

¹⁹ As, for example, the work by Hélio Oiticica and his *Parangolés* which place spectators as artworks rather than work activators.

Thus, “in a truly revolutionary way the secret signal of what is coming acts, and it speaks through the child’s gesture” (Benjamin, 2009, p. 119, our translation), challenging in contemporaneity what must, what is possible and what is wanted in theater with, or better, from babies.

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