

Listening, hospitality and the art of dialogue

Working with children is often associated with concepts such as education, training and teaching, even when it is centered on the artistic enhancement or development of the child. As if those who work with children were subjects possessing a presumed knowledge or presumed artistic skills, which, through the relationship between master and disciple, would be passed on to other subjects supposedly reduced to mere apprentices. This model, which prioritizes the receptive dimension of the educational process, has obviously been questioned on multiple fronts, and both artistic mediation and education, whether in the form of artistic teaching or the form of education for art or through art, have played an important role in this questioning. But not always does one dare to question it with all the radicalism that the concept of creativity implies in its extension to activities with the youngest. This radicalism is present in Jacques Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), published a few decades ago, which can be seen as pulsating in a more recent work he titled *The Emancipated Spectator* (2010). In that first work, it is the adventure of Joseph Jacotot, in the distant beginnings of the 19th century, that is narrated and reflected upon as the adventure of a teacher who recognizes himself as ignorant, boldly assuming that he has nothing to teach his pupils or disciples (apud Rancière, 1987: 28), echoing in these words the theme of 'learned ignorance' that Nicholas of Cusa had proclaimed in a book of that title in 1440 (Nicholas of Cusa, 2018).

The aim of this communication is, therefore, to issue the challenge to move more boldly in this direction, showing how, even with the youngest, teachers, educators and even artists have a lot to learn if they know how to come down from their pedestal as supposed masters of knowledge and the arts and embrace the capacity and openness to learn as a virtue (and let us not forget that, in Latin, virtue means strength) for the authentic enhancement and development of the creativity of all interlocutors in educational processes. To this end, we will move in three times and three concepts, drawing from them the consequences for artistic work with children and young people: listening, hospitality and dialogue. These attitudes, which are the basis of all human relationships that are respectful of others and democratic in their aspirations, also constitute the essential foundation of any formative process.

1) Listening. It is curious to note that many training courses for educators or teachers include, directly or indirectly, lessons on the art of well speaking, while at the same time we realize that it is quite rare to find an introduction to the art of well listening. In order to properly understand how the ear can point to another relational and educational paradigm, I think it is important to

emphasize that sight has clearly held primacy in Western culture, with the whole of Modernity, since the invention of the printing press that gave rise to what McLuhan called the Gutenberg Galaxy (McLuhan, 1998), being very much marked by the sense of sight. However, these two senses are quite different: sight is a predominantly dominating sense, at the service of concentrationary projects, as demonstrated by the devices and metaphors of the Panopticon (Bentham, 1989), or 'Big Brother' (Orwell, 1984), not to mention the symptomatic references to the objectifying gaze in Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness' (1976) or the link between surveillance and punishment made by Foucault (2015).

It is through sight and surveillance that power is exercised, and let us not forget that educators and their assistants have often been called 'vigilants'. Because of its dominating nature, sight suppresses the other senses, which become secondary. In contrast, the sense of hearing is a much more welcoming and receptive sense: it doesn't impose, it doesn't project itself onto others, it doesn't absorb all sensitivity, but rather opens up holistically to the world, without disturbing, but instead enhancing other forms of relationship with others and with our surroundings. Sight demands objects in their instrumentality and submission; hearing or listening calls upon subjects in their otherness.

It is, however, necessary to begin by distinguishing between hearing and listening. Hearing is a mechanical action that corresponds to the entry of sound waves into our body through the ear. Listening, on the other hand, implies resonance within the listener, which presupposes welcoming, inner vibration and a heartfelt response (Nancy, 2002; Rosa, 2018: 73-82). This is why listening is so important in artistic activities and formative processes, as it is in listening, often the beginning of astonishment, that creative dynamics are generated, and it is also through listening that that one recognizes the alterity of the other in their difference and subjectivity, even when that other person is a child, rich in potential but fragile in their constitution and in their simplicity and spontaneity.

It is therefore important to start by asking: who or what is being listened to?

Naturally, one listens to the word and the voice. But in listening to the word, one listens to the word that listens, and listens to the word that listens to the word that listens: listening doesn't fold in on itself, but rather expands outward. Therefore, a word that is listened to is, at the same time, a word that listens, in other words, an open word that doesn't remain closed in on itself and, for that reason, is not an exercise of power.

But one also listens to silence. António Ramos Rosa says in one of his shortest poems: 'Some sounds/ are so soft/ that they seem like the vibration of silence' (Rosa, 2012: 12). And David Le Breton, who dedicated one of his books to silence, justifies it in these terms: 'Without a backdrop of silence, communication is unthinkable, it would be obstructed by a continuous

flow of words that would lead to the impotence of the word doomed from the beginning." (Le Breton, 1999: 25) I would therefore say that, as opposed to methodical doubt, which is an exercise of power, we are called to a methodical silence, as openness to listening, which is an exercise in self-renunciation. Only those who are able to listen to the deepest silence from which all words emerge and to which all words return can create or form.

And one also hears the music and the world. The world (*mundus*), which is the Latin translation of the Greek word *cosmos*, means the beautiful, the orderly and the harmonious, as opposed to chaos. Thus, one listens to the world and its sounds: the sounds of animals, the wind and the sea. One also hears the thoughts they generate, their resonance within us.

It is important, however, to be aware that listening is not limited to the specific materiality of sounds or words. And how significant that is when working with children (*infans*) (which, etymologically, means that which is not yet endowed with speech) and with art. For it is essential to learn to listen to gestures (their language), to gaze, to movements, their brightness and their shadows. And also, to light, images and colours, because light, images and colours also have their own specific way of speaking. And it is equally important to listen to affections, feelings and emotions in the varied ways and modulations in which they express themselves, which say much more than words can. They express themselves in dance, in music, in the lines or brushstrokes cast upon the blankness of a sheet of paper, in photographs, in monosyllables and sometimes in silences, which can be pain, amazement, happiness, tenderness, seeking, hope and despair. How indispensable it is to learn to listen to energy: the energy of the world, the energy of others, the energy of the earth, water, air and fire, for one cannot listen to life without listening to its energy. And if the energy of an elderly person is a tempered, lived and experienced energy, the energy of a child is a pure, spontaneous and authentic energy. We do not teach energy to children, it is children who teach energy to us.

Finally, it is necessary to learn to listen to time, because the experience of time differs from childhood to youth, from youth to adulthood, and from adulthood to old age, just as the dance of time varies across cultures (Hall: 1984, 178-204). And listening to time and times means listening to the present, but also listening to the past and listening to the future. In memory, in presence and in hope.

But we must also ask how one listens, because what we listen to depends on the way we listen. And one must listen with openness, with availability, with a sense of encounter. One listens in tension towards the other and towards the world. One listens in an attitude of humility, a word that comes from *humus*, meaning earth, and which also gave rise to the word human. One listens as someone who receives the seed, like the earth or the field that awaits it so that plants may grow. Only in humility can one truly listen. And how difficult it is to listen in humility

when those we listen to are children. But the younger the children, the closer they are to the earth, and therefore, the humbler we must be to listen to them. So that hope may bloom in those who listen and in those who are listened to.

And it's also worth asking: with what do we listen? With our ears, naturally. But also with touch (that is, the skin), with taste and with smell. And with sight. Because sight and hearing nurture one another: one must learn to look as if listening, and one must learn to listen as if seeing. That is, to listen with all the senses. Synesthetically.

Listening is therefore an essential attitude for dialogue and is defined as a state or condition: the human being is fundamentally a being who listens, who is listening, as a finite and needy being. This means that listening is not a provisional or momentary act. It is the way of being of the human as *Dasein* (Heidegger, 2006), that is, being thrown out there, into the world, among others, in the midst of time, in the midst of nature, in the midst of history. Listening is a condition that shapes the other senses: seeing as one listens, touching as one listens, tasting as one listens, smelling as one listens. And it is a condition for formation and art to be fulfilled in us: learning to listen in order to help others listen, listening to create and foster the creativity of others, in a reciprocity of the act of listening and the act of creating.

2) Hospitality. The primacy of listening in formative and educational relationships, especially in the context of artistic creation and aesthetic experience, means that this activity should be understood as an exercise in hospitality. And when we speak here of hospitality, we are not referring solely to relationships with immigrants, refugees or children from cultural environments other than those of the host societies. What we mean is that every formative act and every artistic action must be experienced and practiced as acts of hospitality.

Normally, especially in the multicultural societies in which we live, hospitality is associated with the welcoming of foreigners, of what is culturally different, for geographical, linguistic, ethnic or religious reasons. But I would like us to understand the concept of hospitality, in the context in which we find ourselves, as translating the attitude of welcoming the other, the different, in a broader way and with a very concrete scope in educational processes. Because hospitality comes from *hospes*, which means both guest and host, and corresponds to the attitude of welcoming someone who is marked by difference and otherness, treating them in the same way we treat those who are closest or most familiar to us (Grasse, 2004, 35-46). I would therefore say that there is room for the exercise of hospitality in every relationship with people who are not part of our immediate sphere. Thus, the spaces of education, training and aesthetic and artistic experience, in communities marked by difference, are privileged spaces for the practice of hospitality.

However, in order to understand the scope that the concept of hospitality has in the field of art for childhood and social and human development, it is necessary to bear in mind that it covers three relatively distinct dimensions: an epistemological dimension, an anthropological dimension and an ethical dimension (André: 2023: 261).

In epistemological terms, the exercise of hospitality, recognizing that all knowledge is perspectival and situated, implies that the search for truth is carried out through complementarity and not exclusion. It is from the encounter of different positions that a greater approximation to the truth of things can be born and this encounter presupposes the ability to welcome different knowledge and different visions of reality, in a process of dialogue that does not thrive in combat, but in mutual understanding and the assumption of what completes the relativity of our vision.

And we know that we see the world in different ways, with this difference rooted in culture, traditions, language, gender, or age. Therefore, if no one has the whole truth, each person, in their difference, can have their share of truth. There are things that children know that adults don't, either because they've forgotten the simplicity of being children, or because they knew them in a different way from how children today understand them. A hospitable epistemology in the sphere of education and the arts is an epistemology that knows that truth is stereoscopic (Brook, 2001: 23) and can be looked at from many sides and in many ways, it always has areas of light and shadow, it is characterized by the 'already', but also by the 'not yet', and it makes embrace and complicity the most reliable gestures for accessing knowledge.

In anthropological terms, hospitality is based, on the one hand, on the relational structure of the human being and, on the other, on the unconditional value of difference and singularity. Because we have a relational structure, our existence is, by definition, a dialogical existence: our being is a being-with, a *Mitsein*, and only in dialogue with a 'you' is the 'I' perfected and fulfilled (Buber, 2017). And every I-you relationship is a relationship of intersubjectivities, while the I-it relationship is an objectifying relationship of its other pole. We are not atoms or closed spheres, we are not 'monads without windows', we are openness to the world and to others, communion with the world and with others. Thus, the title of a recent work by Jean-Philippe Pierron, which is an authentic manifesto on education and the arts, makes perfect sense (Pierron, 2021): 'I is a we' ('je est un nous'). Grounded in the interdependence of the human being with other living beings and with nature, it calls for the transformation of our autobiographies into ecobiographies, seeking to capture and record the way in which these interactions influenced our identity. But, at the same time, because hospitality recognizes the value of difference, it transforms the experience of formative processes into an emergence of singularities, rich and fruitful in their difference, and not into a replication of the same, as if all

subjects were reduced to copies of the same matrix and the same original. And if what characterizes artistic activity is the permanent creation of the new, it must be said that it is within the paradigm of artistic creation that educational activity should move, especially when it comes to the arts and education for the arts.

Because this interaction between education, art, singularity, and relationships gives rise to the concept of a hospitable identity, which is an identity that, in contact with others and with what is different, interweaves with its differences, creating mestizo, composite, hybrid or creole identities that breathe difference and live off the difference they breathe (André, 2015: 15-71; Sousa, M.: 2021). And this means that it's not just children and young people who are in the process of forming their identity. It's also adults or educators, because there are no fixed, closed or finalized identities, but dynamic identities in process, in which what children give us also profoundly changes us.

The epistemological and anthropological dimensions of hospitality ground their ethical scope in the day-to-day praxis of those engaged in formative processes. And if such processes have children as interlocutors and art as an activity that fosters their development, it must be acknowledged that among the various ethics that can provide guiding frameworks for action, the ethics of care are of paradigmatic importance. Not that eudaimonist ethics, utilitarian ethics, deontological ethics or the ethics of justice are unimportant. However, the situation of these subjects and the artistic context of interaction with them are marked by vulnerability. And while, for example, the ethics of justice is fundamentally based on the principles of formal equality and equal treatment of all, the ethics of care, based on an anthropology of vulnerability, demands specific and concrete attention to each subject and each situation, due to their uniqueness and the sometimes devastating effects felt by vulnerable people. Theorized within the context of the development of North American feminist thought in the last decades of the 20th century (Carol Gilligan: 1986), these ethics intersected with European traditions of the ethics of virtues, solicitude, love, and hospitality, and opened a broad field of reflection applicable to the most vulnerable people, including the sick, the elderly, victims of domestic violence, former prisoners, drug addicts, the homeless, among others, inspiring a praxis centered on the concept of care, elevated as a paradigmatic concept in Portugal, for example, through the thought of Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo (2012). Supported by the notions of humility, consideration, respect and reparation, the ethics of care calls for a practice that is both prophylactic and therefore preventative, and a therapeutic and therefore reparative dimension, in line with the Latin concept of 'cura', which means both care and the act of healing a disease. And while we are on the subject of the arts, let us not forget that those who lead the respective activities are often referred to as curators, particularly in the field of visual arts. This care is realized in four distinct

moments, which the American philosopher Joan Tronto summarized with the following expressions: 1) caring about, that is, worrying about or looking after, 2) taking care of, meaning to take charge of care, 3) care giving, understood as giving or providing care, and 4) care receiving, related to the attitude of the one who receives care (Tronto, 2009: 147-150). My proposal is that these moments be prioritized in training processes and in the respective artistic activities, when the subjects are particularly vulnerable beings, but without paternalism or maternalism, which would bias the development of the inherent potential in artistic creation, as they could act as a constraint or manipulation of the abilities of the younger ones.

It's about experiencing formative and artistic processes as processes of opening up to and welcoming others, no matter how young they may be, in their knowledge, their emotions, their creativity, ways of offering ourselves in what we are and how we are as their home and of inhabiting others as they are and in what they are as our home. Allowing others to dwell and linger within us while we dwell and linger within others, discovering the reciprocal beauty that inhabits us. Because the practice of hospitality is an exercise in reciprocity, and thus, at the same time that one hospitably welcomes the other, a pedagogy of hospitality is practiced, which leads them, even as a child, to let us dwell within them, their affections, and their thoughts.

3) The art of dialogue. And so, we come to the last moment and the last concept of this reflection, the art of dialogue. Because both listening and hospitality are the necessary conditions for dialogue to occur, to be fulfilled and to achieve its goals. And we speak of the art of dialogue because it is indeed an art and not merely a methodology or a simple technique. It demands the same creativity as art in its expressive processes, the same ingenuity and imagination.

Meanwhile, speaking of dialogue in relation to art and education, and defining dialogue as a process of interactive communication between two or more people, it is important to begin by distinguishing two types of dialogue: there is a type of dialogue that could be called 'dialectical dialogue' and another that we might call 'dialogical dialogue' (Panikkar, 2006: 49-57). Dialectical dialogue, emphasizing differences, oppositions and contradictions, unfolds in the exercise of confrontation in an attempt to overcome the opposing position and establish the truth or correctness of the defended thesis. Dialogic dialogue is based on respect and recognition of the other person's claims to truth, but, admitting that divergence can be translated into complementarity, it seeks not the victory of one position over the other, but the mutual enrichment that can result from the intersection of differences and the uniqueness of each position. Thus, it is not in the theater of dialectical dialogue that educational and artistic processes take place, but rather in the theater of dialogical dialogue.

If the human being is constitutively and structurally relational, in and an I-You relationship, as we discussed earlier, the human being is, by essence, dialogical (Pereira, 1986: 81-90). And this dialogical dimension of human existence cannot fail to be emphasized in processes aimed at enhancing one's abilities, strengths, and dynamics, as is the case in education and art. However, at the same time, it is necessary to recognize that the human being is not solely reason, but also body and affectivity in an indissoluble unity (André, 1997: 61-98). For this reason, the art of dialogue that we advocate here falls into three registers that must be specified. Firstly, the register of knowledge or reason, which operates fundamentally on a logical and argumentative level, playing with thoughts and ideas that are exchanged in the dialogical process.

Secondly, the register of affections, in its diversity of emotions, feelings and passions, because there is no dialogue without an affective projection towards the person with whom we dialogue. There is no knowledge without love, nor love without knowledge, as the Catalan philosopher Ramon Panikkar rightly emphasized when he called this union a *hieros gamos*, a sacred marriage (Panikkar, 2006: 140-141). But we do not speak only words, nor do we express ourselves solely affectively. We also communicate with our bodies, through gestures, musical modulations, movements and dance steps, glances and silences. Therefore, alongside thought and affectivity, we must also include the body and bodily expressions as a fundamental register of the dialogical processes considered in this reflection (André, 2017).

Based on these preliminary notions that help us define dialogue as art and situate it in the registers in which it operates, we can now enumerate some principles of dialogue, so that it becomes fruitful in accompanying, developing and enhancing artistic expressions. Without being exhaustive, I would list the following, which seem to me to be of decisive importance:

- 1) Openness to the other and welcoming them with respect for their otherness and uniqueness, as the first imperative of an ethics of hospitality applied to dialogical processes, which implies sensitivity and amazement at the newness of each being in their own wisdom and in their forms of creation and artistic mediation between their world and the world around them;

- 2) Horizontality as a means of correcting asymmetries and hierarchies structured by power relations, which so often limit the potentialities of the interlocutors in dialogue, especially when they belong to younger age groups;

- 3) The humility inherent in self-recognition of one's own limits, both in terms of forms of knowledge and in terms of artistic expression capabilities, where what matters is neither age, nor profession, nor status, but creativity and the richness associated with it;

4) Activating and listening to affections, in an atmosphere and environment that brings warmth and texture to the interpersonal relationships inherent in any dialogical practice;

5) The elimination of prejudices and stereotypes, whether age or gender-related, ethnic or religious, social or cultural, which always bias the mutual understanding of the subjects in dialogue;

6) The consideration of memory and imagination as operators of artistic formation and creation, which are always singular in their specificity, forging identities and creating worlds anchored in the experience of each and every one;

7) Attention to the multiple languages through which human beings can express themselves, especially when they have not yet fully mastered the word as a vehicle of their inner self: gestures, movements, the externalization of emotions, the gaze, silences, painting, drawing and photography, molding or sculpture, dance and music, to name a few areas in which dialogue, though challenging, can be possible and highly stimulating;

8) Finally, synesthesia, which can bring together all the previous principles, as it appeals to communication and interaction through all the senses: sight and hearing, yes, but also touch, smell and taste, in a circulation between them, as each sense is present in all the others and is equally fulfilled in the unique sensitivity of each of them (André; 2023).

This meeting is intended to discuss art for childhood. We sought, therefore, to establish a path that began with listening in order to understand formation and education as an exercise in hospitality, leading to a renewed conception of dialogue as the key to interaction with children around the arts and artistic making. A dialogue envisioned in a holistic dimension. And also embraced as a form of art. That art that lies behind the arts and education, which are all ways of dialogue with the world, with nature, with others and also with ourselves, in our joys, hopes, desires and also complexities and contradictions.

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João Maria André

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