

Reflection Article/Essay

Activities, common world, and forms of life: contributions of Hannah Arendt's thought to occupational therapy¹

Atividades, mundo comum e formas de vida: contribuições do pensamento de Hannah Arendt para a terapia ocupacional

Elizabeth Maria Freire de Araújo Lima^a 

^aUniversidade de São Paulo – USP, São Paulo, SP, Brasil.

How to cite: Lima, E. M. F. A. (2020). Activities, common world, and forms of life: contributions of Hannah Arendt's thought to occupational therapy. *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional*. 28(3), 1037-1050. <https://doi.org/10.4322/2526-8910.ctoARF1995>

Abstract

In Occupational Therapy, activities - which take shape in actions and doings - are approached from multiple perspectives: as a resource, instrument, tool, or object of study. This text will try to think about activities in occupational therapy from an ontological perspective, as a constitutive element of human life. From the ontological point of view, actions and doings constitute human beings: through them, people create and recreate the relationships they establish among themselves, the world in which they live together, a multiplicity of forms of life, and, at the same time, they persevere in existence, perpetuating the life that goes through their bodies. Considering activities from an ontological perspective, we will present Hannah Arendt's thinking and her concept of action, proposing a dialogue with occupational therapy. Arendt placed *vita activa* at the center of her reflection, focusing on politics and coexistence among human beings in their plurality. For her, freedom, exercised and experienced in the common world and the public sphere, guarantees the existence of singular beings who, through living thought, word and action, exercise an ethic in the form of caring for the world.

Keywords: Occupational Therapy, Critical Theory, Activities of Daily Living, Politics.

Resumo

No campo da terapia ocupacional, as atividades – que se atualizam na ação e no fazer das gentes – são abordadas com base em múltiplas óticas: como recurso, instrumento, ferramenta ou objeto de estudo. Este texto buscará pensar as atividades na terapia ocupacional com base em uma perspectiva ontológica, isto é,

¹This article was based on the (Free Teaching thesis) dissertation thesis entitled "Active life, common world, policies and resistance: thinking about occupational therapy with Hannah Arendt", presented to the Medical School of the University of São Paulo, in 2017.

Received on Aug. 4, 2019; 1st Revision on Dec. 12, 2019; Accepted on Jan. 27, 2020.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

como elemento constitutivo da vida dos seres humanos. Do ponto de vista ontológico, as ações e os fazeres constituem o seres humanos na medida em que, por meio delas, as gentes criam e recriam as relações que estabelecem entre si, o mundo em que vivem juntas e uma multiplicidade de formas de vida, ao mesmo tempo em que perseveram na existência, perpetuando a vida que atravessa seus corpos. Considerando as atividades com base em uma perspectiva ontológica, apresentaremos o pensamento de Hannah Arendt e o seu conceito de ação, buscando um diálogo com a terapia ocupacional. Arendt colocou a vida ativa no centro de sua reflexão, privilegiando a política e a coexistência entre os seres humanos em sua pluralidade. Para a autora, a liberdade, exercida e experimentada no mundo comum e na esfera pública, garante a existência de seres singulares que, por meio do pensamento, da palavra e da ação vivas, exercem uma ética na forma de cuidado com o mundo.

Palavras-chave: Terapia Ocupacional, Teoria Crítica, Atividades Cotidianas, Política.

1 Introduction: an ontology of action, becoming and producing differences

In occupational therapy (OT), activities - which take shape in actions and doings of people - are approached from multiple perspectives: as a resource, instrument, tool, or object of study. This text aims to think about occupational therapy activities in their ontological position, that is, in their intrinsic relationship with the concepts of life, health, and humanity that support the practices in this field².

From the ontological point of view, actions and doing constitute human beings. Through them, people create and recreate the relationships they establish among themselves, the world in which they live together, and a multiplicity of life forms, and at the same time, they persist in existence, perpetuating the life that passes through their bodies. Thus, there is “[...] an ontology of circular causality: when carrying out activities in their daily lives, men are constituted, that is, the human being is done by doing” (Almeida & Costa, 2019, p. 62).

In this sense, we are not speaking of an ontology with a human being essence, but an ontology of action, of the production of difference and of becoming, which places, in the heart of existence, the relationships and processes of production of beings and realities that only exist in constant differentiation. With Bergson, we would say that being is said in its making. With Deleuze & Guattari (1978), we would say that “everything is production!”³.

In such an ontology, the being is in a constant process of differentiation. It is about thinking about processes of heterogenesis within assemblages: each element of an assembly in occupational therapy - people, activities, materials, products, worlds - can

²Some occupational therapists have proposed to think about occupational therapy based on Ontology. Morrison (2018) considers the ontological perspective as one of the central axes for understanding occupational therapy; for him, occupation is an ontological construct of the profession. In the book *Ontological Perspectives of Human Occupation in Occupational Therapy*, written with Diego Vidal, the authors explore different ontological matrices for human occupation in OT (Morrison & Vidal, 2012, p. 62). On the other hand, Almeida & Costa (2019) state that understanding OT as an ontology implies saying that OT “does not seek to treat or minimize sequels through activities, but understands doing as a fundamental, constitutive and essential part of men's lives, donating an existential sense to humanity”.

³“There is no longer any man or nature, but only a process that produces them in each other” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1978, p. 8).

only be thought when related to all the others. The activities involve and develop in heterogeneous assemblages composed of people, bodies, forms of life, worlds, relationships, languages, and senses, generated by the assemblages they constitute. Thus, depending on the assemblies and arrangements the activities are carried out, they can produce health and social bonds; but also, illness, suffering, isolation, and uprooting.

Considering the activities based on an ontological perspective, we will show Hannah Arendt's thinking, in the search for a dialogue with occupational therapy. In the book *The Human Condition*, the author reflects on "what we are doing" based on:

[...] a reconsideration of the human condition based on our newest experiences and our most recent fears. [...], addressing its most elementary manifestations, those activities that can be reached by every human being (Arendt, 2003, p. 13).

In this reflection, the problem that motivated the author's previous book – *The Origins of Totalitarianism* - and that runs through her entire work remains alive: the effort to understand how was possible the emergence of totalitarianism within modern Western societies. Continuing with the investigation brought by this monumental book, Arendt dedicated to research the totalitarian elements that would be present in the great tradition of Western political philosophy. In this new research, the author finds the procedure of *differentia specifica* for determining the essence of the human being (Dias, 2018). Defining the essence of something is equivalent to establishing a fundamental cut between what belongs and what does not belong to a certain area. When approaching the human based on a definition, what is undetermined in human experience is left out, deformed, or simply ignored. In this sense, Thiago Dias thinks that the book called *The human condition* indicates engagement in the criticism of this procedure and the formulation of another way of thinking about the human event without a foundation, abandoning the totalizing pretensions that marked the western tradition.

Thus, Arendt thematizes not human nature but the conditions of human life as we know it, distinguishing her approach from an essentialist perspective. For the author, human existence developed on planet Earth under certain conditions, including those created by men. However, these conditions - life, birth, worldliness, and plurality - could never explain what we are or answer the question about who we are, as they never condition us. The conditions under which human life has taken place can be changed; think about whether we want to transform them and in what direction it is a great political issue (Arendt, 2003).

Motivated by the problems of the time in which Arendt lived, she placed active life at the center of her reflection. Privileging politics and coexistence among human beings in their plurality, she developed long analyzes of work, labor, and action; under the implications of modern science and economic growth; and about the obstacles to acting and thinking in the contemporary. With this text, we hope to highlight the valuable contribution that these analyzes can bring to occupational therapy⁴.

⁴Hannah Arendt is an author still little known and studied in the OT. In a recently published article, Jansson & Wagman (2017) present the author's thinking as an important contribution for occupational scientists and occupational therapists to broaden their perspectives on activities and occupations. In Brazil, Lima (2017) carried out a study of the author's thinking and her contributions to Occupational Therapy, presented as a thesis for Free Teaching at the Faculty of Medicine, University of São Paulo.

2 Active life and the human becoming of singular beings

When Hannah Arendt proposed to investigate the conditions of human life as we know it, she found active life - “[...] human life as we actively strive to do something” (Arendt, 2003, p. 31) - and started to examine the activities that compose it and the modalities of conceiving them in the tradition of western philosophy and political thought.

The expression *vita activa* emerges in medieval philosophy as a translation for the expression of *bios politikos*, which means the life dedicated to the affairs of the *polis*. For the Greeks, the human capacity to produce things - works, achievements, and words - would be the way that mortals have to leave traces behind them and achieve a type of immortality. Therefore, no job would be sordid in itself: the same activity could be an expression of autonomy if performed in freedom, or servility and subjection to necessity if the mere survival was at stake.

Agreeing with this, Aristotle understood that all activities would have relevance and value if freely exercised. The purpose of human existence would be the search for good and happiness, achievable by the practice of activities that allow human beings to achieve their fulfillment. In this context, each man's way of life, his *bios*, would be defined by the predominant activity that he freely chose to exercise. The life of the philosopher - *bios theoretikos* - would be devoted to the cultivation of the spirit and dedicated to thought and contemplation, while the *bios politikos* would be the life dedicated to the affairs of the *polis*, in which excellence would produce achievements and works, and would take place in the sphere of human issues.

In the text *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristóteles (2002) proposed a distinction within the *bios politikos*, between *praxis* and *poiesis*. *Praxis* - action - is an activity in which the product cannot be separated from the producer, existing only during its performance, such as teaching, playing an instrument, or playing a piece. *Poiesis* - production -, is the activity that finds its final term in the production of work; an activity that results in an artifact or something separate from the author, that follows its destiny (like a book, a shoe, or a sculpture...). While these two types of activity would be linked to a form of permanence and potential immortality and would occur in the sphere of human affairs, *Theory* or contemplation would be the experience of the eternal, which would occur when one ceases to be among men.

For the Greeks, a life focused on the issues of the *polis*, eminently political, was not incompatible with leisure, considered it indispensable for a free and happy existence, and the exercise of the activities of cultivation of the spirit (contemplation, letters, arts, science) and body care (gymnastics, dance). For them, leisure was a condition for physical, spiritual, and political development.

In medieval philosophy, the expression *vita activa* abandoned the political meaning of Greek expression and began to show all kinds of active engagement in the things of this world. The medieval *vita activa* would correspond to the Greek *askholia* - with the meaning of restlessness, anxiety, or *nec-otium* -, and its distinction from contemplative life would be given by the opposition between stillness and occupation. The main difference between the Greek view and the view from the medieval period would be in the hierarchy between ways of life and, consequently, between human activities. The idea of eternal life after death searched

accomplishments and works that could remain in the world beyond individual life losing its meaning. Action and production started to be seen to answer to the needs of earthly life, becoming servants of contemplation, and by being linked to the search for the eternal, it became the only free way of life (Arendt, 2003, p. 22).

With the Modern Era, the primacy of contemplation over the activity was reversed. The French and Industrial Revolutions elevated work, which had been the most despised of human activities, to the highest degree of productivity and value, while humanism placed man at the center of the world, the source of the creative process.

Marx's philosophy is in line with this inversion of the hierarchy between contemplation and work. His formulation produced with Engels that work created man states that man creates himself and his humanity is the result of his activity. According to Arendt, the idea that man produces himself is a formulation of great radicality and coherence, in which the whole Modern Era agreed with it (Arendt, 2014).

However, when studying Marx, Arendt found a fundamental contradiction that remains unsolvable in her terms: the glorification of work. Without a clear distinction between the various forms that human activity can take, the exaltation of work is alongside the ideal of a society liberated from work and politics. Marx insisted that the goal of the revolution would be the emancipation of man in the work, which in Marx's own words, would amount to emancipation from necessity. But, "[...] if work is the most human and the most productive activity [...], what will happen when, after the revolution, in the realm of freedom, man has managed to emancipate himself from it?" (Arendt, 2014, p. 51)⁵.

Arendt shows that this incompatibility between two ideas of work - as subjection to the necessity and as an expression of human freedom, productivity, and creation - needs to propose distinctions between the activities of active life. The great value given to contemplation would have obscured the differences in the active life scope, not evidenced even by the hierarchical inversion that accompanied the break with the tradition in Marx.

With the expression of active life, the author highlights three fundamental activities: work, labor, and action⁶. Each of them is to one of the basic conditions that human life can emerge from the network of relationships in the earth: the conditions of being alive, of inhabiting the world, and of existing as a singular being in human plurality. Each of them is also associated with a human capacity: the ability to respond to vital needs, to create a common world as a home on the earth, and to act among others as a political being.

Starting from the distinction proposed by Aristotle between *praxis* and *poiesis*, between action and production, Arendt (2003) introduces a third element,

⁵According to Arendt, such a contradiction in a great thinker like Marx refers to the center of his work and is a precious key to the understanding of the problems around it is constituted. She also expresses the meaning to deal with new problems based on a tradition of thought that no longer accounts for what was new. Thinking against tradition, but using the conceptual tools of that same tradition, Marx would indicate the culmination and end of this tradition of thought.

⁶In Hannah Arendt's texts published in Portuguese, we find different choices for the translation of the terms *labour* and *work*. In the 2003 translation of *The Human Condition*, published by Forense Universitária, Roberto Raposo proposes the words labor and work. Adriano Correia, in the translation of the text "Trabalho, obra, ação", published in *Cadernos de Ética e Filosofia Política*, he prefers *trabalho* and *obra*. More recently, some authors such as Thiago Dias employed *trabalho* and *fabricação*. We opted for this translation since *trabalho* derives from *tripalio* (instrument of torture), which leads to the association between work and punishment; *fabricação*, in turn, brings the dimension of construction of the common world, contained in the original term work.

distinguishing work from the work production. Thus, she establishes three different arrangements in which the creative capacity of the human being, in its virtuality, is updated in the shared experience. Her argument for this distinction is based on the etymological study and associated with the meaning that the Greeks gave to activities related to the maintenance of life and those related to the making and construction of the world. From an etymological point of view, Arendt maintains that all European languages have two words, of different origin and the semantic universe, to designate what is understood to be the same activity, and use them as a synonym. Thus, there are: in Greek, *ponen e ergazesthai*; in Latin, *laborare and faceres* or *fabricare*; in French, *travailler* and *ouvrier*; in German, *arbeiten* and *werken*; in English, language in which the book was written, *labor* and *work*.

Work as labor is the activity imposed by necessity, aimed at ensuring the survival of the individual and the life of the species. The human condition of work is life itself, as the biological process of the human body.

On the other hand, production is directly related to the construction of the common world: a home made by human beings, which testifies to the presence of other beings and guarantees the reality of the world and each one. The common world is the home of human beings on earth, in which they enter at birth and they abandon it when they die, with what they have in common with those who are contemporary with them, those who lived before them and those who will come. Therefore, production is the human condition of worldliness.

Finally, the action is the activity directly performed between human beings and depends on the presence of others; it creates the web of relationships between human beings, and therefore, it is political par excellence. The one who acts initiates something, which is also the beginning of himself in continuous variation (Arendt, 2003, p. 22). The action is anchored in the darkness of the soul. Darkness that “[...] becomes a singularity at the very moment of its revelation”, when it appears before other singularities, within a plurality (Dias, 2018, p. 158). Thus, the action is the human condition of the plurality of singular beings, who live on earth and inhabit the world, without any being equal to the other. Human uniqueness is shown in the discourse and the action, and for this reason, the action is the condition of all politics (Arendt, 2003).

Arendt (2003) highlights the difference between what is produced in each of the activities of the active life: while producing guarantees the permanence and durability of the world, work produces ephemeral things destined for incessant consumption, ensuring the survival. That is why the productivity of work is measured by the needs of the vital process and the reproduction of life, and not by the quality or character of what has been produced. Unlike the products to be consumed and the objects in the common world, the “products” of action and discourse are human relationships and establish the public space. Its effectiveness depends entirely on the existence and presence of others, and therefore on human plurality. As it affects a network of actions and relationships that pre-exist, the action is undetermined, its results are unpredictable and irreversible, and its meaning is revealed only in a retrospective view.

The three different activities that characterize active life in the modern Western world are an articulated set, in which each one has its meaning from the relationship with the others. Thus, human life was produced in the West through an interwoven web between action, work, and production, and these forms of activity are conditioned

by the fact that not a human being, but humanity and all living beings inhabit the earth and in one way or another they live together.

3 Active life in the contemporary

The difference between these three activities that in the active life is essential for Arendt to support the original thesis of her work, seeking to answer the problem that caused it: how was the emergence of totalitarianism possible?

The philosopher states that the predominant existence in modern society has practically reduced all activities, even those of producing and acting, into a work aimed at ensuring the things necessary for the life of the biological body, producing them, and consume them. In a short space of time, modern communities were transformed into societies of workers and wage earners, so that human groups began to be organized around survival with activities aimed at maintaining life.

Arendt (2003) explains that the sudden and surprising promotion of work to the position of the most valued human activities is associated with the ideas of Locke and Adam Smith, respectively, in which the work would be the source of all property and all wealth; and finally, with Marx, to be considered the origin and form of all human productivity. The discovery of work productivity led to the association between a growing process of production, acquisition, and appropriation of wealth, and the natural fertility of life, that is, the vital process. Among all human activities, work is the activity that comes closest to this process, in its endless and cyclical character. Thus, work and procreation are seen as two modalities of the same fertile process of life: the first, responsible for the production of social life, and the second for the reproduction of the species. In this perspective, the equation of productivity with fertility would lead to the development of productive forces for the creation of a society of abundance.

For Arendt, Capitalism is the economic system that impressively connects to physiological processes and their rhythms. The production of wealth and its transformation into capital - characteristics of the Modern Era - took place through a work understood as “[...] metabolism of a man with nature” as expressed by Marx (1950 apud Arendt, 2003, p. 118), in which production and consumption are two stages of the eternal cycle of biological life.

However, the accumulation of capital from increased productivity did not lead to stagnation or slowness in the process, nor did the appropriation end with the satisfaction of needs and desires, but it started an increasing flow of wealth. The “vital process of society”, whose capacity to produce wealth can be compared to the fertility of natural processes, remained linked to the principle of alienation from the world, and all things produced were used to feed this accumulation at an increasing rate.

This process had enormous consequences in the active life sphere: producing started to take the form of working, and its products, instead of building a world, started to be treated as objects of consumption. In turn, the action has been replaced by behavior and politics by bureaucracy and planning, trying to control the results and suppress the uncertainty that all actions and policies involve.

Reduced to work as the labor and the maintenance of life in his effort for survival, the man is trapped, according to Arendt (2003), to an uninterrupted process of increasing production of things that are not very durable to be consumed; to a process

that ends only with the exhaustion of the workforce. Everything that the modern man does is almost exclusively a way of ensuring his and his family's livelihood. On the other hand, any activity that is not necessary for the life of the individual or society is considered a hobby or leisure.

When everything is done as a mechanism of a ceaseless production of perishable goods and incessant consumption of those same goods, human beings fail to build a world and to coexist in public space as political beings. The overlap between activity and the vital process also means that all the riches of the earth are quickly consumed without interrupting this productive flow. That is, this process aiming at accumulating wealth is only possible if the world and the earth are sacrificed.

Thus, human beings begin to experience the futility of a life that is not done in anything that is permanent and they become entirely private human beings: deprived of the presence of others, of the reality that comes from sharing a world, and from accomplishing something lasting. Therefore, there is the public space and the political sphere erased, which, for the author, mainly because of the disinvestment in the common world.

To face this constant growth, which devours the earth and the world and which is imposed as the only form of life, on the one hand, the intimate and the self and the political and the common on the other, established as poles of difficult and necessary resistance.

4 Activities and life forms

Linked with other living things by life, as a force crossing the planet, human beings have another layer of existence, inseparable from the first, that covers it and means: the specifically human life, limited between birth and death, made of stories, encounters, languages, meanings, action, and work. Arendt (2003) recovers the Greek distinction between *zoé* - the life common to all living things - and *bios* - the form or way of life proper to an individual or group, full of events and qualities. According to Agamben (2015), it is the *facts-of-life* and *forms-of-life* that, although they are different should not be separated in human experience, not generating what the author calls *naked life*. The philosopher warns that the contemporary Western political regimes affect human life and separate what is inseparable, establishing a fracture between *bios* and *zoé* and reducing the multiplicity of *forms-of-life* to the unity of *facts-of-life*. If everything we do has the form of work as labor, the life we maintain and reproduce is increasingly reduced to the simple fact of living, so that life in the state of exception becomes naturalized and normalized as a way of a dominant life.

However, Agamben considers that human life can never be separated from its form and reduced entirely to the *fact-of-life*; it is always a way of life as political life. They are forms of life present in the world and define a human life “[...] in which the singular ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts, but always and firstly the possibility of life, always and firstly potency” (Agamben, 2015, p. 14).

Thus, any forms of life are full of virtuality and cannot be reduced to the biological fact. The gestures, actions, creations, and forms of human living:

they are never prescribed by a specific biological vocation, nor attributed by any need, but ordinary, repeated, and socially mandatory, they always retain the character of a possibility, that is, they always put life at stake (Agamben, 2015, p. 14)

Life forms are embodied subjectivities: pulses and body rhythms dressed in language, culture, and senses that are only produced in meetings, during relationships. Many muscles, bones, and viscera that, crossed by experiences and events, embody ways of thinking, feeling, doing, and acting, produced collectively, and singularized in each existence.

5 Doing and acting as ways of caring and producing health

In contemporary, occupational therapists face the challenge of designing interventions in the spheres of health, education, work, culture, and the social area, in a world dominated by the power that mimics life and constitutes acting on what Agamben (2015) called a naked life.

In this game between power and resistance, a mark of the profession has the potential to cause an important deviation in the health area: the bet that coping with health problems - illnesses and suffering of all kinds - can occur through exercise and experimenting with ways of doing and acting. By placing the activities of the active life at the heart of their practice, occupational therapists perform, perhaps inadvertently, a counter-hegemonic action, in the statement that the life of the body cannot be dissociated from the doings and actions, from its social values, of the relationships they bring into play. Thus, there is no human body that is just *zoé* that exists without a world, without language, without relationships; on the other hand, there is no human life without body, blood, muscle, and viscera. It is always an assembly, an agency between heterogeneous components, which opens the field of the possible, unpredictable, and full of virtualities.

Forms of life are social, cultural, and corporeal realities. The human body is a reality that is built together with experience, as an environment linked to other environments, forming ecologies (Favre, 2004). Thus, a body is not defined by the form that determines it, nor by the organs it has or the functions it performs, but by the affections and compositions it is capable (Deleuze & Guattari, 1997).

With active life as its landscape occupational therapists - who work in the common world and the sphere of relations between human beings - insert the conditions of worldliness and plurality in the health area, that characterize human existence. Thus, the performance in occupational therapy has a political character and can be constituted as a force that tensions the health area towards the forms of life, that is, the life that cannot be separated from its form, allowing the reconnection of what was separated: *bios* and *zoé*, the *fact-of-life* and forms-of-life.

In this sense, several ways of doing occupational therapy outline an attempt to affirm a qualified life where only biological life was seen. These practices show that if a body in a hospital bed can seem like a naked life, it is a reality-based on very precise devices that isolate and objectify a body. The body still pulsates, breathes, sweats (Lieberman, 2010). There is a rhythm in this pulse; an embryo of itself that takes risks; a song about

to be born. The slowing life there perhaps is only naked for those who do not want to see their clothes. As Peter Pelbart says,

[...] a life that appears naked and animal is only naked in appearance because it is always a composition of relationships, friendships, a force that produces life forms. Even the silence, the refusal to speak or to eat can already be an expression of the wealth of relationships. The singularized life is always a life that at some point escapes from power and becomes a qualified life (Pelbart, 2003, p. 66).

We must be able to be free from the idea that life is a mere fact so that it can become what it is: a set of possibilities and variations of life forms. As Agamben (2016) says, in this uncertain terrain, in this opaque zone of in-differentiation between the biological body and the political body, we can find the path to another policy, another body, and another word.

Thus, based on occupational therapy, a perspective of action is constructed in the face of many severe conditions, based on ethics and the affirmation of human dignity. Operating in the realm of active life, the occupational therapist is concerned with the maintenance of life and is allied with the life he wants to persevere; establishing, or seeking to re-establish networks of human relationships that have been broken; and participating with the people assisted, in the construction of the common world. Therefore, according to Hannah Arendt, their performance is in the political sphere.

The action of the occupational therapist involves the search to reduce alienation for the common world, the fight against isolation and uprooting and the expansion of the horizon of the active life of users, their capacity to create and act, their spaces of action and freedom, their relationships with the world and with others. It is about establishing spaces of common life in which ways of acting and doing can consider the respect for different temporalities and styles, including the relationships with childhood, old age, with a disability, with madness, with the female condition, and with ethnic-cultural differences. Finally, it is about strengthening the web of human relationships and investing in the affirmation of a qualified life, which is invented and unique.

This singularization, the forms, and ways of living taking shape can never be reduced to what someone does or produces, nor to the body as a biological machine. Human beings are these beings of power, who can do and not do, succeed and fail, lose, and find themselves. Their uniqueness gains existence and appears in the public dimension of the common world, in the exercise of those activities that only exist in mere performance and conditioned to the presence of others. The *who* that appears in action and discourse appears in his uniqueness (Arendt, 2003) and matters above all because the power is his existence (Agamben, 2013).

This power being, whatever it may be, matters far beyond its abilities or the sum of the qualities it may have. For Arendt (2003), the premise that someone's existence, their ability to do, act, and say goes beyond all the products that can be generated in their doing, it is the indispensable element of human dignity. The source of creativity comes from who we are and will never be completely absorbed by the work, nor contained entirely in the work.

Therefore, we question the possibility of experimentation and composition between different ways of being. It is producing new poetry, an unprecedented relationship with the social, a new art of living, a new kind of love, through creative processes that are always restarted. Love that does not transport someone to another place or transform him into something else, but loves him “[...] as he is and transports him to his place” (Agamben, 2013, p. 11).

6 Activities: captures and resistances...

As we saw at the beginning of this text, all the research by Hannah Arendt is around one issue: the conditions that enable the Western world to engender totalitarian experience, an experience that continues to haunt our dreams and our world, even in so-called democratic societies.

Based on the vast and deep genealogical research, there were some lines to unfold this problem. The author finds, within the Western thinking, the procedure of establishing a definition of the human in its essence and identifies, in the heart of the totalitarian world, the production of life forms and ways of doing marked by isolation and uprooting. According to her, isolation is the beginning of a totalitarian rule: terror can only reign over human beings isolated from one another. When this process is added to the destruction of the forms of expression of human creativity and the possibility of adding something for the world, uprooting takes place and makes isolation entirely unbearable. The isolated being loses his place in the political area and is no longer recognized for his actions, so the relationship with the world and with others disappears, and only the effort to stay alive survives (Arendt, 2012).

Therefore, totalitarianism is based on one of the most radical and desperate experiences that one can have: that one not belonging to the world, not having a place in the world recognized and guaranteed by others, being expendable. The isolation in the political sphere also has the solitude in the sphere of human relationships and uprooting as expulsion from the world, destroying the capacity to feel, think, and act.

When everything we do is captured by the continuous movement of production and consumption, everything becomes a commodity, including labor, natural resources, land, human relationships. The effect on people's active lives and the way they live their daily lives is devastating and penetrates all areas of experience, even if subtly and diffusely.

As a know-how field among the different applied human sciences, which develops practices in health, education, work, culture, and in the social sphere, occupational therapy builds its way of acting and thinking based on a unique perspective that characterizes it. A perspective is a place where we look at the world, beings, and things. The occupational therapist looks at people and problematic situations that come to him from the perspective of active life; he does things together with others, acts in composition with the person or groups he accompanies. His lens is an active life; his tool is the different activities that compose it.

Thus, the occupational therapist looks at the body as the place where the *bios* and *zoé* intertwine, to see the gestures and movements of this body and its actions in the world; looks at subjectivity as a composition of ways of living, thinking and acting, crossed by feelings and sensations, imagination, dreams, and desires, and sees its

relationships with things and with others and its forms of expression in the world, which take place in not doing and not acting; and looks at the world as a collective creation of singular beings, an environment of multiplicity in which their doings and actions take place in continuous variation, deviations, attempts, sketches, inventions, beginnings...

Thus, the activities are part and sustain an ontology in occupational therapy. An ontology of becoming that starts from the updated forms, from the individual that presents into the world at a certain moment, from the body that acts and suffers, from the functions that it exercises to reach the movements of singularization and, thus, approaching what each one is in the process of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1997).

Becoming is the people who withdraw from power as domination, those who rise and resist, with no announced place or return; after all, they are events that break with the linear vector of historical time and recreate the traces of a nomadic meaning (Vilela, 2010, p. 29).

Becoming is to continually update the human capacity to act as a starting, rooted ontologically in the fact of birth. For Arendt (2003), human beings are creatures that act to initiate something new and trigger events. New human beings are continually arriving in the world, each one, unique and capable of new initiatives; therefore, they can interrupt or divert the chains of events triggered by actions that, in multiple assemblies, produced themselves and the world in its current state.

Arendt (2003) brought the perspective of birth to philosophy, inverting the logic of philosophies based on the inexorable destiny of every living thing, which is heading towards death. For the author, although human beings must die, they are not born to die, but to begin. Birth is at the beginning of all beginnings. Each child that is born tells us that it is possible to believe in the world again, believe that other worlds can emerge.

The birth of a human being is a vital event, both sacred and immediately political. Thus, it re-establishes life inextricably as *bios* and *zoé*, combining the body in its power to generate life, between blood and viscera, and the world into which a new being enters. The being that is born remains connected to all living things and the earth by the processes of the living, at the same time that it is received by a community with its language, culture, its objects, its ways of living and thinking.

Because he was born and inserted in a web of relationships that today covers the planet, every human being in every gesture, movement, and action, alters the entire composition of the web and starts something of unpredictable developments. The beginning, which only happens in relation, is the very essence of freedom, which consists of “[...] calling into existence what was not before, what was not given even as an object of cognition or imagination” (Arendt, 2014, p. 198).

Acting and doing allow living on an inventive line, instituting new ways. By doing and acting, one escapes the stiffening of the instituted forms and the isolation, uprooting and existential collapse that comes when one is out of the world and in every relationship; and it creates the creation of places where it is possible to live, territories constituted by rhythms and forms open to a permanent invention of oneself and the world. In this sense, doing and acting are always done through assemblies. “You have to talk to, write with. With the world, with a portion of the world, with people” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1998, p. 67).

As it is built by participation, the concept of action in Arendt highlights ethics based on the visibility of acts created by human beings in their plurality. Those who act are free and responsible for their actions when they do not dissociate from their thinking, necessary so they can decide what to do in each situation. Totalitarianism, separating action from thinking, transforms it into behavior: not thinking is also deny responsibility for what you do, and anesthetizing criticism (Arendt, 2004). In turn, freedom exercised and experienced in the common world and the public sphere guarantees the existence of singular beings who, through their living thinking, word, and action exercise ethics in the form of caring for the world.

References

- Agamben, G. (2013). *A comunidade que vem*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.
- Agamben, G. (2015). *Meios sem fim: notas sobre a política*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.
- Agamben, G. (2016). *Uma biopolítica menor* (Série Pandemia). São Paulo: N-1 edições.
- Almeida, M. V. M., & Costa, M. C. (2019). Movimento de artes e ofícios: perspectiva ética-política-estética de constituição da terapia ocupacional. In C. R. Silva (Ed.), *Atividades humanas e terapia ocupacional: saber-fazer, cultura, política e outras resistências* (pp. 59-79). São Paulo: Hucitec.
- Arendt, H. (2003). *A condição humana*. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária.
- Arendt, H. (2004). Responsabilidade coletiva. In H. Arendt, *Responsabilidade e julgamento* (pp. 213-225). São Paulo: Cia das Letras.
- Arendt, H. (2012). *Origens do Totalitarismo*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras.
- Arendt, H. (2014). *Entre o passado e o futuro*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Aristóteles. (2002). *Ética a Nicômaco*. Bauru: Edipro.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1978). *O Anti-Édipo*. Lisboa: Assírio & Alvin.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1997). *Mil Platôs: capitalismo e esquizofrenia*. São Paulo: Editora 34.
- Deleuze, G., & Parnet, C. (1998). *Diálogos*. São Paulo: Escuta.
- Dias, T. (2018). *Totalitarismo, tempo e ação: uma leitura de "A condição humana" de Hannah Arendt* (Tese de doutorado). Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo.
- Favre, R. (2004). Viver, pensar e trabalhar o corpo como um processo de existencialização contínua. *Revista Reichiana do Instituto Sedes Sapientiae*, 12(13), 75-84.
- Jansson, I., & Wagman, P. (2017). Hannah Arendt's vita activa: a valuable contribution to occupational science. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 24(3), 290-301.
- Lieberman, F. (2010). O corpo como pulso. *Interface - Comunicação, Saúde, Educação*, 14(33), 449-460.
- Lima, E. M. F. A. (2017). *Vida ativa, mundo comum, políticas e resistências: pensar a terapia ocupacional com Hannah Arendt* (Tese de livre-docência). Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo.
- Morrison, R. (2018). O que une a terapia ocupacional? paradigmas e perspectivas ontológicas da ocupação humana. *Revista Interinstitucional Brasileira de Terapia Ocupacional*, 2(1), 182-203.
- Morrison, R., & Vidal, D. (2012). *Perspectivas ontológicas de la ocupación humana en terapia ocupacional: una aproximación a la filosofía de la ocupación*. Madrid: Editorial Académica Española.
- Pelbart, P. P. (2003). *Vida Capital: ensaios de biopolítica*. São Paulo: Iluminuras.
- Vilela, E. (2010). *Silêncios tangíveis: corpo, resistência e testemunho nos espaços contemporâneos do abandono*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento.



Funding Source

The Research Committee of the Medical School of USP supported this paper with a research grant.

Corresponding author

Elizabeth Maria Freire de Araújo Lima
e-mail: beth.araujolima@gmail.com