



Listening to the Arts: poetical possibilities in research

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ABSTRACT – Listening to the Arts: poetical possibilities in research – This essay discusses methodological possibilities for conducting research using creative artistic processes as references. I ask: how can experimentation be valued, as well as notes of works in progress, and registers of flashes from life, without losing the rigor of theoretical discussions or an attentive look at urgent ethical and political needs of the present? Supported by Foucault, Hadot, Benjamin and others, I discuss topics from the work of Kiarostami, Clarice Lispector, Italo Calvino, and Pina Bausch. With these and other examples, including comments on a study in progress, I propose ways of *reasoning poetically* by fearlessly appropriating lessons from the arts.

Keywords: **Art. Research. Creative Processes. Poetics. Methodology.**

RÉSUMÉ – Écouter les Arts: un essai sur possibilités poétiques dans la recherche – Dans cet essai, je discute des possibilités méthodologiques pour réaliser des recherches, en utilisant les processus créatifs dans les arts comme référence. Comment valoriser l'expérimentation, les notes sur les travaux en cours, les éclats de vie, sans perdre la rigueur du débat théorique, ni le regard attentif sur les urgences éthiques et politiques du présent? Avec le soutien de Foucault, Hadot, Benjamin, je discute des sujets du travail de Kiarostami, Clarice Lispector, Italo Calvino et Pina Bausch. Avec ces exemples et d'autres, y compris le compte rendu d'une recherche en cours, je propose des moyens de *raisonner poétiquement* pour s'approprier sans peur de ce que les différents arts enseignent.

Mots-clés: **Art. Recherche. Processus Créatif. Poétique. Méthodologie.**

RESUMO – Por uma Escuta da Arte: ensaio sobre poéticas possíveis na pesquisa – Neste ensaio, discute-se a possibilidade metodológica de realizar pesquisas, tendo como referência processos criativos em artes. A pergunta é: como valorizar a experimentação, as anotações do trabalho em curso, o registro dos lampejos de vida, sem perder o rigor do debate teórico, nem o olhar atento sobre urgências, éticas e políticas do presente? Com o apoio em Foucault, Hadot, Benjamin, entre outros, percorrem-se tópicos da obra do cineasta Kiarostami, de Clarice Lispector, do escritor Italo Calvino e da coreógrafa Pina Bausch. Com esses e outros exemplos, inclusive com o relato do percurso de uma pesquisa, propõem-se modos de *raciocinar poeticamente*, com a apropriação sem medo daquilo que ensinam diferentes artes.

Palavras-chave: **Arte. Pesquisa. Processos Criativos. Poéticas. Metodologia.**

How can we locate ourselves *between* science and art, *between* the lived and the thought? How can we value experiences related to the theme, data and objects of our studies, to go beyond so-called analytical categories, which often imprison us in supposed totalities, repeating what we already know? Why do we and our students, when facing a blank page, so often fear making a mistake, of *spoiling* the page, perhaps insecure that we will not fulfill academic and editorial norms – when this is precisely the moment when we should not give up, and accept the free expression of ourselves, without a need to conclude a *complete thought*?

In this essay I propose that conducting a study can be an intellectual adventure that allows us to bathe in enigma, in non-systematic or systematizing moments – although the need remains in suspension to link *that which can come to be established with that which is already established*, as Marilena Chauí affirms, when writing about Merleau-Ponty (Chauí, 2002). I propose that we let ourselves be invaded by meanders, by happenings for which we still have not found words. That is, we should study amid ignorances – as Carlos Skliar (2011, p. 121) discusses the act of experimental essays. After all, wouldn't this even be desirable, and paradoxically, in methodological terms, for scholars of education, the arts, the human sciences. To work as if we were artisans, operating *Benjaminally* with fragments and remnants – wouldn't this be a good way to write and investigate urgent current themes?

The idea of things *making themselves*, of conducting operations with sketches, is certainly something that concerns different processes of artistic creation. The dedication of scholars from the fields of literature, the visual arts, theater, music, and cinema to this *midway point* or *middle way* – is not new. It shows us how the enchantment of creation would be found precisely in things not taken to their final point.

One book that joins countless references about this theme is certainly *Gestos inacabados: processo de criação artística*, [Unfinished gestures: the artistic creation process] by Cecilia Almeida Salles (2011) – whose theoretical base is the so-called studies of genetic criticism. Salles presents declarations from philosophers, visual artists, filmmakers, writers, playwrights, and theater directors. The idea of the intensity found in work in movement is a recurring idea in the book, as if we could examine, distractedly, but with ri-

gor, the metamorphosis of a painting of Miró, a design by Paul Klee, a poem by Rilke, a philosophical concept of Bachelard, a screenplay by Fellini.

Another important reference is the studies of Arts Based Research, a movement that began in the 1970s and 1980s, focused around Elliot Eisner from the United States. More recently, Spanish thinker Fernando Hernández has been promoting and discussing the limits and criticisms of this proposal that, based on Eisner, calls for an opening of practices and research in education, so that they come to emphasize a type of creation that is more open to the sensorial, to the multiplicity and incompleteness of processes; a more generous scholastic and academic practice, more accustomed to the surprising and to uncertainties (Hernández, 2008; Eisner, 2008).

I have been thinking about that which we can call the *poetic of diaries* or the *enchantment of manuscripts* – in the sense of seeking, in our research, not exactly the linearity of questions and responses, or of causes and effects, much less the applications of concepts to facts, but firstly, the fragile connections between marks and vestiges of an intellectual adventure. How can our studies speak of life, the things of life – as filmmaker Wim Wenders refers to them?¹ How can we value experimentation, the registration of the smallest things, the beauty of diaries and notes, the rushes of an unfinished film, the sketches of a philosophical or literary text, boxes with collections that apparently have no purpose? How can we work with a type of *poetics of drafts*, with the intensity of an infinity of approximations to a certain theme or to an object of our interest?

In the daily reading and evaluating of articles, projects, theses and dissertations, in the field of education in particular, there are only rare occasions in which we are surprised by an account that produces in readers an empathy, a vibration, a disturbance – that is, it is rare for a study to reveal itself with vitality, as *living flesh, thorns in our flesh*². I am speaking of research as experimentation. It is as if in the academy, everything happens as if we continue to separate the lived and the thought, theory and practice. I ask: and what if we affirm, as does Skliar, that the lived (or better, the experienced) is what is most important? And if we agree with him, and maintain that narration and conversation must be revived, so that we can go beyond current practices, in which we are not ashamed to speak (exhaustively) of ourselves, imprisoned to a narcissistic repetition, on social networks? And what if our investigations would consider the genuine act of conversation –

which Skliar emphasizes as a gesture that is not commonly found in academic and school practices, precisely because we insist on saying the same things and what is more grave, in becoming accustomed to only listening to ourselves? (Skliar, 2011, p. 64-68).

I believe – as Foucault suggests³ – that this perhaps is one of *the dangers that must be confronted* today in the academic world: the danger of the same, the cliché, the emptiness of a writing that rigorously says nothing, because it is done automatically and at times totalitarially, without breath or flesh, and is polarized. I listen carefully to Foucault's provocation, which he made in various texts, by insisting on the gesture of problematizing (as opposed to the frequent act of polemicizing) and I approximate this gesture to the idea of education (and research) as *conversation*. Foucault (2010c), in an interview with Rabinow, conducted in the year that he died, referred to the nearly religious positionings that we assume when defending our points of view – as if we were always facing an adversary, and as if each side would point to intangible points of dogma in the moral transgression of the other. Those who think differently from us, in principle, are pointed to as those who are mistaken, they manifest attachments and weaknesses, and for this reason deserve to be excluded. We know how many polemics are characterized by cutting off the interlocutor: the offense is denounced, the other is thoroughly condemned. There is also the political mode of polemicizing, in which we seek alliances, in such a way that we wind up primarily being occupied in defining our enemy, and gathering forces against this enemy, to be able to gain its submission or even to radically make it disappear.

In other words: when we limit ourselves to polemics, we abandon conversation. Even worse, we destroy the possible intensity of relations, of exchanges, of thought itself. We prevent advancements, such as creation and difference; we attach ourselves to that which we have already been; or we are ferociously occupied in denouncing all types of hidden evils, *behind* the evidences, that which “secretly inhabit all that exists” (Foucault, 2014, p. 217). Far from suggesting a passive response to what happens to us, the idea of sensing danger, problematizing and reproblematicizing all that appears so solid and crystalized, that is – to converse – is related to a proposal to value the *hows*, the vibrant processes of elaborations, that which takes place in *the between*. And this concerns an attitude that is developed by

countering the insane desire for completeness, for a finished work and for the destruction of alterity.

To bring the wealth of differentiated creative processes, in various art forms (in particular cinema, theater, literature and the visual arts) to the interior of our studies, appears to me to be an extremely rich way to dynamize how we have designed and conducted our research projects. As examples, I consider registers of Kiarostami, Clarice Lispector, Cézanne, Stanislavski, Foucault in which we find scintillations of their creative processes. To what degree do these registers help us produce spaces for breathing in our studies?

More than *breathing*, it involves a route that can perhaps help us when supervising projects (of teachers and students), by problematizing the difficulty of articulating theoretical discussion and empiric data; of discussing the so common practice of separation of supposedly *noble* (academic) questions from those that are related to *common life*. Moreover, I believe that the processual experiences of artists can help us to question the inconsistent and rushed ease with which we read and interpret images and statements, supported nearly exclusively on the idea of language as representation.

We must encourage the movement of thought, considering a series of problems such as these: the impasses and limits of the operation of writing academic texts, nearly always divorced from vitality and aesthetic beauty; the frequent opposition between art and thinking, in research reports; the lack of clarity about the opportunities to transform a report into an authorial and genuine text; the rigid hierarchization of data, in the sense of the elimination or even forgetting of basic events in research, its unexpected deviations and those apparently less worthy of consideration; the abandonment or the denial of the quotidian fragments of study; as well as the oscillations and new configurations of the very object; and of the action of the researcher, during the investigative journey.

I turn to Nadja Hermann (2016), who summarizes some of the main issues that we are concerned with: after all, how can we strive for a permeability between the act of research in education and the development of theoretical and philosophical thinking? How have we focused on what Nadja calls a *formative philosophical culture*, without losing sight of the importance of treating *data* carefully, while remaining open to imagination, sensibility

and a genuine ethical responsibility? Doesn't the empiric universe on which we focus deserve a slower and more sensitive examination and also a *reflective* one, thus avoiding theoretical fragility?

When we open ourselves to the moving films of Kiarostami and to his narration of the paths of each of his creations, we find a condensed idea of images as sensations – that can give potency to the production of new sensations, to the degree that they affect thinking and provoke its emergence, but always differently. This is what interests us here, when we think of the task of the researcher. We affirm that the arts are not the exclusive domain of some talents in literature, poetry, theater, painting sculpture or cinema. We maintain that the life of any individual can be made a work of art (Foucault, 2014, p. 222). We imagine that our studies can be partners in the ways of thinking of a philosopher like Benjamin. And we take the adventure to learn with the creative processes of artists like Paul Klee, Paulinho da Viola, Eduardo Coutinho and many others.

Parentheses: a doctoral student and the construction of her object of study

What I write here about the act of research, with our pores open to what we learn from creative processes in art, refers me to the *midway point* of a student that I recently supervised. Surprised by a change in her professional life, precisely during the turbulence of developing her research proposal, Elena⁴ literally fell into panic when facing the blank page – in this case, a blank screen, which was filled in and erased countless times. Called on to be the assistant director of a public school, Elena saw before her an endless sequence of daily tragedies, involving children and particularly youth from the urban periphery.

At each supervisory meeting, Elena would appear with a new author, a new theme, a new anguish. She accumulated readings in philosophy, questioning, for example, different times and their mysteries (*Chrónos, Kairós, Aión*), and soon migrated to specific studies of pedagogical theory (what school could simultaneously serve its condition as a democratic space and the genuine task of making a responsible *presentation of the world*? The excellent readings of Bergson and Maschelein, among so many good thinkers, followed one after the other. But what was the focus? I asked her.

As her supervisor, I wound up recognizing that it was necessary to live the intensity of that time of waiting, as we read in the letters of Rilke to the young Kappus: I was certainly not there to make revelations to Elena. The glimpse of the creation belonged to her. To her alone. And perhaps this could only be perceived in the courage of her solitude. I felt that it was necessary to provoke her to absorb what vibrated around her, in the corridors of the school, in the administrative office, in the gestures of her fellow teachers, in the looks of the students, in the anguish of the parents who sought her out, hopeful for a word. I even experienced the expectation and suffering of that gestation, hers and mine. Waiting for something still without a name.

I invited Elena to watch films of Kiarostami once again, some of them with scenes of schools. *Onde fica a casa do meu amigo?* [Where is My Friend's Home] (1987) was one of them. As well as *Dez* [Ten] (2002). And some short films such as *Duas soluções para um problema* [Two Solutions to a Problem] (1975) and *O pão e o beco* [The Bread and the Alley] (1970)⁵. Each detail of the scenes imagined by the Iranian filmmaker approximates us to a very particular and generous way of working. Together, we wove a mode of thinking that strengthened a type of *ethics of listening*. To listen to the other and to ourselves. This would strengthen in us more sensitive viewings, seeking to capture unique gestures, such as those of Ahmad, in the saga of finding his friend's house. To play or study: obey his mother or help Nématzadé? The most radical daily simplicity is offered to us in a way that provokes empathy and intensity of affects.

A few meetings later, Elena burst into the room with her laptop, opened the files and showed me a diary: *I began to take notes of the scenes, Rosa*. They were scenes from school. Scenes of life and death. Scenes of losses and fears. Scenes that took place in a specific space, but that certainly transcend it. The drama was not that of a student who could be admonished for not having done the homework. But, in that school, in that city, with those people of the periphery, there were other stories, common to a country such as ours, and so profoundly unequal, as is Iran. A youth with panic attacks, a sexually abused girl, a boy who is hostage to drug dealers, a student with a violent father. And more. There are also children who ask the *profê* [teach] to spend a bit more time with them, as if the hours in the classroom did not count: for them, *something more* was missing.

So we decided that Elena would continue to register stories of the school, scenes of life of an assistant school director, scenes of a public school teacher. And more than that, as a viewer of Fellini, Kiarostami, Agnès Varda, a reader of Clarice Lispector, this is how Elena plunged into the task of literary writing. She transformed her daily notes into true stories. The fictional word, came to be her focus, her object of attention - without failing to see *reality*. Little by little, and always accompanied by a reading of diaries of artists, countless records of creative processes, Elena returned to Bergson, to Foucault and his *Hermeneutics of the subject*, to Maschelein and his elaborations about education and democracy. She sought essays by Benjamin, devoured Jeanne Marie Gagnebin and the concepts of narrative, memory and forgetting.

I risk affirming that Elena lived a type of revelation, a joyous revelation. I am stealing the expression that Fellini used in his memoirs, to speak of the master Rossellini. Fellini said that he had “a joyous revelation. I came to realize that you could make films with the same freedom, the same ease with which you draw or write, making a film while enjoying it and enduring it day by day, hour by hour, without worrying too much about the final result” (Fellini, 2015, online). Elena was not afraid to walk along the tight-rope of the most adverse conditions, whether of daily school life, or of the need to write a thesis. She gave in to an active waiting. And she experienced the thesis as an adventure that deserved and deserves to be lived and told.

To be Amazed by the Ordinary: living the spirit of the child

I hope that the meanders of Elena’s doctoral research allow me to exemplify what I consider to be *listening to art in research*. To accompany the creative processes of a filmmaker, a writer, a playwright, a choreographer appears to me to be immensely useful and promising for the elaboration of our own studies. Perhaps what provokes us most in them is the fact that they involve states of becoming, of happenings in the making.

Do you know what my dream is? – Foucault confessed once in an interview with *Nouvel Observateur*: “To create a publishing company for research. I am hopelessly chasing these opportunities to show *work in its movement*, in its problematic form. A place where a study could present itself in a *hypothetical and provisory character*” (Foucault apud Eribon, 1990,

p. 274, emphasis ours). Perhaps few thinkers have been so radically coherent with themselves, in terms of interlacing theory and practice, life and thought, as Michel Foucault. Everything that he researched and wrote about had this mark, by which he ceaselessly affirmed and reaffirmed the idea that to think is to think differently from that which is already known. And isn't it precisely in this that resides the beauty of philosophy and of life? The *work in movement*; that instant in which one does not know, but when one does not stop questioning; that *moment of passage*, in which something is suspected, arguments and data are sought, and at the same time, sketches of possibilities are designed. If it is necessary to turn back, then turn back, invent the path once again.

I suppose that all the beauty of creation is found in this process—philosophic, literary, artistic. Doesn't the famous passage about the three metamorphoses in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* concern precisely this? But haven't we already carried everything, suffered through hunger for the love of truth? Haven't we faced the dragon and in the solitude of the desert affirmed *I want*? What more can the spirit do? Stripped down, he will declare a sacred yes to life and not fear to live the game, take risks to begin again, whenever needed, transmuted into the spirit-child. (cfe. Nietzsche, 1996, p. 213-214).

When I write *life* here I refer to what Pierre Hadot writes about Nietzsche and Goethe: for both, *to say yes to life* cannot prescind artistic activity; this vital adherence (of art and life), as the ancient philosophers teach, was part of an ascetic experience, which is absolutely necessary and urgent to transform our look, in the aesthetic interplay of confrontation, when facing the pains and terrifying situations of life (Hadot, 2010). Like a child, we must be amazed by what happens to us, by the smallest things of daily life, and simultaneously by that which bursts into a poem, a song, a dramatic dialog, in the composition of an image, in a cinematographic sequence. The doctoral student, Elena, appropriated this and was able to face the phantom of her blank page. In the company of thinkers and artists, she put herself in the place of children and youth, protagonists of stories that came to be hers as well, as a teacher and researcher. And with modesty, as a writer.

Much has been written about thinkers who, like Foucault and Nietzsche, profess the epiphanies of creation of the self, that go beyond the

large and heavy *system of thought*. But it can be said that Walter Benjamin would be, among all of them, the greatest inspiration, when it comes to praising the incompleteness of work and thought – in the sense of that which that opening offers as an invitation to the other, to the reader, to the apprentice – so that she also ventures through the possibilities of creation, precisely by a type of construction that generously offers itself in gaps and movement. And not only by this mobile character of a writing made in mosaic, in such multiple variations. We are interested here in the degree to which Benjamin makes philosophy with art, by means of art, in dense and inextricable dialog with poets, novelists, musicians, but mainly in dialog with his own dreams, memories and anguish. All of these sources became raw material in his essays and his philosophy – in which, if we could synthesize, he elected the beautiful as the object of experience; the *insufficient things* as having the dignity to be called *happening* demanding that our existence could reach, through the work of thinking, a pleasure similar to that which many creators reach through art (Benjamin, 2000).

The essayist Beatriz Sarlo helps us to approximate Benjamin and Foucault, when she writes about *Passages* [The Arcades Project], which she prefers to call the *The Walter Benjamin Workshop*. To read the notes of this German philosopher is to be convoked to a type of archeology, in which, far from reconstituting a lost totality, “we work above the ruins of a building that was never built” (Sarlo, 2013, p. 33). To those dedicated to research in arts and human sciences, Benjamin’s unfinished collection of writings compose a true theoretical and methodological legacy – for we find there a free movement between facts, data, material and symbolic objects, memories, and landscapes, so that, as Benjamin himself wrote, with them one could capture history in its “less evident crystallizations” (Sarlo, 2013, p. 34).

We are speaking of a poetic method placed in action, by Benjamin, as a philosopher “sensitive to the strangest, most exceptional strongly individual aspect of experience [...], which discovers the general meaning in the uncommon, instead of seeking the general in the habitual and in the accumulation of the same” (Sarlo, 2013, p. 35). This is what interests us and is what we seek to place in operation with master’s and doctoral students, as we saw with the student Elena: to imagine the viability of a *poetic method* of research and writing. This method would operate by fragments and intensi-

ties, without abandoning the horizon of something broader – which would mean constructing provisory totalities, marked at times by minimum events, which are not always clearly visible. It is a method much more interested in the exceptional, rare, and deviant events, and not in great facts, which, as a rule, prove to be visibly similar to so many others.

How can one wear the garb of the poet, who works with condensed and condensing images, which are often nearly opaque, but which through the strength of the art of bold composition of words precisely illuminate the pain (or even the wealth) of a certain historic and political moment? Certainly, we do not demand the place of the poet, the painter or filmmaker; we of course do not intend to confuse such differing modes of creation. The idea is to allow ourselves to listen to artists, and learn about their ways of preparing images, verses, literary and theatrical characters, film scenes, fictional narratives. Why? Perhaps because we suppose that the arts of thinking are not separate from thinking itself with (and about) the various arts. And by hypothesis, we understand that our research would become more lively and dynamic if the horizon of our studies includes aesthetic and political concerns that lead us to look at the so-called *real* with imagination, and simultaneously with a lucidity that distances us from ourselves – which is “essential to being able to continue to make choices, and realize changes and transformations” (as Fellini said about himself and what he hoped that his films would provoke in viewers) (Fellini, 1983, p. 130).

Michel Foucault left us literarily beautiful texts, but even so did not consider himself to be truly a *writer*, but a *scribe* (a distinction made by Roland Barthes). In dialog with Claude Bonnefoy, a modest Foucault referred to himself as someone without imagination, a person who was not very inventive:

I am alongside those whose writing is destined to designate, show, manifest beyond itself something that, without it, would have remained, if not hidden, at least invisible. Perhaps it is there that exists, despite everything, for me, an enchantment of writing (Foucault, 2016, p. 68-69).

Despite confessing that he did not consider himself to be original, the reality is that Foucault enchants us, and in this condition is found intimately close to creators like Magritte, precisely to the degree that, like artists and poets, he tries “to make appear what is too close to our eye for us to see, what is very close to us, but that our look passes through to see something

else” (Foucault, 2016, p. 69). And fulfilling this intent, as he himself said, is how thickness and density (we would say opacity) is returned to that which “we usually experience as transparency” (Foucault, 2016, p. 69).

Research: to become ethically and aesthetically another

To place in the foreground what is so close to us; to find wonder in the common, which at times becomes invisible, because it is so *given* - is a good objective for a researcher. The doctoral student Elena experienced a new position, as an assistant school director: a student involved with drug dealers was not simply *a student involved with drug dealers*. She pursued that insignificant existence and made it visible. Before judging it precipitously, she approached it ethically and aesthetically. It was there, before her, more than a common scene in the urban peripheries of Brazil. Elena asked herself: what there speaks to us of the *dangers of our time*? This was an important concern of Michel Foucault. And this was also the concern of one of the most surprising filmmakers of the twentieth century Abbas Kiarostami. In a book of statements and comments on his films, the Iranian director of celebrated works such as *Onde fica a casa do meu amigo?* (1987) and *Certified Copy* (2010), seduces readers with a dense narrative that is simultaneously poetic and deeply philosophical, telling us about how he creates his films and what he thinks of cinema. Upon reading Kiarostami, we think of his beautiful work, and simultaneously, we note precious questions – as did out doctoral student Elena.

About the film *Close-up* (1990), there is a passage in which Kiarostami tells us about a desire that is common to any human being: *to become another*, to change oneself – and this is true of the filmmaker himself, to the degree to which he constructs his characters, embodies them, lives each one of them. The director makes observations that certainly hold true for all his films. For example, the idea that we need patience to “pay attention to that which a human being lives interiorly” (Kiarostami, 2013, p. 229-230). According to him, legal devices do not have this time; differently, the mechanism of art approaches the human being and puts him in the foreground “to see him in in-depth, to understand his motivations, decipher his suffering” (Kiarostami, 2013, p. 229-230).

At each page, Kiarostami's declarations and observations suggest a complete passion for the art of filming, affirming that "cinema and life are one and the same" (Kiarostami, 2013, p. 245). They speak to us of the art of simplicity, of a genuine curiosity in relation to the other, of "harvesting the intensity instead of the duration from life" (Kiarostami, 2013, p. 252). Once again, we find the idea of *life*, beyond *practices* or *daily life*. It involves time, happening, a philosophical look that gathers the tiniest element and transforms it into thought and ethical attitude, through the gesture of creation.

In nearly all the texts, the observations about time are expressed so clearly, so modestly – as if they allow us to calmly listen with reverence to an older person returning to a time when it was accepted that wisdom was related to many years well lived. Incidentally, in an encounter with film students in Beirut recalled by Kiarostami, one of the youth commented that the film *Dez*⁶ was so simple that it would never be accepted if was made by a mere student: "Only you could have made a film like *Dez*, because of the fame you have achieved" (Kiarostami, 2013, p. 263). Kiarostami recalls: "Since I was the professor there, I had to tell them the truth: to make simple things requires a good dose of experience. Moreover, it is necessary to understand that simplicity is not a synonym for easy" (Kiarostami, 2013, p. 263). He concludes, in the next paragraph: "I had to wait sixty years to dare a film like that" (Kiarostami, 2013, p. 263).

Simplicity. Humility. I recall Clarice Lispector and the many texts in which she explores the pain and beauty of writing. The story *Amor* – about the character Ana, her bag of knitting, her route to the street car and the confusion in her life, when she sees a blind man chewing gum (Lispector, 2016) – helps us to understand what she says about *humility as technique*, in the task of writing. Why humility? Clarice confesses that she sees in herself the *incapacity to grasp, to understand*. Moreover, she sees herself as someone with "complete awareness that she is truly incapable" (Lispector, 2004, p. 62). Like Kiarostami, Benjamin, Fellini and Foucault, Clarice needs time, and humility. "Humility as technique is like this: only by approximating something with humility is it possible that it will not completely escape" (Lispector, 2004, p. 62).

This sentence from Clarice is an opening to what we call an *ethical attitude* not only that of the artist, inspired by the interpellation of the crea-

tive act, but of any person – as may be the case of a researcher in the arts and human sciences – someone interested in *speaking of this world*. Even because, as Gilberto Gil teaches, *everything deserves consideration*⁷. Pierre Hadot (2010), in a dialog that approximates the classic philosophers to the poet Goethe, refers to the theme of concern for the present, in the sense of philosophical and poetic immersion in the intensity of experience, which can be found in the most trivial and ordinary things. Hadot reads in them the invitation to a submission to the present time, in which we nearly always see only common and futile, automatic things. The idea, proposed by Goethe, is that each present instant is not lost in the trivial: it can be attributed an ethical value, of responsibilities to oneself and the other – and precisely in this way would be the raw material of creation.

Clarice's character, who left home to do a simple thing (buy eggs), sees her small and simple world suddenly unravel upon facing the blind man and the chewing gum. Each of these objects, each frame of the sequence of images, Ana's looks and feelings, wind up acquiring through Clarice's literature, and for the reader, a nobility, a tragedy and a dignity, perhaps unthinkable in our blind and unconscious daily paths. The present (*kairós*) imposes itself, is truth; but art invents for us the link between time and eternity – as Hadot writes, when considering Goethe (Hadot, 2010, p. 22).

I ask, how can a researcher, inebriated by the fruition of the arts, all of them and without hierarchical distinction, and by philosophy, become interested in the realities that are closest to her, and find spontaneous joy in her own existence? (Hadot, 2010, p. 26). How can ethical will and aesthetic will be combined? And even if we choose a difficult and arduous theme, such as the horrors of our time (such as violence that afflicts refugees worldwide, or poor black youth in Brazil's urban peripheries, or the thousands dying in this coronavirus pandemic) – how can one present this reality and simultaneously transform oneself, exert great effort upon oneself, and convert one's own look to have the plane of artistic creation emerge *despite it all*?

The questions do not cease. How can one develop an analysis of so many discourses and events, and do so by creating oneself, in the sense worked with by Foucault, in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and in various interviews, lectures and articles about the theme of *the aesthetics of existence* (Foucault, 2004, 2010a; 2010d; 2014)? It should be emphasized that this

creation of the self is not separate from writing that registers the *gracious* attitude of living, as does a child who is open to submitting to the present and to the course of an eternal *devoir*. How can one integrate this gesture to academic research? I am not speaking of the *application* of one thing to another, but of having this disposition on the horizon, this desire to make oneself a work of art, allowing oneself to be absorbed by the arts. The time *spent* by our doctoral student Elena was not in vain, given that the wait was composed of a joyous submission to literary writing, to many film narratives and to philosophy.

Clarice's attitude, to approach the things of the world humbly so that they do not escape her and she can write about them, is related to the approach proposed by Didi-Huberman about the work to which the spectator is invited and in particular the student of the arts and images. There is an ethics of artistic productions, an ethics of images, in the sense that art asks us to have an attitude – the gesture of thinking about the great evils produced by men (like the Nazi terror, for example, which is reemerging throughout the world and is very close to us in Brazil), approximating us to them, *malgré tout* – although we know that it is completely impossible to access the real. This absolutely does not mean to be consoled with a mere abstraction, or with the fatality of what is *given*; it means, firstly, to make the effort to *understand, despite everything*; to plunge into the complexity of certain events or phenomenon, as beautiful or terrible as they may be (Didi-Huberman, 2014, p. 226). To accept that we certainly do not have direct access to the real is not that obvious to us, who are researchers in the human sciences. How often do we believe we have *grasped something*, so-called *reality* – simply because we interview people and record their opinions, their memories, their plans? How can we unpretentiously make the simple movement of suave approximation, in a desire to capture and narrate flashes of life, in their mysterious existence, without the presumption of a supposed possession of some truths, in this case, about art and education?

To accept that we absolutely do not have a grasp of anything, I believe, is a good attitude for a researcher. One exemplary text, which I discovered by chance, has nourished me, whether as a theoretical reference, empiric material or as analytical inspiration. It is a conversation of Ítalo Calvino with the painter Tullio Pericoli, about the theme of *Art Theft* (Calvino, 2015). They have an instigating dialog about creative processes and

the problem of *theft*, of copying, rereading or appropriating another's work. This is an issue that is faced by artists, painters, writers, filmmakers – and is also a problem for us. Pericoli questions the choice of work based on a creation by Paul Klee. The two discuss what would be ownership, for an artist. After all, is he really the owner of something? Both help us to think about the importance of “discarded, unrecoverable, lost” forms (Calvino, 2015, p. 66) of creative processes. We are instigated to see that any creative activity carries literary, visual reminiscences, of the artist and of others (after all, are they copies? Thefts? Or who knows: homages?) And in relation to the appropriation of the text of others, quotes of others – couldn't this drive us precisely to not repeat ourselves? We hear a dialog of two creators, who speak of themselves and of their inventive processes, at the same time as they comment on other artists. They discuss, theoretically and freely, about relations between art and thinking.

In a recent book, filmmaker Wim Wenders synthesized much of what we have been discussing in this essay. In the book, we find various texts about creation – in film, dance, theater, painting, photography. Are they thefts? Yes, art thefts. The book is a compilation of statements, memories, lectures, texts for catalogs, and conversations in which Wim Wenders elaborates on what Foucault would call a genuine writing of oneself and the originality of the German filmmaker is that he speaks of himself, as the creator who he is, but delicately takes a look at the path that another artist traced. Moreover, in most of the writings, he chose to do it in verse, not exactly wanting to be a poet, but to create “visual blocks of ideas” without losing sight of “the grammar of thoughts” (Wenders, 2016, p. 17, our translation).

In a text dedicated to German choreographer Pina Bausch, for example, and about whom he directed the documentary *Pina* (2010), Wenders comments on how much some artists in fact seek to approximate the time that they were given to live, so that, each one of them with their tools, winds up making a true *mark on the real*, to approach their contemporaries and portray in their art a bit of what is usually called the *spirit of a time*. For Wenders, in a way that few other artists have, Pina ventured to create in the world of theater and dance a very particular way of speaking of human loneliness and also of many encounters, and spaces between people,

[...] using, as the sole tool, gesture and movements to unveil joys, happiness, and torments, hopes, pains, furies and anguishes, presenting them before our eyes, in all their transparency, in her own grammar and in the language of dance (Wenders, 2016, p. 110-111, translation ours).

It is important to emphasize what Wenders highlights in an artist like Pina: for her, to approximate to one's own time, and to speak of it with dance, does not mean creating from an act of reason or from a bitter position – given we are living in such dark times; to the contrary, her choreographies are creations imagined from a ludic sense of existence: “Pina makes us feel a lightness of being that, frequently, we do not even believe we still have; she allows us to participate in a lightness which we do not imagine we are capable of” (Wenders, 2016, p. 111, translation ours). Her methods are contagious – writes the filmmaker.

This is precisely one of the points that we want to reach by discussing creative processes and those of scientific investigation: wouldn't we have much to learn from *practical philosophy* of life, as do the artists and philosophers mentioned here, and who appear to dialog so beautifully with the ancients, like the Greeks and Romans studied by Foucault in his course *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*? Isn't this related with the expression *poetic reasoning*, used by the filmmaker Tarkovski (2010) – this particular and bold type of reasoning, which is so much closer to the minimal daily discoveries and to so many complexities of existence? I understand that this is related to a detachment from the desire to *say everything* and, by doing so, we propitiate the poetic imagination of the reader, the spectator, the student (and the researcher). I ask: wouldn't this be genuinely and healthily contagious?

To Conclude

To question the present; it seems that Fellini and the other creators mentioned in this essay do exactly this – they assume the *darkness of the present*, this *part of the non-lived in all of the living*, as Giorgio Agamben⁸ says. After all, what are we saying when we affirm that we are *contemporary*? We can't escape our time – but the fact is that the present will always be distant to us, it does not reach us, it is complete darkness. Agamben thus emphasizes that to be contemporary “is a question of courage: because it means be able to keep a fixed gaze on the darkness of the time, but to also perceive in

this darkness a light that is pointed at us, and but becomes infinitely distant from us” (Agamben, 2009, p. 65).

In the first words of the lecture, not by chance, Agamben cites Nietzsche and Roland Barthes, emphasizing that, as do these thinkers, he believes that to truly belong to one’s time, is, paradoxically, to not coincide with a time, to not be *suitable to its pretensions*; in sum, it is required that we distance ourselves, that we shift – because this is the only way to “perceive and learn your time” (Agamben, 2009, p. 58-59). We are always immersed in a time of *broken vertebrae*, which require some type of suture. Perhaps the poets, with their blood, can weld “the broken back of time” (Agamben, 2009, p. 60-61).

This Italian philosopher turns our contemporary modes of understanding the present and the idea of contemporaneity inside out: the present is fracture, is darkness; and to be contemporary, is, firstly, to distance oneself from the now – although with one’s eyes fixed on what is here. Moreover: without letting oneself be blinded by the light of the century in which one lives. This paradox relates us to the need for art and poetry – these spaces of seeing in blindness, as Chico Buarque affirms in the words of the song “Choro bandido”: *Even if you escape from me/ By labyrinths and trapdoors, / Know that poets, like the blind, / Can see in the dark*⁹.

To solder with one’s own blood the fractures of a century, of a time, of a given education – maintaining the proper proportions, if we consider that the task of a poet, painter, filmmaker or a researcher in the human sciences – is a radical invitation, whose strength is in an idea that is also found in Foucault: which is that the work of the scholar consists, at the limit, in living the experience of what we are, in this precise historic moment. And to do so, as Foucault would have us, based on the idea of a construction *en abîme*, so that the thinking that is elaborated remains open, incomplete. In this methodology, one turn leads to another; it is language and readings taken to the infinite. As Sarlo (2013, p. 43-44) writes, “to smooth an image, as people like to say, is to find in the new surface the lines of the previous surface, but modified”.

To think is to transform ourselves. Although this is an often used formulation (with reference to Foucault), we do not tire of stealing it. To think is to transform ourselves in such a way that by constructing our ob-

jects of research and dedicating ourselves to them, this would only be true, if, by giving in to this task, we did come out from it transformed. We would only be truthful if we could say, upon concluding, that it became possible (even if minimally) to establish new relations with our object of study, with the *danger* of which we speak. For Foucault (2010b), a book (and I add, a study) “functions as an experience” and is neither true nor false. “An experience is always a fiction; it is something that is fabricated for itself, which does not exist before and which could exist afterwards” (Foucault, 2010b, p. 293).

To do research, is, in some way, to make fiction, to steal, to distance oneself from one’s time, precisely to perceive the historic, grasp the *spirit of a time*, our time, and that, may suffocate us and demand tremendous effort from us. It is to reason poetically (or at least try to, as the doctoral student Elena experimented with in her *school stories*). It is to experiment with grammars other than our own customary one, to make unimagined marks in the real, to seek a lucidity that distances us, at times, from ourselves. Mere words? I think not. Each art, each language, each mode of creation teaches us the strength of a present that is never reduced to the trivial. Rather, it is cloaked in an ethic of obligations which are made upon us, obligations towards others, and towards ourselves. All and any creation is made from this, including our academic inventions. A child who asks a teacher for *more time* is certainly a cause for alarm. But it also substance for poetry and thought.

Notes

- ¹ In a statement to filmmaker Gustavo Spolidoro, in the film *De volta ao quarto 666* (2008).
- ² Image used by Marilena Chauí in her well-known text *Janela da alma, espelho do mundo*, referring to a painting by Van Gogh and to writings of Merleau-Ponty about the visible and the invisible (Chauí, 1999).
- ³ In conversation with Dreyfuss and Rabinow (Foucault, 2014).
- ⁴ A fictitious name.
- ⁵ According to the site IMDb, these two short films by Kiarostami were not released with English titles.

- ⁶ The film *Dez* 2002 takes place entirely inside a car, recording dialogs, mostly among women.
- ⁷ A passage from the lyrics to the song *Oriente*, by Gilberto Gil, on the LP 1972, *Expresso 2222*.
- ⁸ The text reproduces the opening lecture of a course on Theoretical Philosophy in Venice, Italy, in 2006. In it, Agamben uses the late-nineteenth century Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, to create the image of the contemporary as a state of *broken vertebrae*, by requiring some type of sutura.
- ⁹ Verses by Chico Buarque and music by Edu Lobo, for the play *O corsário do Rei*, by Augusto Boal, 1985.

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