

# THE REPRESENTATION OF TIME LIVED IN SYMBOLIC PLAY

*A representação do tempo vivido na brincadeira simbólica*

*La representación del tiempo vivido en el juego simbólico*

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**Abstract:** *This text addresses the great versatility of symbolic, verbal, imagery or ludic manifestations, in their various interactions, in the human construction of personal and social identity. It addresses the concept of man inserted in his life story, who experiences the possibility of making present, through his symbolic representations, his experiences of the past, as well as his vision of the future. It briefly follows the course of history, which generates the expansion of levels of reflection and consciousness, enabling, in turn, new conquests, appropriations and demarcations of properties and spaces, as well as the consciousness of the need for exchange of experiences. It focuses on the fundamental role of memory in the construction of this process in its historical relationship between the continuity in the present of the time lived, with the changes that occur in it. It highlights the importance of narrative, in its historical and fantastic versions. Finally, it presents an analysis of the symbolic activities played by three-year-old children, which already reveals their ability to record lived situations, as well as the richness of their symbolic representation, which allows them, when recording what they have lived and being able to represent it playing, to revive in their own way, with a number of details, significant situations and, therefore, to create favorable conditions for their understanding and elaboration of their emotions and feelings experienced.*

**Keywords:** *symbolic play; memory; narrative; life's history; experience report.*

**Resumo:** Este texto aborda a grande versatilidade das manifestações simbólicas, verbais, imagéticas ou lúdicas, em suas diversas interações, na construção humana da identidade pessoal e social. Aborda a concepção de homem inserido em sua história de vida, o qual vivencia a possibilidade de tornar presente, por via de suas representações simbólicas, suas experiências do passado, assim como sua visão do futuro. Acompanha brevemente o correr da História, que gera a ampliação dos níveis de reflexão e consciência, possibilitando, por sua vez, novas conquistas, apropriações e demarcações de propriedades e espaços, assim como, a consciência da necessidade da troca de experiências. Enfoca o papel fundamental da memória na construção desse processo em sua relação histórica entre a continuidade no presente do tempo vivido, com as mudanças que nele ocorrem. Destaca a importância da narrativa, em suas versões histórica e fantástica. Ao final, apresenta análise de brincadeiras simbólicas de crianças de três anos, a qual já revela sua capacidade de registrar situações vividas, assim como, a riqueza de sua representação simbólica, que lhe permite, ao registrar o vivido e poder representá-lo brincando, reviver a seu modo, com riqueza de detalhes, situações significativas e assim, criar condições favoráveis para sua compreensão e elaboração de suas emoções e sentimentos vivenciados.

**Palavras-chave:** *brincadeira simbólica; memória; narrativa; história de vida; relato de experiência.*

**Resúmen:** *Este texto aborda la gran versatilidad de las manifestaciones simbólicas, verbales, de imágenes o lúdicas, en sus diversas interacciones, en la construcción humana de la identidad personal y social. Aborda el concepto del hombre insertado en su historia de vida, que experimenta la posibilidad de hacer presente, a través de sus representaciones simbólicas, sus vivencias del pasado, así como su visión del futuro. Acompaña brevemente el curso de la historia, que genera la expansión de niveles de reflexión y conciencia, posibilitando, a su vez, nuevas conquistas, apropiaciones y demarcaciones de propiedades y espacios, así como la conciencia de la necesidad del intercambio de experiencias. Se enfoca en el papel fundamental de la memoria en la construcción de este proceso en su relación histórica entre la continuidad en el presente del tiempo vivido, con los cambios que se producen en él. Destaca la importancia de la narrativa, en sus versiones histórica y fantástica. Al final, presenta un análisis de juegos simbólicos jugados por niños de tres años, que ya revela su capacidad para registrar situaciones vividas, así como la riqueza de su representación simbólica, que les permite, al registrar lo vivido y poder representarlo jugando, de revivir a su manera, con una abundancia de detalles, situaciones significativas y así, crear condiciones favorables para la comprensión y elaboración de sus emociones y sentimientos vividos.*

**Palavras-clave:** *juego simbólico; memoria; narrativa; historia de vida; informe de experiencia.*

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## Introduction

According to Cassirer (1968), man would have discovered a new way of living, of adapting to the world, the way of the symbol, which would have allowed him to resize his reality through verbal, imagery, graphic or ludic manifestations, which are linked to his memory, his creative imagination, science and art. In this sense, the symbolic is introduced in dealing with the lived experience, as well as in its theoretical interpretation, which integrates and dynamizes its vision of a man inserted in his own history. The experience of the past, as well as the vision of the future, can become present through their symbolic representations.

Memory has a fundamental role in the creation and maintenance of its identity, as well as in the understanding of the relationship between the continuity in the present, of the time lived, with the changes that occur in it, as explained by Bergson (1972). With the passage of history, the levels of reflection and consciousness are expanded, generating, in turn, new conquests, appropriations and demarcations of properties and spaces. In turn, such innovations also give rise to the need to exchange experiences, to exchange ways of living, that is, cultures, as indicated by Coppens (2015). Therefore, the narratives of the lived and the imagined, which before were presented for a small group, around the fire, begin to spread and reach new spaces and times and also, in turn, generate new experiences and conquests, which, again and again, will be narrated and spread in ever widening ranges of action. Such narratives of lived facts often include and are also intertwined with legends based on their magical imagery, according to Patou-Mathis (2005).

The narratives of what has been lived or imagined, according to Ricoeur (2019), aim to tell, reproduce in the present, something that happened in the past or was imagined, that is, they keep configuring the passage of time. In doing so, they are thus weaving the threads of the historical plot. The fictional narrative, in turn, provides, in a certain way, to those who narrate and to those who listen, an imaginary experience, as if happening in another reality but, many times, related to the real time lived in the moment, an experience that is similar to what we are going to see in this text when dealing with symbolic play, also called dramatic play or make-believe, through which children narrate, through ludic

representations, imaginary situations, which can be mixed in different degrees with experiences lived by them in reality, with all their color and dramatization.

As Benjamin (2019) reminds us, in order to narrate something, someone must have had life experience but, on the other hand, as he adds, the narrative makes it possible to deconstruct the real time lived, which, however, does not change itself by being counted. The narrative, according to Todorov (1969), when restoring a situation from the past, might be in a new experience of the lived, since it allows a return in time and is affected by the way the narrative takes place and evolves. Ricoeur (2019) admits the congruence between historical and fictional narratives, both in their configuration and in their power to make it possible to review and reassess the past, since both allow a reconfiguration of time. These considerations are also relevant in terms of play, which relive, in a certain way, situations experienced by the child. Symbolic play, also called dramatic play, can be considered in certain situations as reports of experiences lived by children, since, as well as verbal narratives, they allow them, in a certain way, to relive and resignify a remarkable situation from the past, through its enactment in current time and space, with a strong emotional content (Oliveira, 2020a).

When following with Huizinga (1971) the historical trajectory of *Homo Ludens*, it can be seen in its biological framework that the act of playing emerges with the cerebral evolution of mammals, and evolves with the human being. As a constitutive part of our history and culture, playing means, in short, creating and representing real or imaginary situations, having fun, daring, taking risks, enduring tension.

For Damásio (2000), the formation of conscience depends precisely, over time, on the internal representation of what has been lived. In this process, our lived experiences, with their emotions and feelings, are registered in the brain, forming and safeguarding our life history, our identity. The predominance in pleasure playing, interaction and relaxation, in face of the effort to settle in to interact, is highlighted by Piaget (1978), who considers symbolic play precisely as the most important manifestation of children's symbolic thought, exactly because it facilitates and triggers the cognitive and affective-emotional process of adaptation and interaction of the child to the environment experienced. In this sense, and taking into account the above considerations, ludic

situations with strong dramatic content are reported, represented by three-year-old children, which, due to their richness and narrative depth, highlight the relevance of free and creative play for retrieving the poorly resolved situations by the child, as well as in all of his healthy development.

## **Symbolic record of the lived history**

In the record of our life history, Cassirer (1994) is considered one of the great theorists responsible for inserting the symbolic in dealing with the lived fact. The past experience of an event that occurred is no longer treated as something that is already gone and dead, but, on the contrary, as something that is part of the person's trajectory, of his past, and that accompanies him throughout life, today and tomorrow, acting in time and space through his mental representations present in his action. In short, in his history.

In this sense, man would seek to become increasingly conscious of the immense wealth of his possibilities for action, based on his past, on his memory, as well as on his reflection and imagination. He becomes increasingly conscious that his actions are carefully thought out, planned, recorded and performed, since, in addition to providing him with the preservation of what he has lived, they can open up perspectives for renewal and creative expansion. In his conception of History, Cassirer (2004) also emphasizes the importance in the symbolic reconstruction of the human trajectory. By seeking to clarify what differentiates a physical fact from a historical one, he considers that the physical fact is determined by observation and experimentation, whereas, for the historian, things happen quite differently, since the facts with which he deals are from the past, belong to history, can no longer return as present in reality and persist in the collective memory. Therefore, historical facts can only be reconstructed through their memory, registered in documents and monuments, which constitutes the first step in the direction of historical knowledge *per se*.

The historian, such as the physicist, lives in a material world; however, in his investigation he deals with a symbolic universe, a world of representations and, first of all, he must learn to read these symbols, since any historical fact, simple as it may seem, can only be determined and understood by a

symbolic analysis, which would be exactly its pivotal notion. In this line of reasoning, he considers that the representations aim to "(...) illuminate and clarify the origins and historical development of the fundamental problem of modern philosophy: the knowledge problem" (Cassirer, 1977, p.7). The depth and richness of Cassirer's works, which underscores the paramount importance of history in the symbolic reconstruction of the reality experienced, helps us to better understand the fundamental role of mental representations, which allow us to dare to navigate in time and space lived, imagined and/or thought out (Rocha; Mariella, 2020; Cassirer, 1994).

According to Cohen (2018), however, the philosophical and epistemological reflection on the a priori conditions of scientific knowledge, which aims to discover its assumptions and foundations, develops from a "fact" of natural science, from a historically determined experience; therefore, there is no way to admit the historian Cassirer without the philosopher Cassirer, which leads us to consider him as one of the pioneers in understanding the true meaning of the role of History in an epistemological program. For Heller (1982), historical time accompanies the irreversibility of social events, and what is altered is not the course of time, but the rhythm of social structural changes. In the course of history, values are built, with the value being an ontological category that becomes the expression and result of social relationships and situations.

## **Memory and identity preservation**

According to Bergson, in his *Introduction à la métaphysique* (1993, p.208), time implies a "(...) multiplicity of moments linked to each other by a unity that crosses them like a thread", that is, by a representation that simultaneously expresses its diversity, continuity and unity, possible only through memory, which is fundamental for the recalling and consciousness of our memories. Such continuity, however, turns out to be changes, since the events are not the same, even if recalled or repeated, because, strictly speaking, there are not two identical moments, since the situation and the person change over time, as well like, every change becomes a new version of reality, so there is no essence that remains unchanged, a permanent identity behind the changes. Therefore, any attempt to recompose a psychological succession

by intelligence alone is artificial, since, through abstraction and analysis, the most that is achieved is to constitute more or less independent psychic states, as if they were parts of consciousness, that is, as if it had parts. It would be, as Bergson exemplifies, to try to reconstruct a poem from the letters that make part of its composition and are randomly mixed. The whole is lost, its meaning is lost. Also accompanying the Bergsonian reading, the time of scientists and philosophers becomes fictitious, since, by means of a scheme, it ignores, hides the nature of real time, and it cannot be seen separately from physical and psychological events. When it comes to the multiple succession of world events, we can only retell them through a process of symbolic figuration, in which space necessarily intervenes. This spatialization of time can be seen in the representation of inner life.

In this sense, real time becomes a succession that combines continuity and change, memory and creativity. In its continuity, the moments lived in the past, in their immense variety and multiplicity, are stitched together, so as to speak, by the ability that man has to represent what he does, which becomes the guiding thread that unites them with each other and with the present. On a personal level, two types of memory complement each other: the one of images, which retains conscious memories of what we lived in the past, and the one which can be defined in more general terms as the mark of the past in the present, that is, an inner memory that is prior to the change itself, a memory that prolongs the before in the after, in a present that is constantly reborn (Bergson, 1993; 1972). In short, without memory there is no possibility of resuming history itself, since the conscious perception of temporality is only possible thanks to evocations. Real time can be seen as a continuous creation, in which its irreversibility, richness and complexity are related to each other and to memory. In this sense, Bergson (1972) complements this view by emphasizing the fact that the source of the unpredictability of the lived moment is due to the internal, innovative and creative dynamism of the person. In the conjunction of remembered and lived with innovation, memory would have a fundamental role, since, in part, it explains the relationship between the elapsed, past time, and the increased complexity and unpredictability of the situation experienced in the present. Such an intimate and dynamic conjunction of the multiplicity of moments is an effective part of the unity of life in time and space.

Retaining and respecting the immense richness and originality of both readings, in their respective approaches, there is a possibility of establishing a bridge between Cassirer and Bergson, since both, each in his own way and optics, highlight the importance of memory in the constitution, maintenance, reflection and expansion of human experiences (Bergson, 1993; 1933). Coelho (2004) synthesizes that, for Bergson, real time cannot be seen separately from physical and psychological events and also be described as a source of news, since the imagined and/or the possible can be richer than the real.

As for memory, as Foster (2011) reminds us, it can be real or imagined, and the context experienced at the moment, as well as a current stimulus, can facilitate or awaken a memory.

According to Arendt and Kohn (2006), the concept and task of History consist precisely in preserving and reconciling the lived and the reflected, in saving them from oblivion, and placing them, based on the repetitive cycle of life, in the "scope of being forever". The historical narrative, even keeping its characteristics isolated, reconciles and activates the recalling of remembrances through memory, often providing a new vision and even a reconciliation with reality by generating an opportunity to relive a situation.

## **Narrative as a record of the lived and the imagined**

When considering time in a chronobiological approach, Menna-Barreto (2003) argues in favor of the existence of a biological time, as well as time-marking mechanisms in organisms. It considers time as an inherent part of life and proposes its consideration as fundamental in the organization and in the evolution process of living beings, as well as the need to know their history. In a complementary way, it recalls that historical environmental cycles can, in turn, contribute to generate several cycles, rhythms and biological clocks, which function as self-sustaining oscillators, belonging to every living being.

In turn, the narratives of what has been lived in time have followed man's life since its beginnings, according to Patou-Mathis (2005). Around the fire, already in very ancient times, man told stories of his hunts and of the beings that haunted him. From the narratives of the lived and the imaginary, legends are born. Over time, man increasingly dominates the



environment, expands his territory. He innovates, anticipates, transmits knowledge. He then proceeds to narrate what he did, what he does and what he plans to do. The nascent and growing culture increasingly complements genetics. Man then begins to question himself about his present and future, as he reviews his life story, his past. The hand, in turn, in the long human historical journey, according to Leroi-Gourhan (1965), is no longer a tool for gestures and becomes its force, given that, more and more, the manual motricity invades the domain of memory, of intelligence and creativity, which implies planning and execution in time and space, challenges that cause concern, but which, in turn, lead to the emergence of civilizations. In this sense, Coppens (2015) considers that the human brain development, as it becomes increasingly complex and conscious, leads to a higher level of reflection, which, in turn, awakens new curiosities, discoveries and needs, such as appropriation of goods and land. This fact even leads to the search for demarcation of the own territory, which, in turn, leads to the progressive appropriation/separation of spaces.

On the other hand, still according to Coppens, by becoming a cultural being, man realizes the importance of exchanging his ideas, experiences, information, reflections, tools and also... his women. From these cross-breedings, mixed-breed children are born, which is not the case with animals. The spaces, diversified over time, specialize for different purposes and generate the desire and the need to establish their own territory, to settle and create their own roots. Along with the fixation in a specific place, there is also the desire and the convenience of marking what belongs to him, what is his, that is, the meaning of property starts to be formed throughout history, in the lived time and space, and man gradually learns the importance of marking and registering his trajectories and properties with abstract signs, to symbolically represent what is his. In this way and in this historical journey, the importance of graphic signage is configured, understood and used in its intimate relationship with the preservation of the lived history.

### **Structure of the time lived and imagined in the narrative**

Alongside his action in time and space in reality, on the ground of the earth, man expands his memory and imagination with the time available to

him, because he constituted a territory. Thus, he develops the ability to narrate what he lives, what he lived, and what he expects or imagines to live. It is also the structure of time in the fictional narrative, which springs from the lived experience and expands on the imaginary terrain, with its emotions, dreams and fears. Language allows man to describe himself. Linguistic reflection leads to the expansion of the mind and consciousness. The various forms of language, such as corporal and ludic, precede and underpin the construction of verbal language. Language, in its various modalities and combinations, becomes fundamental for the descriptive recursion of the lived and organization of the present, in the possible and continuous reconstruction of our life experiences through action. The appearance of language in man highlights his self-consciousness as his most intimate and rich experience (Maturana; Varela, 2020).

According to Ricoeur (2019), the narratives of the time lived and imagined, that is, historical and fictional, come from mimesis, from the Greek *mimesis*, "imitation" (*imitatio*, in Latin), which designates action or faculty to imitate, copy, reproduce or represent, since every narrative aims to tell, to reproduce in the present, something that happened in the past or was imagined. In both cases, the notion of time and the concepts linked to it of innovation, stability and decline characterize the structural configuration of the narrative, and time can be considered as lived, historically or not. The diachrony present in the ongoing narrative can even unveil difficulties that have arisen over time. In turn, the fictional narrative combines the composition of the intrigue, the plot of the story, with the narrated time, and develops according to an order attributed to the imagination. In both, however, the facts, narrated and/or imagined, are intertwined and unfold in the time of telling with the time of the things told. The fictional narrative provides, in a certain way, to those who narrate and to those who listen, an imaginary experience, as if occurred in another reality, but often related to the real time lived in the moment, an experience similar to the one we will see below, when dealing with the symbolic play, also called dramatic play or make-believe, in which children narrate, through ludic representations, experiences lived in reality, with all their color and dramatization. In a narrative, also according to Ricoeur (2019), the composition and expression of time are continuously interrelated in a dynamic way, around the central character, and

everything revolves around his doubts, desires and needs. As can be seen, it interweaves psychological with social complexity, addressing the flow of consciousness at its various levels. The addressed field is the one of the plot that is told, which expands as it unfolds. The character's action is narrated and expects to be understood in its broad sense of transformation and greater moral and emotional complexity. Its action can, in turn, generate changes that may affect the course of emotions and sensations of those who narrate and also those who listen. On the other hand, the narrative strategy can produce pleasure or displeasure to the narrator, by representing the lived reality, depending on it, as well as to the listener. The order sought by the composition of the intrigue can be attributed to the productive imagination, which, even following the ordering of the imaginary, also has a reaction with the temporal dimension of the narrated situation. Therefore, the narrative intelligence in the reconstruction of a real or imaginary fact is a continuous, cumulative and sedimented history. According to Ricoeur, its identity is transductive, that is, transhistorical and not timeless.

According to Benjamin (2019), in order to narrate it is necessary to have had life experience. The time of the narrative representation, however, can deconstruct the real time, since it has its own resources to invent its own temporal measures. The past, however, always remains a source of order, since the rupture does not change it in itself, but as a new reference or interpretation of it. In the narrative, however, it is always possible to introduce something else, experienced or known, and, in this way, to overcome the mere repetition of what has been lived, as revealed by Barthes (2011), and a well-conducted and articulated story can cause impact, generate an abyss in the world of those who listen or read it, that is, at both ends of the narrative cord, of those who narrate and those who listen. Therefore, it is observed that the strength and consistency of the narratives, when built, narrated and listened, can provoke deep reflections and emotional reactions. During the time lived and/or narrated, according to Coveney and Highfield (1991), two major facets, opposite and complementary, are detected: its reversibility or repetition and its irreversibility, since time does not revert. In the so-called arrow of time, they thus verify the appearance of a structure, that is, of a closed set comprised of conjugated internal relations that make up its coherent unity and its cohesive formal progression.

According to Todorov (1969), the narrative becomes an opportunity for exchange between those who narrate and those who listen. In its articulation, it always combines the formal integration of what is narrated, that is, of its structure, with its content, that is, what is narrated, maintaining the progression of its meaning. The author admits that the act itself of narrating already becomes, in a way, a reflection on the events narrated, since the fact of distancing from the action itself to narrate it requires an unfolding in time and space of those who narrate. The verb tenses employed attest and ensure this distance, this relative and prudent detachment from experience, when, for example, narrating a situation, the person uses the verb in the past imperfect tense when he says, for example, 'I used to go', instead of 'I went'. According to Todorov, the diverse relationship between the time of the lived act (*Aktzeit*, time of the act, in German) and that of the textual representation (*Textzeit*, time of the text) attests to this distance. Representation, however, does not cease to make the transition between the lived experience, its representation and the current time, after it. Since narrating, on the other hand, in essence, also makes it possible to relive, to be able to make it present again, although the time for narrating is different from the time narrated, which, despite being past, is somewhat restored and revised when told. When narrating, the narrator brings to the present a situation from the past, and in this way, puts it in relation, and in possible tension, the time of the narration with the time of the narrated. Such tension can be seen as similar to the continuous work of formation-transformation (*Bildung-Umbildung*; that is, construction-deconstruction) that takes place in the path of increasing the understanding of the meaning and richness of life.

### **Play: source of pleasure and constitution of historical and social identity**

Just as narratives allow, in a certain way, to revive and give new meaning to the past, symbolic play, that is, make-believe or even called dramatic play, can be seen as an excellent way of representing the lived and the imagined in its most diverse combinations and, thus, effectively take part in child development (Oliveira, 2020a; Oliveira, 2020b). When accompanying with Huizinga (1971) the trajectory of *Homo Ludens*, it can be seen in his biological

framework that the act of playing emerges with the cerebral evolution of mammals and evolves with the human being, becoming an effective part of his historical and cultural journey. Present in the most primitive societies, the ludic spirit, whether solitary or collective, already supposes daring, taking risks, enduring uncertainty and tension, as well as generating and combining: creativity and objectivity, competition and mutual assistance, and physical and mental resistance, that is, it is an inherent part of our life, of our development, of our history. For Damásio (2000), the formation of conscience depends on the internal representation of the lived, on our experiences and knowledge over time. In this process, our action is continuously mapped in the brain by means of mental images, which also record our emotions and feelings that are present in the situations experienced, continuously forming our personal and social identity. As he points out, symbolic play can be seen as a narrative that also provides the corporal and emotional expansion of central consciousness. As seen, the presence of two complementary mechanisms can be observed: the generation of a not-only verbal report about the child's relationship with the environment, as well as the emphasis given by the child to images represented by the objects present in the ludic situation.

Symbolic play can be seen as a non-verbal narrative, which provides, even corporal and emotionally, the expansion of central consciousness. As Damásio points out, the presence of two complementary mechanisms can be observed in it: the generation of a report not only verbal between the child and the environment and the emphasis given by the child to the images represented by the objects, which also express feelings. With regard to the component of the sense of the self, the formation of consciousness depends on the construction and internal display of new knowledge, referring to an interaction between the organism and the environment, which is made possible and favored by symbolic representations. Therefore, there is no possibility of forming consciousness without mental representation and interaction with the environment. Along this path, playing takes a fundamental role since the first months of life, already motivating the little child to move around, to explore the environment and to interact in a communicative, spontaneous and pleasurable way. When playing, the baby awakens and supports the construction of his body memory, as pointed out

by Le Boulch (1985). And, it is from this form of play with recursive sensorimotor predominance, which explores the environment in a rhythmic way, linked to the present time and space, that the little child gradually creates conditions to reach greater heights in the field of mental representations and begins to create his first symbolic activities, in which, at the beginning, he represents small scenes that are still very close to his day-to-day life, when projecting them in his environment.

For Piaget (1973; 1978), pleasure, interaction and relaxation predominate in play, due to the effort of having to settle down to interact with the environment. He considers symbolic play as the most important manifestation of children's symbolic thought, which develops from sensory-motor play, already around the end of the first year of life, triggered in its initial path by the individual symbol which is motivated and remains very connected to the feelings and affective experiences lived by the child. He also emphasizes that, in the child's development and new experiences, this form of play grows in duration and in depth, and develops itself, forming scenes that are increasingly rich and representative, and that its symbolism progressively acquires an unconscious and profound character, which may be linked, among others, to very intimate feelings and emotions, such as love, jealousy or aggression. By representing what he lived through the symbolic play, the child finds better conditions to deal with his feelings and emotions, as shown in the small selection of symbolic activities recorded below. According to Winnicott (1975), the verbal limitation of the small child finds compensation in playing, which becomes a form of non-verbal expression, universal and proper to health, as Psychoanalysis points out, and is even a form of communication with oneself and with others. With the child, play contributes to his experience of dealing with reality, of being able to manifest himself and, therefore, go on forming his self, his feeling of himself. When playing, the child deals with his deepest feelings and affections and, for that, he needs safety and tranquility, to feel free to create his game, and to represent his experiences in it, including those that aroused sadness and uncertainty. On the contrary, any situation that inhibits him from manifesting, harms him a lot, because, as Winnicott reminds us, "submission brings with it a feeling of worthlessness" (1975, p. 95). The freedom of action, always present in genuine Play, is linked to creative living,



to the joy of living. The emphasis placed on creativity present in playing leads Winnicott to consider it as a true cultural experience, closely linked to the lived history. According to his words, "(...) in any cultural field it is not possible to be original, except on a basis of tradition" (1975, p.138). In short, the little child, when playing, can represent the situations experienced by him, even when the reality becomes too difficult or complex to be assimilated and understood.

## **Illustrative clippings of symbolic play**

In this sense, the following are clippings of ludic observations from an evolutionary observational study on the free play of a daycare child (Oliveira, 2020a), here briefly analyzed. In order for the situations described to be better exposed and understood, it is clarified that the research was carried out for two years, every three months, starting with the children's average age of 1.5 years. It is also clarified that it was a daycare center with an agreement with a city hall, serving 200 low-income children. The activities described below were part of the last stage of the research, and, therefore, with children aged close to three years old, already familiar with the proposal of a ludic situation, entirely free, as well as with the graphic and ludic material.

Initially, the analytical descriptive summary of Valt's play, aged 3 years and 2 months, is described:

*Valt represents by playing, in a dramatic context, a waist belt spanking that took him to sleep. This representation was already being sketched, when, in a previous observation of the same research, he distinguished in the box of colored pencils the figures that had a waist belt. In this session, he takes a deep dive into the deep and dramatic waters of childish symbolism. At first, he plays with the pencils, looks at the figures in the pencil box and says: "It's all mommy"; "Mom will take me home, she'll take me". He's loose and relaxed. Next, he organizes the scene of putting the bear to sleep. Talks to him while making the bed with the sheets on the floor: "It's sheets", he repeats. He smiles at him, saying, "Now sleep." While the bear 'sleeps', he plays running and jumping over the basin, several times, after which he turns to the bear and orders, angry: "Go to sleep! Sleep, huh!". Again, however, he returns to his motor racing game, this time simulating driving a*

*car, with the bear together, imitating the honking. He stops and examines the figures in the pencil box again, when he refocuses the belt on one of the figures: "It's belt, it's mommy's belt". He changes his posture again, from calm and relaxed, to an expression of anger and physical violence, kicks the bowl with the bear inside and says: "Damn, damn, damn!". He returns again to his calm expression and says: "It's raining, it's raining hard" (at the time it was not raining), and he comes closer to the observer, looking for physical contact to calm himself. After a while, he starts getting nervous again and says: "Damn, right, auntie? It's damn!" and throws the bowl away again. He restlessly walks in the room, removes a poster from the wall, throws it up and vigorously stomps on it. He puts the bear on the poster and says again: "It's bed. Now go to sleep!". Standing beside the bear's 'bed', he touches the waistband of his trousers, pretending to take off a belt and then begins to simulate a spanking, beating the bear violently while ordering in a thick and very rude voice: "Go to sleep! Sleep, sleep!", in a climate of great dramatization. After the beating, he covers the bear with a cloth and says: "It's over!" He puts a cloth around his waist as an apron and again speaks, very angrily, with the bear: "You fool, you fool!". He shows signs of great tiredness and satiation, which coincides with the time to end the observation. Throughout this dramatic session, Valt also demonstrated to be alert and fearful of possible intrusions, constantly watching the door.*

The symbolic play described above can also be considered as the narrative of a waist belt beating experience lived and represented by a three-year-old child, with a strong realistic and emotional content. It is observed how, from the beginning, the image of a female figure is identified by the child, in the box of colored pencils, and pointed out as "mother", with an expression of affection and confidence, when he says and repeats: "Mom will take me home, she'll take me." At that moment he is happy and relaxed, but his speech already reveals hope and a desire for closeness and protection by her mother. However, the emotional affective ambivalence toward the mother is already manifested at the beginning, when Valt relates the female image of the box with her, imagining a belt in the print. It is observed, then, how the situation represented is elaborated in a syncopated and rhythmic way, which alternates representative moments of the scene of the beating with motor actions



of intense movement, possibly to deal with the great emotional load that Valt was suffering. His exhaustion is evident when he approaches the observer and sits very close to her, as if asking for a lap. Soon after, however, he resumes his alternative path of running and building the waist belt scene until he fully represents it, in gestures and dramatically, which leaves him extremely prostrate.

In this narrative, it is possible to observe how, according to Ricoeur (2019), the plot of the play revolves around the main character, in this case, Valt, who in his play presents the psychological and historical-social complexity experienced by the child since his early years. Based on Damásio (2000), it is possible to observe the presence of two complementary mechanisms in this ludic situation: the generation of a not-only verbal report between the child and the environment, and the emphasis given by him to the images represented by the objects and situations, which also express feelings. According to Kensinger (2004), the representation of a situation lived in the past may represent a change in its emotional representation, as well as creating conditions for its resignification. The alternation of activities of great physical movement, along with the scenes in which the beating is represented, reminds us of Le Boulch (1985), for whom, it is from this form of play, with a recursive sensorimotor predominance, which explores in a rhythmic way the environment, linked to the present time and space, that the little child gradually creates conditions to reach higher heights in the field of mental representations and begin to create his first symbolic activities. Hence, once again, the great need to play is reinforced here, as well as to provide freedom of movement and action to the child, and emphasize, as Winnicott reminds us, that: "submission brings with it a feeling of worthlessness" (1975, p. 95). Threatening and even beating a child, especially with the aggravation of using a waist belt, to subject him to obey an order, as in this case, to go to sleep, is a great risk to his emotional health and the construction of his autonomy. However, it should be remembered, on the other hand, that the sacrificed life, with a lot of work and few resources, of most mothers in daycare centers, can lead them to lose control, which also deserves our understanding and support, hence the relevance of the presence of Psychology.

The following is also briefly transcribed, the symbolic play of Aria, aged 3 years and 5 months.

*Right at the beginning, Aria organizes the space of the scene of putting the "children to sleep" and clearly states: "Here is the little bed" (shoe box); "The pencils are here" (bath water). She puts the bear and the doll in the basin, simulates giving a bath, with the pencils. She then examines the figures in the pencil case, and says: "The gun. You have a gun, yes. Everybody with gun."; "Look, auntie, this is a man, look at the cock!"; "Blood is coming out of his mouth. He puts medicine... it tastes good!". She turns to the "children" (the doll and the bear), puts them to sleep, each in his crib (the shoe box and a rug), and then takes her own bath in the basin, with lots of joy, opening an imaginary faucet on the door latch, while commenting: "Now what? Now I'm going to buy my key, brand new. An ash-tray, a beautiful key just for me. A cigarette just for me. Ready! I am going to take a bath. Shhhhhh... (imitating the noise of the water, while she pours the pencils on top of her)." When she gets out of the bath, she checks if everything is okay with the children and asks the doll: "Are you going out with Mommy? Yes?" Later, she says: "Mom will be back, I'll buy a key just for me!" She pretends that she opens an imaginary door, goes to another corner of the room and says to someone invisible: "Give me a key"; she takes the imaginary key and pretends to make her way home. She pretends to open a door: "Hey! I just bought a key. It's two... I'm going to buy another one." She repeats the symbolic rite of buying a new key and returns home, when she says, sadly: "There is no one here with me." She lies down next to the bear and the doll, and speaks in a voice different from hers: "Turn off the light for me!"*

In the course of this observation, it can be seen how Aria develops and organizes in time and space the symbolic representation of a scene, probably already experienced by her in her reality. She represents, with a great number of details, the scene of a mother, probably hers, who, at the end of the afternoon, accommodates the children to sleep (the doll and the bear), with care and attention, so that, only afterwards, she goes to take her bath. It is also observed, as Damásio (2000) points out, that in this ludic representation there is the affective and sentimental context of the situation, given by Aria to the children represented by the doll and the bear, with whom they even talk in a loving way, which reveals how the children's symbolic thinking remains closely linked to the feelings and affective experiences lived by them.

This scene, which unfolds and develops in the creation of a second space, where Aria simulates going to buy a key, new and 'only hers', as she says, already highlights her capacity for logical organization, which allows her to build a sequential report, in different spaces and times, in which she places herself as the author of her acts, with her rights to possession and territory. And, all of this, organized by a child with just three years old, who already distinguishes the before and after, the here and there, as well as being able to represent, in a clear way, an end of the day lived through a ludic narrative. In this sense, it is observed, mainly, the great sensitivity of this girl, still so little, to perceive, record and reproduce speeches and feelings, possibly heard from her mother, when she speaks of her loneliness, shortage and desire even to have her own things, the simplest ones, like a key, a cigarette and an ashtray 'just for me' ... On the other hand, she represents the strength of this mother who, only after laying her children down, lovingly, goes out looking for something she wants to possess, to buy for her own use. In short, it is assumed that the symbolic play briefly described here can be considered as a deep and faithful way of representing the time lived, of capturing expressions, demonstrations of affection and great emotions, with fidelity and sensitivity, which attests to the great emotional burden that the child revives and resignifies through playing, as well as her precociousness in identifying and representing, by playing, emotions of the people with whom she lives. It can also be seen, according to Todorov (1969), that the representation of past facts may constitute a new experience and vision of the lived, since it raises and makes it possible to go back in time.

## Final considerations

Finally, we return to the view of Ricoeur (2019), who admits the congruence between historical and fictional narratives, both in their configuration and in their power to review and reevaluate the past, since both allow the reconfiguration of time and intertwine psychological and social complexity. This reading makes it possible to better analyze the richness and depth of symbolic play, of the small child, briefly described above, which can be seen, according to the author, as a narrative that provides, even through corporal and emotional ways, the expansion of central consciousness. In this sense, the great feeling of freedom experienced by the child when playing is close to the dream, which allows him to express his emotions and feelings, in a conscious and unconscious process, as observed by Piaget (1978) and this author (Oliveira, 2020a). Symbolic play, in its vast majority and diversity, narrates the lived, supported, mixed and added, so to speak, in a background constituted by the child's perception, associated with his desires, expectations and fears, built by him throughout his life. When creating and experiencing a dramatic play, the child, so to speak, creates a narrative and, according to Todorov (1969), the very act of narrating already becomes, in a way, a reflection on the narrated events, since the fact of distancing oneself from the action in order to narrate it requires an unfolding in the time and space of the narrator. The richness of free and spontaneous Play is part of our human heritage, as highlighted in this text, and therefore becomes vital in the face of the great and fast historical and cultural transformations that we are going through, as well as a source of physical and emotional balance, particularly in the face of the difficult health situation that humanity is going through these days.

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