Artistic enjoyment is a fundamental aspect of children’s emotional, perceptive, cognitive, reflexive, and axiological development. Various aesthetic objects point out to the child as to which groups it should identify with and which places it can occupy in the world. For this reason, a lack of aesthetic formation and an absence of empowered artistic representation are cultural ways for social exploitation and discrimination to be maintained. On the other hand, access to a variety of aesthetic compositions is a powerful way to promote democracy through the possibilities of multiple cultural constructions and structural changes.

Theatrical art is deeply connected to childhood since both symbolic games and artistic play arise from theatricality and are different cultural manifestations of creativity. According to Winnicott (1982), an individual can only discover itself, feeling that life is worth living, through creativity. However, Vygotsky (2007) states that imagination, creativity, and awareness are not inherent. According to the evolution of the communication’s pluriperceptive sign management, these need to be developed based on each person’s opportunities for aesthetic formation. But how does the original communicative root emerge in the child’s life? Connecting Winnicott’s (1982), Maturana and Verden-Zöller’s (2004), and Bakhtin’s (2010) reflections about the role of emotions, it is possible to find communication’s origin in the capacity of love, first materialized through the elemental musicality inside the womb (Verden-Zöller 2004).

In human lives, the properties of musicality, body language, and theatricality are a material expression of the emotional bases that roots personal and social structures through the establishment of feelings, values, habits, desires, and viewpoints. This process embraces a permanent cultural construction and transformation where the perceptions of identity, belonging, and diversity are built through the coordination of emotions, actions, rationality, and awareness (Bakhtin 2010; Maturana and Verden-Zöller 2004). In this path, cultural perceptions related to aesthetic signs, symbols, and speeches are either supported or transformed by diverse affective–rational bases (Giroux 1988; Maturana and Verden-Zöller 2004).

Artistic enjoyment plays an essential role in personal and social development since aesthetic fruition provides emotional channels that promote cultural models with deep symbolic power (Bourdieu 1989). For Brecht (1967), artistic compositions may naturalize some social structures by reproducing hegemonic culture or may reveal their contradictions, promoting new perceptions, values, and awareness. In the same vein, recognizing that
artistic authors are not entirely aware of their own artistic works, Bakhtin (2010) states that the author is responsible for their creation's axiological paths. This responsibility is even more substantial concerning childhood, since children are just building their references and aren’t aware of their thought operations, which restrains critical consciousness (Vygotsky 2007). The deep infantile connection between subjectivity and objectivity, fantasy, and reality (Winnicott 1982; Bettelheim 2012) promotes a strong emotional attachment to aesthetic models.

Theater for children finds its specificity in the connection between childhood and theatrical communicative ways. Thus, theater for children requires the same artistic skills and tools as theater for adults, associated with childhood scientific knowledge. In this permanent dialectical process, concepts relate to the contexts and do not precede them as absolute truths.

It is not my intention to present fixed models or strict creative rules, or even to belittle the experiences children may have in appreciating some kinds of arts for adults. These opportunities can be a treat for children’s curiosity, as long as they do not contain elements that may intimidate or psychically harm them. This perception of communicative diversity can be enjoyable if children can also access artistic compositions fully dedicated to them. In any case, children subliminally perceive that they understand the world differently from the way adults do (Winnicott 1982; Elkonin 2009).

The reflection on the work’s target audience concerns the internal coherence of the artistic propositions. Indeed, it would not be possible to predetermine the unique characteristics of each person in the audience. It is desirable that theatrical pieces present unexpected perspectives. In recognizing flexible generalizations of distinct moments of childhood, the intention is not to create rigid and stratified patterns. Instead, the goal is to find ways to propose dialogical paths arising from emotional investment and scientific rigor always related to each context’s complexity.

To create theatrical pieces for children that respect their emotional and intellectual integrity, I consider it essential to reflect on what I call children’s ludic logic through the pluriperceptive and multisignificant systems of games. In recognizing a familiar way of communicating, children can feel confident in establishing bonds of creative cooperation to face new challenges.

**Emotional roots of communication: from musicality to theatricality**

According to Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2004), love is biologically rooted and grounds the child’s personal and social development related to the emergence of oral and bodily languages. The authors affirm that emotions guide the choice of actions in each given context and express concern about the current lack of awareness about the role of emotions in human lives. For them, communicative signs emerged from collaborative ties that existed in the earliest human communities based on the consensual behavioral coordination of emotions and actions. Human beings created consensual signs to refer to events, objects, and sensations through this affective bond.

According to Maturana (2004), a culture’s emotions define its character and the paths of its transformation throughout history. He also states that cultural change can only be understood through observation of the way its children are raised, since they learn to live with the emotional flow of their culture, assimilating it as something natural, according to the adults’ behaviors. In this path, language emerges through the affective—rational connections between the first learned signs and symbols and the structures of codified communication that follow.
Similarly, Bakhtin (2010) understands that communicative emotional–symbolic structures are built from earliest childhood through the mutual influence of objective dialogical references and subjective dialectical understandings. Language is an affective–rational material expression of emotions, actions, and thoughts where the known guides the discovery of the unknown. But how does a baby’s communicative expression grow?

Verden-Zöller (2004) states that in the womb, the baby perceives the sounds of its mother’s heartbeat patterns and its mother’s voice tones, which it will be able to recognize after birth. These are global perceptions, where all bodily senses and emotions are deeply intertwined. In the intrauterine environment, the baby is unable to perceive that its own body is separate from its mother’s. In the context of this connection, Winnicott (1982) and Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2004) agree that the pregnant mother’s conversations about and with the baby are essential to fetal development. According to Winnicott (1982), the vibratory, resonant, and emotional perceptions of intrauterine life result in particular experiences that configure each human being’s singularity. Winnicott states that before birth each person is already unique and has significant pleasurable and unpleasant experiences.

Early childhood emotions are deeply related to what Verden-Zöller (2004) calls elemental musicality, an essential epigenetic process that roots the development of human personality, sociability, and consciousness. After birth, the mother–figure must offer a harmonic–melodic environment where the newborn child’s basic rhythmic competence resonates with the caregiver. By recognizing intrauterine sounds in the social interaction in the external environment, the child develops the sensorimotor ability to reproduce sounds. It appears very early in the rhythmic and melodic characteristics of either giggles of satisfaction or sad crying, which, for Vygotsky (2007), are the roots of spoken language. According to Winnicott (1982), sad crying is based on a musical feature that can entertain the baby and later be turned into a melancholy melody that babies use to lull themselves. Winnicott considers sad crying as physically and psychologically healthy. He is much more concerned about the psychological development of silent babies than that of crying children since the latter fight bravely for the attention they have learned to deserve through experiencing love.

When the baby is born, it recognizes sound patterns and tones as the known referentials that enable it to discover the unknown. According to Bakhtin (2010), after birth, the child begins an experience of itself, originating in the recognition of new sensations, physically dissociated from its mother, and integrated with the external environment’s different stimuli and situations. The author explains that the baby’s personality is constructed anchored in the intimate people’s volitional–emotional tone that defines the child from the outside. In this regard, Maturana (2004) elucidates that the feeling of being loved is a condition of mental and physical health. For Verden-Zöller (2004), this emotional relationship is rooted in intimate bodily contact, in distinct touch situations that enable the babies to perceive their body’s limits and contours. For her, these experiences gradually situate the children in time and space and allow them to experience and reproduce movements and sounds based on the emotional contact with those responsible for them. Amid this development, in the rhythmic–social affective coordination of its sensorimotor skills, the child discovers sound imitation games, which are genetically linked to the development of spoken language.

According to Verden-Zöller (2004), children search for balance to understand their bodies and their environment. They play from low to high sounds, from soft to strong movements, from dark to light, and create colored dots, spirals, balls, and scratches in their graphic compositions. In terms of adult appreciation of children’s creations, Winnicott (1975), Bakhtin (2010), and Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2004) highlight the relevance of maternal delight as a necessity for the child’s self-confidence and emotional bases. Their ideas converge in the
understanding that a relationship based on love is essential to normal physiological and social development. So, recognizing children’s actions and products as beautiful and valid provides the support for their self-respect. The presence of familial elements in art objects is felt like a gesture of love. As Bakhtin (2010) affirms, an organism merely lives, and only in relation to maternal sympathy and compassion can it justify its existence to itself and find happiness.

Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2004) emphasize that love is directly related to the child’s bodily awareness that is rooted in individual consciousness and grows from bodily and eye contact with its caregivers. In this process, the maternal face is the baby’s first mirror, a human mirror that does not merely provide a reflected image but rather the emotions that give significance to the baby’s life. Bakhtin (2010) states that just as the child’s body is formed within the mother’s body, the children’s consciousness is built within the consciousness of the adult responsible for them. For Winnicott (1982) and Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2004), the child must experience the dignity of being respected as a socially active person. In this respect, the authors highlight the fundamental relevance of the corporal intimacy between the child and the maternal figure, through complete acceptance and trust. They understand that this kind of relationship requires playful interaction that will enable the child to play, which forms the basis of the pleasurable development of consciousness and autonomy through creativity.

The ability to play emerges from the connection between the objectivity of daily life and the child’s subjectivity. For Winnicott (1975), the trajectory that leads human beings to play begins when the child realizes that its mother is neither part of itself nor always at its disposal. This discovery of alterity results in the emergence of transitional objects configured as the first possession of the non-self. Through this elaboration of otherness, the child projects its own experiences onto the object and builds self-consciousness through an aesthetic–creative process. For Bakhtin (2010), since a human being cannot see itself as it sees others, in perceiving another person externally, the child begins to understand that the other also sees back. So, the child realizes its own singularity in the social plurality that delimits its individuality from the outside. Bakhtin concludes that every person needs the others’ aesthetic activism since being seen enables the creation of an externally unified personality. For Winnicott (1982), transitional objects provide the child security since they are deeply connected to inner emotions. The author explains that this affective support gives way to the child’s autonomy by developing the symbolic use that gives rise to play and leads to all cultural experiences.

From this path, it is possible to recognize Vygotsky’s (2007) assertion that creativity and imagination need opportunities to be developed all through life. The more a child can relate its acts to those of others the more it will imagine possibilities and create associations. When a baby has its sounds imitated by someone, it improves its ability to replicate the sensorimotor process of creation of the sounds. In this respect, Verden-Zöller (2004) states that through sound–body references, associated with playful experiences in the affection of intimate sociability, the child discovers the alterity of what it imitates, as something outside itself, and develops the original game that will make playing possible. In this process of making bodily, sonic, and environmental discoveries, through the aesthetic perception of otherness, the child develops the capacity to represent a situation through the symbolic use of its body and objects, in a fictional time and space parallel to the time and space of ordinary life’s operability. It enables the child to produce different rational and emotional perceptions through sympathizing with fictional situations elaborated by the property of theatricality.

Theatricality can be understood both in strict and broad senses. In the strict sense, it refers to the different stylistic compositions of theatrical art. In the latter, theatricality is a
human property that underpins the evolution of symbolic games and arts (Juguero 2019). It is characterized by a conscious superposition of two spatiotemporal perceptions that connect the operative actions of daily life to a symbolic gaze on the same elements. This means that one can see a child holding up a stick and understand that it represents an orchestra’s conductor. The same occurs in the simultaneous perception of the actor and the character in a professional play. So, theatricality arises from the impression of an otherness that transmits a symbolic meaning about something or someone present in ordinary daily life, resulting in a double perception of reality (Juguero 2019). Thus, neither a child playing a monster nor an actor playing a queen is an illusion or a lie. They don’t pretend to be their roles; they are building emotions and senses that aren’t subordinate but rather related to daily life in diverse expressive ways.

My understanding of broad theatricality’s double perception of reality is based on Ubersfeld’s (2010) idea of theatricality’s double enunciation, which occurs when someone or something is a referent of itself and of what it symbolizes. According to Ubersfeld (2010), fictional enjoyment requires distinguishing between the two planes without ordinary daily life impairing symbolic construction. In this regard, Féral (2002) comments that each person in the audience technically inscribes fiction into everyday reality through a complex conscious operation. The same occurs in symbolic games. According to Elkonin (2009), fictional semantization can happen even when there is no similarity in color, shape, or size with the represented objects, environments, or characters. The conscious simultaneous perception of the two parts enables the creation and appreciation of theatricality by the intentionality present in this kind of action. When there is no awareness concerning the double perception of reality, theatricality is diluted and actions are understood entirely differently. In the plural complexity of theatricality’s experiences, the human being expands the possibilities of its expressiveness and life’s understanding, based on creative, emotional relations.

Symbolic games and theatrical art

Theatricality is present in personal life from early childhood, and it is possible to find traces of it in remote human history. It is deeply interwoven into each historical–sociocultural context, being an intermittent, constant experience in human life. It is a source of creativity fundamental to all knowledge fields. As Winnicott (1975) and Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2004) state about the play, theatricality is essential to physical and emotional health. It is one of the expressions of what Winnicott (1975) calls potential space, an intermediate area that connects individual subjectivity to social objectivity. For him, this potential space emerges in the transitional object and enables the creativity and imagination that generate cultural experiences, like art, games, dreams, and religion. In terms of all the manifestations of potential space, what differentiates symbolic art and symbolic games is their theatricality, which is based on awareness of the double perception of reality (Juguero 2019). It must be noted that awareness about the double perception of reality by no means defines awareness about the signs and symbols of subliminal pedagogies. Through emotional engagement, theatricality may either naturalize unconscious cultural constructions or reveal contradictions that enable critical thought.

Symbolic games and theatrical art have a common origin, but they are different activities, either in their creation or in enjoyment. Theatricality is essential to understanding how they differ, even if we can recognize a continuum gradation between them. According to Féral (2002), theatricality can be experienced from inside or outside. Appreciators experience theatricality externally through the interiority of their consciousness. Performing
people experience theatricality internally since they are relocated from their daily space by themselves and by the audience or the other players. They also occupy the external territory relating to the symbolized environment.

According to Bakhtin (2010), when children play, they are personally connected to that act and intend to have joy through different creative experiences. As Winnicott (1975) and Elkonin (2009) state, it is how they deal with perceptions and emotions about life subjectively and objectively. Concerning artistic works, they are created through an appreciative projection of a depersonalized target audience and result in independent aesthetic objects, even if the creators semanticize their own bodies or histories and are not aware of their axiological choices. Thus, symbolic games have the main focus in their internal relation, and theatrical art in the external one. Concerning games, children’s perceptions deal with their inner feelings and values and emerge through externalized internal theatricality. When they enjoy artistic objects, they perceive outer referentials that will dialogue with their own ones, creating new connections between the known and the unknown through an internalized external theatricality.

In symbolic games, each instance of play is spontaneous and is not a commitment to further or previous activities, presenting intimate personal and social elaborations of each children’s group (Verden-Zöller 2004; Elkonin 2009). Bakhtin (2010) states that playing children do not establish an aesthetic relationship with their own game because they experience it from within, and the axiological category of otherness is indispensable for establishing any aesthetic forms. The child remains subjectively glued in a performance that is not semantically independent and is not directed at any audience. On the other hand, theatrical art is focused on external appreciation, resulting from aesthetic and axiological choices, even if the author is not aware of these operations. Theater brings the contradiction of rendering organic something that has been carefully planned, conquering spontaneity in the movements of a body that consciously defines its tensions and oppositions.

When playing characters and situations, both children and professional actors, by using their bodies or handling puppets, represent feelings and thoughts rooted in the perception of a semantic otherness. Even if they play the role of themselves or of real people, the double perception of reality results in a symbolic composition. Elkonin (2009) ratifies Vygotsky’s perception that, in a symbolic game, a child may cry as a patient while rejoicing as a participant. In the same direction, Sutton-Smith (2017) refers to Schechner’s theory of performance, which considers that performative acting constitutes a meta-action since it relates to itself in a symbolic situation. Addressing professional theater, De Marinis (2005) stresses the substantial difference between theatrical emotions and daily personal ones. As Bakhtin (2010) explains, there is no complete identification between the creator and their creation, but an aesthetic pleasure emerging from their consciousness of their fictional alterity. In this sense, the emotional adherence of acting occurs precisely in its symbolic specificity and not through some mental confusion that would make someone feel the character’s emotions as if they were the person’s own. This emotional and axiological differentiation allows for the diverse affective-rational maturations that occur in symbolic games and theatrical art.

Theatricality is deeply rooted in the complexity of life and operates from the connections between emotions, senses, perceptions, and rationality. This kind of activity does not accept the fragmenting of life, separating mind from body, pleasure from discipline, or reason from emotion, as Brecht (1967) remarks. Its disciplined pleasure involves collaboration since it requires personal and social engagement in the double perception of reality. In this regard, Elkonin (2009) explains that children, in protagonized games, develop rigid rules and are concerned with following them. Actors also need high concentration when playing their roles. Both
children and actors reveal this state of concentration through their mentally and physically constructed bodily and vocal expressions, even if following different principles. In regards to children’s artistic appreciation, the development of this disciplined pleasure is indispensable for the child’s aesthetic enjoyment and cannot be established by imposition but rather by cooperation. This is an essential issue in children’s education. In our patriarchal culture, fun and creativity are generally understood as the opposite of seriousness and discipline. This thinking hinders both the development of creativity in content learning situations and the serenity that seriousness and discipline provide for aesthetic enjoyment and creation.

Symbolic play and artistic enjoyment are highly complementary for the experiences of children but operate differently in their perceptions. In symbolic play, as the studies of Winnicott (1982), Bettelheim (2012), and Vygotsky (2007) demonstrate, when a child plays, their awareness of their playful status is based on internal intentionality. In their games, children create situations and ludic associations through subjective and objective stimuli rooted in that which they need to emotionally and rationally investigate. Thus, even the most fantastic creations are familiar to the child. When playing, children express their emotions and thoughts by their movements, gestures, sounds, images, and relations with people and the environment. Through their choices they are actively positioned in the collaborations and conflicts of each context. Elkonin (2009) states that in the symbolic play, children distance themselves from and penetrate reality simultaneously. In this way, they can prescind certain aspects while deepening others through a symbolic synthesis that provides a mental configuration of meaningful pictures that allow different assimilations, fundamental to their maturation. When playing, children's strong emotional–rational bond with creativity is directly subordinated to deep subjective connections. They experience various forms of identification with other people and the environment, helping them to better understand and handle emotions towards them, authentically and autonomously. It is the child’s way of understanding the world better.

When someone else proposes the play, the double perception of reality needs to be designed through a ludic posture that invites the child to play on recognizing the theatricality. In this regard, Elkonin (2009) points out that Piaget has demonstrated the importance of cooperation between children to form the symbolic games’ operative structures. Elkonin (2009), Bakhtin (2010), and Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2004) remark that collaboration among children arises from the initial partnership between the young child and the surrounding adults.

The recognition of theatricality is even more complex in terms of theatrical appreciation because the child must understand the status of the situation and handle the distinct signs present in the play. This may occur from an early age, but it does not always happen and depends on various factors. If a child, especially a very young one, understands a fictional act as a daily reality, it will not be realistic explanations that will allow it to change its mind. On the other hand, children generally enjoy saying that a character is a daily figure, even if they are aware of theatricality. In watching theatrical plays, children experience an aesthetic enjoyment presented by references from the outside, offering unexpected relationships, perceptions, emotions, and information. Children need to actively connect these signs with their previous experiences and their cultural capital (Bourdieu 1989). This means that their cultural background in terms of how they handle different aesthetic perceptions will result in diverse affective, perceptual, and intellectual associations.

When seeing a theatrical play, each moment is a discovery that children must be a partner of, since without their engagement, it is impossible to establish theatricality. The child can emotionally identify itself, on different levels, with the scene’s creations, building
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relationships and particular understandings that may be further assessed in its symbolic games through their creative memory. This emotional engagement is due to the cathartic role of art, as first mentioned by Aristotle (1987), and is present in all theatrical compositions, according to Ubersfeld (2010). Aesthetic pleasure allows certain emotions to be psychically elaborated because they are experienced through artistic alterity. For Aristotle (1987), this pleasure comes from recognizing something represented, enabling the creation of different relationships; this would not happen if the person was unable to identify any reference other than the fictionality itself. Even abstract artworks refer to the emotions, sensations, and situations present in the daily operation of life and give rise to distinct subjective and objective elaborations. As Bakhtin (2010) warns, artistic creations can only live in contact with their context and need an external consciousness that recognizes the aesthetic object independently but as intertwined in the presently stable material world. Thus, through the aesthetic object’s mediation, the dialogical relationship between the creator and the appraiser occurs.

Theatrical communicative specificity

A theatrical creation is a pluriperceptive affective–rational artistic discourse materialized by the configuration of a complex set of elements composed of distinct correlated factors. This means that a play’s senses are constructed from all the scenes’ elements connected to the exterior ones in each context. From the ideas of Ubersfeld (2010), Bakhtin (2010), and De Marinis (2005), I propose to understand theatrical structure through the intersection of the pragmatic, enunciative setting, and interpretative planes.

The pragmatic plane concerns the simultaneous and multifactorial perception of daily life and artistic elements, both by theatricality’s double perception of reality and the external environment where the scene happens. It is related to conviviality and ephemerality, as highlighted by De Marinis (2005). Theater performances require a situation of coexistence between artists and the audience surrendering to the present moment. In each new event, the performance needs to be redone and depends largely on the audience’s active contribution, being related to inter- and intrapersonal relationships.

In terms of the interpersonal aspects, all artistic and technical teams, in addition to the people who watch the play, must contribute. Children in the audience must thus understand that their cooperation is necessary for the event since the recognition of the double perception of reality is a collaborative action that allows theatricality to be established. The more integrated an audience is in a theatrical event, the more intense the unique experience of that performance. One relevant indicator of this integration is the audience’s sound quality. In the case of children, they often react bodily and sonorously to what they are seeing. On the other hand, a good level of silence in a children’s audience usually indicates a deep and active connection to the scene. Possibilities for involvement and dispersion can occur to varying degrees. They depend on various factors. This connection is also related to the intrapersonal aspect. Individual appreciation is intertwined with social appreciation since the child observes itself in comparison with other people. Thus, the child notices when it gets scared while other people are having fun, or the child may join in a chorus of roaring laughter. In perceiving its own personal reactions, the child improves its awareness about itself and perceives diverse viewpoints.

The pragmatic plane is also linked to the development of aesthetic comprehension since it is necessary to understand each available element’s status. For example, a chair in the scene may be a queen’s throne, but a chair in the audience or the light reflectors’ structure is not
symbolically semanticized and should be perceived from an everyday perspective. This relation to daily life also has to do with the material conditions of communication. Thus, it encompasses reflections on both the artistic propositions in each space’s dialogical characteristics and the cultural policies that enable production.

The enunciative setting plan is composed at the confluence of all aesthetic signs. It is constituted by the sum of the scenographic elements (scenarios, props, masks, costumes, lighting, makeup, puppets), performative elements (movements, gradations of time and energy, emotional tones, proprioceptive dynamics, gestural and facial expressions), sound elements (soundtrack, sound design, intonation, noise, silence), and linguistic features (speech lines, poems, lyrics), among other possibilities such as various audiovisual projections. Some of these elements may be absent, like in non-verbal plays, street plays without lights, or many other kinds of creations. The signs are perceived as engaged through multiple heterogeneous constructions. Ubersfeld (2010), adapting Jakobson’s linguistic ideas, refers to paradigmatic and syntagmatic compositions, in relation to the perception of simultaneous signs that change asynchronously in the course of a scene. In a theatrical piece, elements may appear, change, and disappear independently in terms of specific materialization but in a dependent way in relation to the complex composition of senses and perceptions. Each structure results in different discursive genres depending on the way actions are linked in terms of design of movements, images, sounds, and texts in the spatiotemporal rhythmic nuances. This can be fabular dramaturgy, presenting a plot, or intra-associative dramaturgy, without a central story, with multiple nuances of hybrid compositions between these extremes (Juguero 2019).

The enunciative setting plane is related to body and sound codifications and each culture’s symbolic representations. It relates to the representation of people and cultural diversity through choices made in terms of senses and signs proposed by each artistic work. In this plane, systems of vectorization, as identified by Pavis (2010), are materialized. Pavis explains that staging directs possibilities in terms of perceptions and senses through vectors of the complex transversally integrated signs of the dramaturgical composition. The direction of vectorizations present in different plays emphatically indicates whether what is being shown is laughable, laudable, frightening, lovely, tender, or deplorable. Only consciousness and critical thinking can recognize these paths and, if necessary, point in another direction.

Finally, the interpretative plan refers to possible appreciative paths, dialogically composed when the intentions of creation meet the audience’s references through aesthetic object mediation (Bakhtin 2010). This affective–rational pluriperceptive interpretation may result in different emotional, rational, and sensitive perceptions, connected or not with discursive descriptions.

According to Bakhtin (2010), artistic creation follows the author’s unique axiological presence in the world. However, the author’s intentions aren’t the only factors that determine the senses of an artistic work since creation proposes signs that must be interpreted. The author’s choices indicate affective and cognitive paths of perception and understanding that cannot determine the exact final meaning but guide the construction of possible senses through its internal vectorizations (Pavis 2010). The development of the appreciators’ senses is deeply rooted in the feelings, values, and information embraced by their own axiological foundations and contextual situations.

In this regard, Bakhtin (2010) argues that it is necessary to understand the context in which the creative act is concretized. The author points out that it is not possible for objective aesthetic criteria to be recognized through a single universal meaning. Only through intuitive conviction, whether in the act of creation or appreciation, can one perceive particular implications since discursive emotional and axiological constitutions are distinct in
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different cultures. As Giroux (1988) and Brecht (1967) suggest, all artistic productions reveal political–pedagogical characteristics. Bakhtin (2010) emphasizes that an artistic creation will never be neutral since the structure of its senses and values shows the authorial definition of an immanent creative logic that is not always consciously recognized by its creator. These discourses provide values and perceptions that are emotionally absorbed and that are integrated with the natural desire for acceptance into sociability.

Due to the emotional–axiological involvement of aesthetic formulations, different theatrical plays result in varying degrees of affective–rational persuasion, according to the levels of identification of the appreciator with the plurality of personal affective–cognitive references and contextual socioemotional factors. In this composition, the relationship between art and society is complex. Just as some works ratify naturalized cultural notions, others highlight society’s contradictions or create new naturalized perceptions. In regards to childhood, the creator’s responsibility is big since ludic signs are relevant in children’s emotional and axiological formation.

Because of this, I propose that creators of theater for children assume the educator’s dialogical position, as required by Freire (2016), by trying to think in the manner of the target audience. This position should not focus on alterity by superior benevolence, considering other people as objects rather than as subjects in the process. It is rooted in a dialogue honestly interested in learning in otherness, recognizing the wisdom emanating from different people. This idea forms the basis of my understanding of children’s ludic logic (Juguero 2019) to establish dialogical artistic works for children.

Children’s ludic logic

The idea of children’s ludic logic is rooted in a deep desire to understand the specificities of children’s logic to create dia-logic theatrical plays. In this regard, Vygotsky (2007), Piaget (2007), Winnicott (1975), Bakhtin (2010), and Verden-Zöller (2004) converge in their understanding that children’s development progresses in a dialectical relationship between the social environment and personal biological maturation. They also recognize that sociocultural and personal particularities result in each child’s unique developmental path in terms of these universal aspects. According to Winnicott (1982), the human nature of every individual is essentially similar, despite hereditary factors. All particularities may be observed in a typical development process from early childhood to adult independence. This means that diverse sociocultural and personal realities may be focused through the same root by different perspectives.

Understanding children’s ludic logic aims to create communicative artistic objects where children feel encouraged to interact, recognizing that the operations required are familiar to their senses, perceptions, and thoughts. According to each work, this aesthetic dialogue may be held through different experiences, from the internal activity of quietly watching a play to bodily engagement with a scene. It is worth noting that as artistic works for children are mostly created and discursively evaluated by adults, they often impose their views on children, as Bettelheim (2012) has warned. It is essential to be aware of this point in investigating children’s communicative structures without succumbing to naïve proposals intended to give children a voice by means of adults’ operative processes. This can occur when a child is asked to evaluate an experience by objective questions or watch a play full of references alien to those they know. On this topic, Bettelheim (2012) points out that excessive realism is contrary to the child’s intimate perceptions since the child’s most relevant experiences are subconscious and should remain so until they reach a more mature age to understand them.
better. He considers that children are not yet mature enough to handle certain kinds of information. They need to be protected and to feel that their needs are welcome.

Childhood is a time when the world is perceived in a wholly integrated way, articulated through a deep engagement between subjectivity and objectivity. According to Winnicott (1982), children articulate feelings, ideas, arousal of the body, and instinctive impulses inseparably. For young children, the perceptive, sensory, emotional, and cognitive elements of communicative acts are much more closely associated than for adults. For the latter, thinking operates based on abstractions aware of its own operations, as Vygotsky (2007) states. Children’s thoughts do not reflect on thinking processes. They are motivated by numerous emotional, sensory, cognitive, and perceptive stimuli, made up of synthetic progressions, always from the known to the unknown. For example, if a child does not understand a word as a whole, it selects the fragment it understands and creates meaning based on this recognizable sense. Thus, children play with words and show great pleasure in making progressive associations.

Amid the socioemotional environment, children’s thinking and language are developed intertwined with the experiences of life. According to Piaget (2007), at the beginning of communication, the child gradually recognizes that its sounds are related to communication. Thus pre-verbal language appears as sounds without specific meanings. From this first oral relationship, children gradually learn words that emerge from a pre-intellectual stage. All perceptions are inseparably assimilated and are progressively referred to in smaller pluriperceptive frames. Piaget (2007) agrees with Vygotsky in the understanding that at this level, the child’s thinking is insensitive to contradiction and functions through syncretism and overlap. In this progressive articulation, Vygotsky (2007) explains that the oral aspect of language evolves from fragment to whole, while semantically, it begins as a whole and slowly breaks down into parts. This results in the gradual move toward abstract thought, created through an awareness of each fragment and through understanding the distinct forms of combination. These combinations are made by pluriperceptive actions where the objective manifestation of subjectivity evolves along with the subjectivation of the objectivity, in a dialectical operation built along a dialogical process (Bakhtin 2010). This aligns with Winnicott’s (1982) perception that the child lives simultaneously in the socially shared world and in its own imaginative world, in which it experiences sensations and feelings intensely.

In this process, Winnicott (1982) recognizes the gradual construction of self-awareness and personality linked to distinct imaginative experiences composed of fantasy and play operations. In fantasy, the child mixes oneiric situations with everyday reality without realizing their distinction. It is characterized by unintentional processes that are unaware of their imaginative status. On the other hand, in play, the child actively elaborates on ludic situations conscious of the creative status. Generally, in sensorimotor and intellectual non-fictional games, children play with words, music, multiple associations, and bodily-cognitive challenges. In symbolic games, theatricality’s *double perception of reality* is essential to develop awareness about the difference between fantasy and reality.

Winnicott (1982) states that the child gradually comes to understand that the imaginary and the everyday worlds, though intimately related, do not correspond to one another. It is not a linear process. From an early age, babies play symbolically, clearly aware of their activities’ playful status, by their integrated expressions. Accordingly, Sutton-Smith (2017) asserts that children know they are not manipulating the reality of ordinary everyday actions but rather their thoughts on that reality, distinguishing their playful self from their typical self. Awareness about the operations that underlie these relationships is gradually built. In
this regard, Elkonin (2009) states that children’s understanding of their ludic roles changes through their development. Although children never identify themselves with the characters they play, there is no conscious notion of the difference between themselves and their roles in early childhood. Only at around the age of five do children clearly show awareness of this difference, creating critical and more codified interpretations. In this construct, the relationships between theatricality and fantasy are variable and permeable. A young child may be in the theater, for example, aware of the double perception of the reality and yet fantasizing, fervently believing that a doll addresses it even while seeing the manipulation.

Through play’s symbology, the child relates to the world, discovering and constructing different meanings and understanding, and actions and sensations, objectively and subjectively. Thus, play is how it faces what is happening in everyday reality, enabling the development of confidence. The play allows the child to take action on what it lives and what it feels, understanding other viewpoints, and experiencing them researching movements, sounds, and postures. As Vygotsky (2007), Piaget (2007), Winnicott (1975), Bakhtin (2010), Verden-Zöller (2004), and Sutton-Smith (2017) state, children understand the world through their play. Thus, children’s ludic logic is constituted by the complexity that is engaged in emotion, perception, sensoriality, cognition, corporeality, and musicality. These are embedded in each child’s social and contextual relations.

In this context, artistic discourses play an essential role, and theater has an even deeper relevance since in it children recognize the same pluriperceptive convivial structures of their games. Emotionally, according to Bettelheim (2012), the impersonality of artistic stories allows the child to feel safe in resolving inner questions. Through subliminal perceptions, children find ways to resolve their dilemmas actively. Understanding children’s ludic logic aims to enable the creation of aesthetic dialogues based on love and respect for the child’s universe.

**Searching for a dialogical theater for children**

Artistic manifestations integrate, build, and modify society in a relevant way. This is not to say that they determine behaviors and values in isolation. Instead, they are part of a complex social network and act effectively in the constitution of subliminal pedagogies that serve different interests through a complex heterogeneous affective–rational pluriperceptive system.

Artistic enjoyment is a fundamental aspect of children’s development, involving emotional, subjective, perceptive, cognitive, reflexive, and axiological elements. The various aesthetic objects demonstrate to the child which groups it should identify with and the places it can occupy in the world. For this reason, lack of aesthetic formation is a cultural way of maintaining social exploitation and subordination. On the other hand, access to different aesthetic compositions is a powerful means of promoting the perception of transformation and of recognizing multiple possibilities.

Children’s bonds with their culture are always affective and make up the emotional bases that link them to their family and social groups. From the beginning of life, babies learn to have a cultural attachment to the adults responsible for them, by whom they are emotionally, cognitively, perceptually, and axiologically influenced. Children’s choices are thus always based on what is presented to them, especially on the affective–axiological way in which it is made. On the other hand, children have a particular affective–rational pluriperceptive way of communicating with the world. Understanding children’s ludic logic is fundamental to developing dia-logic theater plays for children. This process requires the authors’ emotional engagement, sensibility, technical tools, and scientific rigor in a responsible process that needs to be as enjoyable as the final assembly.
Bakhtin (2010) demands authors’ responsibility by being conscious of their art objects’ axiological meanings, which will enable the appreciator’s questions. He states that the construction of meaning is only possible if one feels able to find some answer by recognizing a question. Concerning childhood, Bettelheim (2012) labels as *intellectual defeat* the feeling that children experience when adults want them to understand concrete explanations at odds with their thinking. Of course, in many artistic works, gaps in understanding can arouse children’s curiosity and research. Indeed, art is fundamental to expanding references and perceptions by presenting cognitive and perceptual challenges. However, if communication is not based on recognizable signs, the feeling of impotence may disconnect the child from the theatrical proposal.

From the known to the unknown, how is it possible to develop pieces that make children feel they belong to that universe, secure in being able to have fun and amplify their perceptions of the world? How to assume a responsible stance on the emotional and axiological values presented for children, always remembering that their emotional attachment provides naturalization of the cultural values on which perceptions, desires, feelings, and actions are based?

It is essential to provide familiar elements in artistic vectorizations to establish *collaborative communication* with the child through associations and pluriperceptive connections. Following Freire (2016), these elements are the bases that provide the sense of security needed to meet new challenges. In terms of dramaturgical structure, an effective way to investigate children’s *ludic logic* is to approach children’s play. This means neither imitating nor reproducing the games but examining their foundations. To put games into the scene is an option, but this will not guarantee a good dramaturgical result. The games’ internal structure should provide the dialogic construction of the dramaturgy, and not an explicit revelation of the procedure. It embraces bodily, vocal, musical, and imagistic expressions as well as themes and narrative constructions. These are the known elements that will lead to the unknown. In this sense, Verden-Zöller’s (2004) work contributes significantly to recognizing multiple paths for experimentation. Her ideas about elemental musicality and rhythmic–corporeal experimentation are recognized in lullabies, rhymed poems, tongue twisters, cirandas, body challenges, and so on. She also emphasizes the search for balance between extremes, spatial investigative displacements, and children’s graphic compositions.

When inspired by the structures of play, artistic creation is constructed from a pluriperceptive perspective where musicality, corporeality, and the elements of the *enunciative setting plane* are deeply integrated through the composition of rhythmic spatiotemporal actions. The linguistic text may be present and relevant, but words will not subordinate other signs. The investigation of creative scenes may reveal expressions different from everyday hegemonic positions. Thus, children can recognize *status quo* patterns as one expression and not a model to be followed by validating various cultural and ethnic movements, sounds, images, and behaviors. The scene’s diversity may promote children’s investigative curiosity about their possibilities and freedom to discover their personal expressions.

All these aesthetic elements may build the themes of theatrical play without the necessity of objectively addressing them. The central question is less ‘what’ than ‘how’ to focus on each issue appropriately for children. Children’s plots in games are always a good source of inspiration for artistic dialogues addressing the different stages of children’s *ludic logic*. It is significant that I refer to structure and not to the symbolic games’ axiological approach since children reproduce signs and values they learn from their cultural environment. The idea is to investigate the game’s systems to develop aesthetic dialogical references where the child feels valued and able to face new possibilities.
Concerning the presence of plot in children's symbolic games, Elkonin (2009) states that in the child's development, play begins without argument, based on free associations. So, in theater for babies, sensory, bodily experimentation and the perception of affectively harmonized actions and sounds communicate more than long narratives. In this context, small scenes based on simple plots, or even compositions without a specific story, may present multiple possibilities for sensory and perceptual designs suitable for appreciation by babies. For older children, their games' plots are organized in short episodes until they become methodically determined arguments. Elkonin (2009) also states that action gradually becomes synthetic and concise. This dialectical process results in many different game structures based on various ludic constructions. So, the artistic process may be diversely inspired and not follow games as models or rules.

Among various alternatives, it is also possible to create transversal dramaturgies, targeting a broad spectrum of appreciative projection. Thus, some proposals may encompass children from various age groups in a malleable process that allows for different ways of engaging, from the most artisanal handcraft to modern technological resources and possible combinations. It is important not to idealize or categorically reject the predominant cultural manifestations in the different children's realities, presenting new references that can be integrated into their repertoire and contribute to their aesthetic formation. This is a fundamental aspect since children's ties with their culture are always affective and make up the emotional basis that binds them to the family and social groups in which they are integrated. To condemn or belittle a cultural manifestation that the child appreciates results in a sense that the group into which it is affectionately integrated is devalued or held in contempt.

Significantly, identity formation is a dynamic process in identity development. Distinct identities are composed of multiple references to which people have access. The cultural plurality of current life constitutes the complexity of children's identity. Thus, instead of perceiving folk compositions as in opposition to any other form of expression, it is relevant to consider that they may broaden children's affective bonds with their own country. Also, cultural specificities do not exclude foreign audiences but rather enable the perception of different expressive forms. Especially in international situations where immigrant children coexist with local children, diverse cultural representations are essential to building fair opportunities for emotional development.

Children from different social groups and family configurations must feel they can positively identify with the scene's situations and characters. This is even more relevant for children from ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and family groups that have been historically excluded or stigmatized in widely spread industrialized creations. In addition, artistic volitional–emotional representations of childhood must avoid stereotypes since they collaborate to build children's understanding of themselves.

Awareness that children's flourishing is connected to axiological elaborations that may promote cultural empowerment and transformation through naturalized emotional bonds is essential. Theatrical pieces can affectively contribute to society's maturation through a process that enhances children's self-confidence and that values human and cultural diversity. These responsible vectorizations are intrinsic to the aesthetic object and dialogue through its artistic composition and are not tools that subordinate art to goals external to its specificity.

This proposal is distant from both the intention of transforming the world abruptly and the belief that it is impossible to modify it. Theatricality is part of a social gear in permanent construction, and theatrical plays are powerful discursive constructions. These symbolic utterances constitute the foundations of different cultural structures, rooted in emotional and axiological factors.
There are several ways to create theatrical plays for children, and my intention is not to establish a method or creative models. My goal is to present channels for reflection that encourage the creation of dramaturgies that find dialogical relationships with children by enhancing imagination and perceptions about the world, rooted in responsible proposals that surprise, instigate, stimulate, amuse, and challenge the senses and thoughts through a path of love.

References