

**FROM PSYCHO-PEDAGOGICAL STUDIES TO FREE-EXPRESSION:
STORIES RELATING ART AND EDUCATION IN BRAZIL IN FOUR ACTS**

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ABSTRACT

The association between art, education and freedom takes place in speeches, discussions and Brazilian artistic and educational practices, with constant updates, from the early years of the twentieth century onwards, thus becoming part of the imagery about art and education. Such a concept was driven by psycho-pedagogical studies and the interest of artists, critics and educators in the «spontaneous» or «free» expression recognized in the graphic and plastic productions by children, associated with two other groups, the «primitive» and the «crazy».

KEY WORDS

Art; Education; Stories; Memory.



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From Psycho-Pedagogical Studies to Free-Expression: Stories Relating Art and Education in Brazil in Four Acts

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It is said that pedagogy is the art of forging the souls of our children, the art of developing their knowledge, their speeches, their values, their feelings. It is therefore and inevitably, a battlefield in which submission of powers and the release of powers do not stop the conflict.

Georges Didi-Huberman, 2009

1ST ACT

O Laboratório de Pedagogia Experimental [The Experimental Pedagogy Laboratory] is the title of a collection of essays derived from research conducted in 1914 during the course of Psychological Technique, offered by Ugo Pizolli in the Department of Anthropology and Educational Psychology at the Escola Normal de São Paulo [São Paulo Normal School], a symbol of republican Brazil, inaugurated in 1894 (Monarcha, 1997; Tanuri, 1994; Nagle, 2009).

¹ Interest recognized by the volume of theoretical and artistic productions on the subject from the mid-19th and 20th centuries, evolving in a certain appreciation which did not imply a change in the character of exceptionality associated with these categories, maintained as pariahs precisely for being on the margin of artistic-cultural canons the landmark to its definition, as well as being responsible for the magnetism that drove such an interest (Gombrich, 2002; Didi-Huberman, 1995).



Italian physician and associate professor in Experimental Psychology Ugo Pizolli arrived in São Paulo in May 1914 at the invitation of Oscar Thompson, director of the São Paulo Normal School, with the mission of updating and streamlining the psycho-pedagogical research in this institution. For Thompson, the state government of São Paulo had understood «the advisability of extending the theoretical and practical pedagogy» to open spaces for studies on the psychology applied to education (Thompson, 1914, p. 17-18). Such an attitude contributed to the introduction of the São Paulo Normal School into the modern educational outlook, following the external models, which together valued the «scientific study» of childhood and the «thorough examination of all children's energies» (Thompson, 1914, p. 17-18).

Pizolli's arrival in Brazil was announced by an article published on March 7, 1914, in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*. The article was signed by Adalgiso Pereira, professor at the São Paulo Normal School and the author of «Notas sobre o graphismo infantil» [Notes on child graphics], one of the essays in *O Laboratório de Pedagogia Experimental*. This text presented his research on how the «figurative representation» was initiated and developed in «children's minds» (Pereira, 1914, p.40-41). For the author, this research would be of psychological and didactic importance. Psychological, because children's graphics would be a source of information on the «state of culture, value, an extension of the imaginary heritage of the child» (Pereira, 1914, p.40-41). It would be didactic, because it enabled teachers to acknowledge from stage one the «gaps and weaknesses» of their students (Pereira, 1914, p.40-41). Children of four to seven years of age were chosen for these studies. Isolated, they were instructed to draw «the man, the house, the animal, the plant» (Pereira, 1914, p.40-41). This was the only command given. After completing their drawings, they were questioned about them and their responses recorded as data for subsequent analysis of the representations.

Pereira enters his research in a context of ongoing studies on children's graphics since the mid-nineteenth century, establishing differences in references to James Sully, Conrado Ricci, Paula Lombroso and Earl Barnes, among others, on comparative studies of «children's art with the early Egyptians, the Chaldeans and even with the wildlife of current days» (Pereira, 1914, p.40). In common they had the «children's graphic language» as a «perennial source of psychological investigations» (Pereira, 1914, p.40). Nevertheless, for this teacher, while they went through «this phase of fragmentary elaboration», there was no harm in facing the «graphics upon equally interesting aspects



which do not cease to bring their small contribution to the great chapter of child psychology» (Pereira, 1914, pp. 39-41).

2ND ACT

Along with this interest and echo, children's graphic and plastic production gains relevance among artists, critics and art historians,² especially among those immersed in the modernist avant-garde movements. It was an intermittent theme in relation to the «primitive» and the «alienated», manifestations of «the soul and thought cataclysms» («Crianças-artistas», 1933, p. 29) since time immemorial and of art in its origin, and as such being true revelations.

The Romantic Movement is mentioned by Jonathan Fineberg (1995) as a possible source of such interest. It would leave four notions associated with childhood, decisive for the fostering process of children's graphic and plastic production:

[F]irst, a more direct access to artistic inspiration; second, the ability to see things objectively [...] third, an ability to see beyond appearances to the 'truth' of things, a notion illustrated in the adage 'out of the mouths of babes'; fourth and finally, a privileged view into the mysteries of life (Fineberg, 1995, p. 119).

According to an article published by Paul Klee in the journal *Die Alpen* in 1912 (as cited in Werckmeister, 1977, p. 138), the «art origins» could be found in an ethnographic museum or at home in a child's room. The readers were warned to hold their laughter: «children can do it too» (as cited in Werckmeister, 1977), and it would not be devastating for art, quite the opposite. The fewer instructions they received, the more «art» could be offered, a parallel phenomenon to

2 For example, Aby Warburg, recreated Karl Lamprecht's research in 1895, with the intention of observing the children's representation of lightning. The shape of the «snake-lightning of Hopi mythology» would emerge. Among fourteen drawings, two had the «indestructible symbol [...] the snake with a tongue-shaped arrow». According to Didi-Huberman, that reference would indicate the difference of Warburg's studies. He «understood the paradox implied by the form of appearance of that same 'primitivism': minor (two in fourteen drawings), impure and fragile, that is, symptomatic. Not the archetypal reflection of a phylogenetic source as Lamprecht desired, but one of the complex web of tangled times, 'indestructible symbols' and distortion resulting from the history, in the simple dynamic line of a snake-lightning shape drawn by a child's hand» (Didi-Huberman, 2002, pp. 222-223).



the drawings of the insane. All that deserved a very close attention in order to promote an effective remodelling of art.³

In 1930, in the seventh issue of its magazine *Documents*, Georges Bataille (as cited in Didi-Huberman, 1995, p. 257) broadened the theoretical ideas on Georges Luquet's body of work, *L'art primitif*, also published in 1930. Amid what was considered a negative review of Luquet's analysis, Didi-Huberman indicates Bataille's subtle fascination with one of the categories defined in that book, the «intellectual realism», integrated by the dialectical relationship between «images and language». The «highly transgressive figures—more than regressive—that 'children drew [on church walls]», would demonstrate a certain preference for «forms susceptible to various interpretations, having the value of a pun» (Bataille as cited in Didi-Huberman, 1995, p. 257).

In 1933, *Minotaure* magazine published the graffiti photographed by Brassai during his wanderings through the streets of Paris in 1920. These images are accompanied by «Du mur des cavernes au mur des usines» [From cave wall to factory wall]—a text written by Brassai about the power of these manifestations, «the frenzy of the unconsciousness» (Brassai, 1933). There, only «two steps away from the Opera», the walls would reveal «similar signs to those of the caves of the Dordogne, and the valley of the Nile or the Euphrates», signs drawn by the same anxiety that carved a «chaotic world of cave paintings». Expressions derived from the writing and mythology elements.

In Brazil, Flávio de Carvalho, modernist artist, an avid reader of Nietzsche, interested in psychoanalysis and accustomed to surrealism, organized that same year (1933), along with the psychiatrist Osório César, the *Mês das Crianças e dos Loucos* [Month of the Children and the Insane] or *Mês dos Alienados e das Crianças* [Month of the Alienated and the Children]. This event occurred during the months of August, September and October in the Clube dos Artistas Modernos, or CAM [Modern Artists' Club] in the city of São Paulo. Doctors conducted conferences on the relationship between art, psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry, and graphic and plastic productions made by interns from the psy-

3 «[...] there are still primordial origins of art, as you would rather find them in the ethnographic museum or at home in the nursery (don't laugh, reader), children can do it too, and that is by no means devastating for the most recent tendencies, but there is positive wisdom in this fact. The more helpless these children are, the more instructive art they offer; for already here there is corruption: if children start to absorb developed works of art or even to emulate them. Parallel phenomena are the drawings of the insane, and thus madness is no appropriate invective either. In truth all this is to be taken much more seriously, if the art of today is to be reformed [...].»

chiatric hospital Juqueri and by children were exhibited. In one of the conferences, Pedro de Alcântara advocated the teaching of drawing at school as a natural means of expression and, quoting Marcel Brauschvig's work, stressed the importance of children's artwork found randomly on fences and walls of the city as «spontaneity at its peak, natural, naive», free of «disturbing influences» which cause «expressive misrepresentations» (Alcântara, 1933). Pedro de Alcântara included projections of drawings on fences and walls from the streets of São Paulo as a visual complement to his speech. This lecture was then entitled «Ensaio de Psychologia e de Pedagogia do Desenho Infantil» [Psychological and Pedagogical Essay on Children's Drawing], published in *Rumo* magazine, one of the journals that opened space to this event, as well as the newspapers *Correio de São Paulo*, *Diário da Noite* and *Estado de São Paulo*.

The same magazine *Rumo* published «Crianças-artistas, doidos-artistas» [Child artists, crazy-artists], an anonymous article which presented the exhibition of drawings by «the alienated and the children» as a «beautiful» approach because it met «the two classes of people living in the most complete freedom» (1933, p. 29). After this laudatory introduction, the conferences to be held in this event were mentioned, and their topics articulated the approach between art, psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, such as, «Interpretação dos desenhos de crianças e seu valor pedagógico» [Interpretation of children's drawings and their pedagogical value], «Psychanalyse dos desenhos dos Psychopatas» [Psychoanalysis of the drawings of psychopaths] and «Arte e psiquiatria através dos tempos» [Art and psychiatry through the ages]. Flávio de Carvalho's excerpts on the value of the drawings by the children and by the crazy concluded the article that highlighted the «great honour» of this exhibition for being «absolutely spontaneous» and for a «complete lack of interest in the rigid forms of the academy» («Crianças-Artistas», 1933). That was Flávio de Carvalho's synthesis. The artist's claims revealed the controversy of the modernist's position in relation to academic standards. The productions of the children and the crazy represented the artist's freedom towards true art, something lost under the ruling of «the 'tricks' of the magicians of the fine arts institutes» («Crianças-Artistas», 1933). According to Flávio de Carvalho, children's drawings were not mere fanciful manifestations. Far from the «teacher's influence», such expressions would have «profound psychological importance», because they would be representations of the free association of ideas that reveal the «sequence of ancestral facts, the shapes of a faraway evolution», something similar to a «panorama of species» («Crianças-Artistas»,



1933). To Flávio de Carvalho, a «child using a pencil freely» seems to unfold «all tragedies of life and of the world, all cataclysms of the soul and thought» («Crianças-Artistas», 1933). The child would be able to see the «painful caricature of everything» and dramatize a «pureness of shapes and colours» («Crianças-Artistas», 1933). The «true great artists», as Flávio de Carvalho would call them, would be similar to children because they had the same «unconscious spontaneity in colour and form» and insubordination to the rules preserved by «most often ordinary» individuals, responsible for «suffocating or ending any original outbreaks», making out teachers to have a «worn out and dusty personality» («Crianças-Artistas», 1933).

3RD ACT

Some other names linked to the Brazilian modernist movement joined the creation of this concept. The painter Anita Malfatti, for example, was also a drawing teacher. In 1930, the newspaper *Correio da Tarde* published an article about her students' exhibition. Her methodology was described as being «mechanical and intuitive», guided by «psychological observations» that induced the use of the «student's awareness» («Mostrando às crianças», 1930). Tarsila do Amaral, another Brazilian modernist painter, also wrote about this exhibition. The text, entitled «Instrução Artística Infantil» [Children's Artistic Education], was published in the newspaper *Correio da Tarde* on January 28, 1931. In that article, the painter praised Anita Malfatti's work, especially for providing her students with the «cultivation» of their imagination (Amaral as cited in Barbosa, 1983).

The same exhibition was also commented on by another modernist writer and teacher, Mário de Andrade, in his article «Pintura Infantil» [Child Painting], published in November 23, 1930, in the newspaper *Diário Nacional*. The spontaneity of the work is again exalted, confirming its value as opposed to copying. It also emphasized the great educational value of this exhibition for the theory of painting and psychology.

Exhibitions of children's drawings were not uncommon. The interest shown in the «spontaneity» of children's expression motivated these exhibitions from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Osinsky & Antonio, 2010; Beuvier, 2009). Events continued throughout the twentieth century and gained semantic nuances in relation to their different performing contexts,



circulation and reception, as was the case of the *Exposição de Desenhos de Escolares da Grã-Bretanha* [Britain's Exhibition of Drawings by School Children], shown in Brazil in October, 1941, first at the National Museum of Fine Arts [Museu Nacional de Belas Artes] in Rio de Janeiro, and then in other Brazilian cities, including São Paulo.

Having accepted the invitation of the British Council, Herbert Read organized this exhibition integrating about 200 drawings and paintings of children aged 3 to 17, as stated in the Brazilian edition of the catalogue. It came to Brazil with the support of the Ministry of Education and was sponsored by the National Museum of Fine Arts, the National Institute of Pedagogical Studies, the Brazilian Education Association, the Association of Brazilian Artists and the Brazilian Society of English Culture. Its broad repercussion was carefully planned by the publication of texts in newspapers and magazines, two of them signed by the poet and educator Cecília Meireles, all of them praising their educational artistic value, establishing the freedom of feelings and imagination, assured by the «methodology, acknowledged in the modern pedagogy lessons» which «allow children to act freely on their sketch and colours» (Teixeira, 1941). About 27,000 people visited the exhibition in São Paulo in just 15 days, according to the newspaper *Diário da Noite* of December 15, 1941 (Pedrosa, 1993, p. 421 f).

Due to its regularity in historical narratives, including historiography and the recollection of art education in Brazil, the *Exposição de Desenhos de Escolares da Grã-Bretanha* became a kind of founding myth of art education driven by the motto of freedom of expression. This exhibition was responsible, for example, for the urge to create the *Movimento Escolinha de Arte do Brasil* [Little Art School Movement of Brazil] (Rodrigues, 1980), founded in 1948 by Lucia Alencastro Valentin, Margaret Spencer and Augusto Rodrigues. This movement was largely responsible for the spread of what became known as «free-expression».

According to Suzana Rodrigues, a puppet theatre actress, journalist and founder of the Club Infantil de Arte [Art Kids Club] in the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, or MASP [São Paulo Museum of Art], the «British children's drawings» opened space for «freedom of expression», as if they had a «magic touch».⁴

4 Suzana Rodrigues (personal communication to the author, 2001).



4TH ACT

As part of the educational activities of the newly opened Museu de Arte de São Paulo, the activities of the Club Infantil de Arte began on April 3, 1948.

Dedicated to children, this space was created on the initiative of Suzana Rodrigues as a community and experimentation centre. Activities such as drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry readings, puppet theatre production, and even visits to exhibitions and reception of works that would be part of the collection of this museum, formed part of the work done at the Club Infantil de Arte.

These activities were the topic of at least four newspapers in the city of São Paulo: *Gazeta*, *O Estado de São Paulo*, *Correio Paulistano* and *O Dia*. Nevertheless, the main vehicles for advertising MASP's events were the periodicals published by the group *Diários Associados* of Assis Chateaubriand, founder of the Museum. We can find intersections in these texts, such as the emphasis on projects valuing the child's autonomy and encouragement to express their feelings and imagination.

Something was aroused by the memory of two students of the Club Infantil de Arte. Memories recorded in two statements. The first, a letter from 1998, sent to Suzana Rodrigues, exposing the unforgettable «mood of freedom, and experimentation due to the projects being performed with several materials, individually and in groups».⁵ The second, an excerpt of Maria Amélia de Carvalho's thesis, when she mentions it as the «first school of art and 'free-expression' for children in São Paulo», directed by Suzana Rodrigues «as a fundamental reference to her professional training» (Carvalho, 1999).

The works performed by children in the Club Infantil de Arte were first exhibited on September 28, 1948. The newspaper *O Diário da Noite* referred to this exhibition as a «demonstration of the vitality the Museum showed in that section dedicated to childhood», a testimony to the «educational opportunities» («Exposição dos Trabalhos», 1948) generated by a work aimed at free expression.

On March 24, 1949, another exhibition was inaugurated. This time, its release highlighted the lecture held by the psychologist, Betti Katzenstein, on April 5, 1949, on «Arte Infantil e Psicologia da Criança» [Children's Art and Psychology of the Child], based on the interpretation of the works exhibited. The newspaper *Diário de São Paulo* on April 2 of the same year (Arte Infantil,

5 Elisa Landa Lahtermaher (personal communication to Suzana Rodrigues, March 10, 1998).



1949) disclosed the event highlighting «children's art» as a «powerful» means of expression of the «creative forces of the child».

In reference to Katzenstein's statements, another published article on April 5 («Precisa a Arte», 1949), highlighted the interest of that exhibition to the artist, who could «observe the relationship between children's art and art in general, from primitive to modern»; to the teacher, who could recognize the most suitable type of guidance by observing children's expression; to the psychologist, who could «find the child's personality development through design»; and to the mother, by simply «recognizing the outcome of her child's work». There were also listed items in this exhibition, related to «children's art», that could be pointed out:

1st, the child should be allowed wide-ranging freedom, the educator's job being to prevent them from getting hurt; 2nd, wide-ranging freedom of choice as far as materials are concerned and respect in relation to the child's world view should also guide their production; 3rd, the child knows how to express movement in their work; 4th, the child is able to construct a narrative about the drawing itself; 5th, the expansion of their creative skill; 6th, the possibility of expression of the individual, their personality, mood; 7th, the reinterpretation of the sensible world; 8th, the expression of family conflicts; 9th, the drawing as an index of dreams, desires, jealousies, as an indicator of the psyche, the unconscious; 10th, the personality outcome in their drafts and materials («Precisa a Arte», 1949).

This article was divided in two parts. The first, entitled «Relação entre a arte infantil e a arte primitiva e moderna» [Relationship between the child's art and primitive and modern art], the second, «Libertação de modelos» [Liberation of models], where freedom of expression was defended as a valuable educational tool. The «eloquent» drawings present in that exhibition would be revelations from the «children's subconscious», manifestations of «a complete unknown world, only suspected by most, only at its initial acknowledgement». Art began to be «used as a powerful tool suiting the child's education» («Precisa a Arte», 1949).

Betti Katzenstein, a well-known scholar in children's drawings, delivered a lecture on the same subject mentioned before, *Exposição de Desenhos de Escolares da Grã-Bretanha*, entitled «Problemas psicológicos revelados pelos desenhos das crianças britânicas» [Psychological problems revealed by British children's drawings]. This conference was quoted in «Desenho e



Desenvolvimento» [Drawing and Development], a text of her own in which she addresses exhibitions of children's drawings held in Brazil since 1942.

Two invitations were made to share these works in two other international exhibitions: *Children's International Art Show* at the Denver Art Museum, and one for the International Council of Museums (ICOM), in the Children's Section, during the second biennial conference of London in 1950. In response to the ICOM invitation, Pietro Maria Bardi,⁶ director of MASP⁷ at the time, highlighted «total freedom» as a characteristic of the work developed in the Club Infantil de Arte.

Suzana Rodrigues' work was not limited to MASP. In 1949, for example, the newspaper *Diário da Noite* reported the opening of a Club Infantil de Arte in Santo André, São Paulo, again emphasizing the «immeasurable» value of the «psychological and pedagogical results» of artistic activities performed with complete freedom of expression («Fundado em Santo André», 1949). The multiplication of these «clubs» was suggested, among other documents, by a manuscript⁸ found in Suzana Rodrigues' personal collection, where a definition of a Club Infantil de Arte is stated as one of «the children's property». The most important organizational condition of a Club Infantil de Arte was «absolute freedom».

Suzana Rodrigues left MASP in the early 1950's, but continued her work as a journalist, teacher and puppet theatre actress, spreading the ideal of freedom of expression in educational texts and artistic practices. In one of her texts, for example, she states that «respect and deference to all manifestations» of the child's personality, «must be our primary care». For Suzana Rodrigues «all drawings that are freely produced by a child are first and foremost a portrait of their soul, a discharge of emotions. Before judging it by the perfection of its forms, we should analyse it for its spontaneity».⁹

The term «free-expression» was not used in the mid-twentieth century, at least not among the researched documents. Not even in Suzana Rodrigues' statements of her own work during the same period was it reported. However, a movement in favour of using such a term could be noticed whenever there

6 Pietro Maria Bardi (personal communication to Mme. Germaine Cart , 10 oct. 1949).

7 Museu de Arte de São Paulo (São Paulo's Museum of Art).

8 Suzana Rodrigues (personal communication, 1951). Handwritten text with the following inscription in the margin: «Lecture held for trainee nurses in Paris as conference to the letters received in Paris».

9 Rodrigues, Suzana (n.d.). «A Criança e o Desenho» [magazine clipping]. Personal archive of Suzana Rodrigues [we can establish the date of the article around the later 1940s, by analysing hints present in the draft text belonging to the same collection].

was a description of the methodology of the activities of the Club Infantil de Arte. As a common point, we found a subtle guided freedom. To Lucie Call, for example, «the worst enemies of original and potent art are disruptive permission, abject submission, carelessness, negligence and superficiality» (as cited in Bagaglio, 1948).

In 1943, *Education through Art*, by Herbert Read, was published, a book that would become an important foundation for Brazilian art teaching. It also contains a definition of «free-expression» given by the distinction between an «expression portrayed for a specific purpose» and another one, an «indirect one» with no other aim «in addition to externalizing a more general feeling, such as pleasure, anxiety or anger» (Read, 2001, p. 119-120).

When describing the activities of the Club Infantil de Arte, Suzana Rodrigues mentioned the need for guidance, pointing out the subtlety and economy of words.

In 1971, the teaching of art, known as *Educação Artística* [Artistic Education], became a legal requirement in the formal Brazilian educational system. It was a controversial addition because it was linked to the educational policy carried out under agreements between the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Brazil was ruled by a dictatorial regime at that time and public education, following the MEC-USAID project, was that of the «theory of human capital», aimed at a technical education focused on «training of human resources for economic development within the parameters of capitalism» (Saviani, 2008). But it was also controversial because of the abrupt and indefinite way in which Artistic Education was imposed, replacing the specific subjects of «drawing», «music» and «crafts». Doubts about the specific content of the new «subject» originated some procedures that have association with «free-expression», although close to a sense which was criticized by Lucie Call, and distant from the grounds set out by Dewey and Read. As a result, this term acquired a pejorative meaning. As it was associated with neglect, it became a controversial agenda for critical review, and subsequently, advocated as a means of resistance and even subversion, in a context of limited freedom.¹⁰

10 To Joana Lopes, actress and art educator engaged in movements against the Brazilian dictatorship, «expressing yourself freely» was «fundamental», referring back to the dictatorship years and the 1983 event, in which Paulo Pasta along with other artists and educators—involved with the Movement of Art Education—took part in Brazil.

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