

Original Article

Human activities in occupational therapy: construction and commitment¹

Atividades humanas na terapia ocupacional: construção e compromisso

Isadora Cardinalli^a , Carla Regina Silva^a 

^aUniversidade Federal de São Carlos – UFSCar, São Carlos, SP, Brasil.

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Abstract

We presented in the study, a propositional synthesis about the uses and understandings of the term human activities, which from the 1990s, became privileged in the production of knowledge of Brazilian occupational therapy. There is a description of the epistemological and social construction around the activities, pointing out its dimensions as a tool and/or centralizing and guiding element of the occupational therapy process and, finally, we propose a contemporary critical discussion. Using as reference four historical movements and theoretical-methodological markers of the production of occupational therapy to address the displacement of understandings to a human, cultural, plural, and polysemic concept, above all, focused on the living dynamics of people and collectives. The perspectives of Occupational Therapies in the South and Occupational Therapy as Production of Life are presented to contribute to the propositional debate, supported by the ethical-political-cultural commitment of this field of knowledge and practices, contextualized in the Brazilian reality. By indicating challenges and urgencies of human activities, we have that changes will not stop and, therefore, new understandings and reframes are important. The epistemological and social contributions that mobilize constructions that are culturally consistent with social transformation are valued, facing the hegemonic domains and powers, with openness to inventiveness and professional solidarity.

Keywords: Occupational Therapy, Human Activities, Knowledge, Critical Theory, Concept Formation.

Resumo

Apresenta-se uma síntese propositiva sobre os usos e compreensões do termo “atividades humanas” que, a partir da década de 1990, passou a ser privilegiado na produção de conhecimentos da terapia ocupacional brasileira. É feita uma descrição

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sobre a construção epistemológica e social em torno das atividades, apontando suas dimensões como instrumento e/ou elemento centralizador e orientador do processo terapêutico ocupacional e, por fim, propomos um debate crítico contemporâneo. Tem-se como referência quatro movimentos históricos e marcadores teórico-metodológicos da produção da terapia ocupacional para abordar o deslocamento das compreensões até um conceito humano, cultural, plural e polissêmico, sobretudo voltado para a dinâmica viva das pessoas e coletivos. As perspectivas das Terapias Ocupacionais do Sul e da Terapia Ocupacional como Produção de Vida são apresentadas para contribuir com o debate propositivo, sustentado pelo compromisso ético-político-cultural deste campo de saberes e práticas, contextualizado na realidade brasileira. Ao indicar desafios e urgências das atividades humanas, vê-se que as mudanças não cessarão e, portanto, novas compreensões e ressignificações são importantes. Valoriza-se as contribuições epistemológicas e sociais que mobilizam construções culturalmente coerentes com a transformação social, que enfrenta os domínios e poderes hegemônicos, com abertura para a inventividade e solidariedade profissional.

Palavras-chave: Terapia Ocupacional, Atividades Humanas, Epistemologia, Teoria Crítica, Formação de Conceito.

Introduction

“Human activities are a privileged instrument for the actions of occupational therapists and constitute the centralizing and guiding element in the complex and contextualized construction of the therapeutic process in this area” (Universidade de São Paulo, 1997). This excerpt composes a concept of occupational therapy widely spread in Brazil, even guiding the Brazilian definition of the profession with the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2017).

The centrality of *human activities* for occupational therapeutic processes in the Brazilian context has been recognized from the 1990s onwards, although other terms or qualifiers of activities coexist and even different understandings of the same term in the discussion of the instruments and/or objects of study of the profession over time (Cardinalli, 2017; Poellnitz, 2018). After all, it is necessary to recognize “[...] the polysemy, the polyvocity and the inevitable plurality for the construction of a field that was necessarily highlighted by different practices and knowledge” (Silva, 2013, p. 462).

This essay seeks to contribute to the debate on the uses and understandings of *human activities* in Brazilian occupational therapy. Therefore, it performs a critical unsystematic review of the literature², based on the recovery of key references organized and debated from the proposition of the four movements in the production of Brazilian occupational therapy proposed by Galheigo et al. (2018). Thus, this essay starts from the historical recovery of the term activity and its understandings, considering its dimensions as an instrument and/or centralizing and guiding element of the occupational therapy process and the understanding of *human activities* anchored by an ethical-political-cultural position.

²This essay starts from an excerpt of the results of a doctoral research in the area of occupational therapy, whose focus is human activities for and in Brazilian occupational therapy, developed between 2018 and 2021.

Historical and Epistemological Constitution

This essay starts from the proposition presented by Galheigo et al. (2018), who suggests four distinct movements in the production of Brazilian occupational therapy. Uses and understandings of activities related to the historical processes of the profession will be reconstituted.

The first movement began in 1956, with the emergence of occupational therapy courses in Brazil, when the first theoretical-practical bases of the profession in the country were set, lasting until the end of the 1970s (Galheigo et al., 2018).

Soares (1991, p. 12) considers that the beginning of the intervention in occupational therapy was with the “[...] mental patients” in the 1940s and the focus of the following decade was on the “physically disabled”, using “[...] work, recreation, and exercise as a means of development and adaptation of man to society”. These three resources constituted a contradictory social role for occupational therapy due to the lack of conditions to achieve “[...] individual's autonomy in their activities of daily living and their absorption into the world of work” (Soares, 1991, p. 13).

For Maroto (1991), until the mid-1970s, occupational therapy sought legitimacy for its social project with the incorporation of the dominant international discourse, aimed at the productive reinsertion of its patients, defining its professional practice through paramedical techniques. Feriotti (2013) indicates that the reductionist medical model marked the understanding of the profession, linking it to the means/instruments/resources of therapeutic intervention. That is, they limited and conditioned it to the application of therapeutic occupations or activities aimed at the treatment of diseases, dysfunctions, or symptoms. Salles & Matsukura (2016) related the use of the activity and occupation terms, in this period, with the understanding of hobby for institutionalized people or the maintenance of institutions and the logic of submission.

Ferrigno (1991) states that the concepts of health and disability incorporated and transmitted by the first generations of professionals were based on the health-disease view as excluding and isolated phenomena, whose overcoming was restricted to the immediate cure of the problem. In this understanding, the determinants of health are in the individuals and in their predisposition to diseases or socioeconomic and cultural conditions, which would be immutable.

In this period, there was also a humanist and psychoanalytic influence on national production (Galheigo et al., 2018). The profession incorporated psychological aspects, interpersonal relationships, and well-being with oneself and the environment into the discourses, considering primarily the family, as the “[...] social integration conveyed by OT presupposes the family as the nucleus of socialization” (Maroto, 1991, p. 129). In Ferrari's master's thesis (1975), the meaning of activities appears: “The activity, therefore, only has value when the individual participates in it, that is when it has meaning for the person” (Ferrari, 1975, p. 49).

The notes of this first movement show the reproductions and contradictions of practices in occupational therapy and the first mobilizations related to the social demands of the context. We can emphasize the dimension of activities as a means/instrument/tool/resource and its applicability to minimize or suppress any lack, alleviate or cure diseases, symptoms, or disabilities. Likewise, we can note concerns related

to social and relational contexts, as if this dimension could also contribute to the demands and needs of social inclusion.

The second movement ranged from the late 1970s to 1996 and was marked by the problematization of occupational therapy based on contributions from collective health and the human and social sciences. “The emergence of critical thinking in Brazilian occupational therapy at the end of the 1970s is highlighted, initially through criticism of hegemonic practices, and later, through propositions of emancipatory practices” (Galheigo et al., 2018, p. 734). In this period, we also see the construction of foundations for the conception of *human activities*.

The dissertation by Galheigo (1988) mentions that the concept of *human activity* was beginning to be used by occupational therapists, advancing the idea of work. This is because the

[...] concept of activity allows occupational therapy access to all human manifestations. It puts under its domain: the everyday life in the needs of self-care and self-maintenance, the capacity for creation and production, leisure, children's play, the need for instruments for adaptation (Galheigo, 1988, p. 69).

This reflection moves towards the promotion of the individuals' autonomy beyond the work logic, as mentioned by Soares (1991) about the previous movement.

In one of the first national books, “Occupational Therapy”, Francisco (1988) analyzes the models related to professional performance: *occupation* would presuppose an occupational nature of people, considering *leisure* as an evolutionary preparation for *work* or *production*, segmenting and hierarchizing life in *activities of daily living* in a systemic and positivist social logic with productivity incentives; the *activity as an exercise*, dependent on detailed analysis scripts and adaptation and graduation protocols, would have the reductionist biomedical model as a guideline; *activity as an expression* would refer to psychodynamics and psychoanalysis; and, contrasting with such therapeutic resources, *human activity as creation and transformation* would be based on the Marxist vision.

In this dialogue, Medeiros' master's dissertation (2010), published in 1988, makes an epistemological and social analysis of occupational therapy, indicating his interest in the problems of individuals/collectives in their activity life. She considers *human activities* as a product and means of construction of the human being, and the profession's role is to seek to understand the relationships that this active being establishes in his life and health condition. According to the author, the profession would have the

[...] intention to structure knowledge about the active man, his possibilities of action, and the inter-determinations of his different dimensions and historical-social contextualization, in the construction of himself and a humanized world, as a starting point and goal of his intervention (Medeiros, 2010, p. 28).

The author also points out that activities are not always central to all perspectives in occupational therapy, as the history of the profession is marked by ruptures and the production of different principles and actions (Medeiros, 2010).

Nascimento (1990, p. 17, emphasis added) emphatically questioned whether “[...] to *apply or supervise* activities with certain patients, giving them a therapeutic character [...] the therapeutic sense, capable of transforming any activity into a therapeutic activity. This

is, in my opinion, a myth”. In his criticism, the hegemonic construction of the biomedical model that introjected the linear view of cause/effect character and the medicalization of care through activities is denounced, imprinting beneficial and therapeutic beliefs on them in a decontextualized way (Nascimento, 1990).

In the same year, Castro & Silva (1990) published an article on creative processes in occupational therapy, in which they contextualize the subject and *human activities*, as well as their cultural and creative dimension, demarcating this dimension to the field:

[...] every human activity is inserted in social reality, therefore, when performing an activity, the creator man is not exclusively expressing his feelings, but projecting onto it everything that he perceives as belonging to the men of his time and place, in other words, of his cultural context that directly or indirectly affected their experiences. Experiences, whether personal, social, or affective, are fundamental as they are built through relationships (Castro & Silva, 1990, p. 74-75).

In 1991, Soares' book questions the logic of capital in occupational therapy, presenting concepts and practices from reductionism, with critical reflections, to propose a more coherent praxis with the political changes in the country, corroborating Francisco (1988) and Medeiros (2010) on the Marxist framework in the use of the term *human activities*. She points out “[...] that it was not possible to meet the needs of the popular classes without promoting conjunctural changes that promoted the absorption of this offer for similar needs of the dominant classes” (Soares, 1991, p. 204). When inquiring about the conflict of its relevance and social role, it provokes: “[...] if the human activity, in its physical, psychological and social aspect, ceased to be the essence of occupational therapy, what would it become?” (Soares, 1991, p. 190).

Furtado (1991) understands that occupational therapy stereotypes and stigmas derive from their ignorance associated with biased understandings such as “occupying people” or “performing manual activities” that disqualify their performance and relationship with demands and populations. The differentiation between the phenomenon and the object of the action is highlighted as the only way out to transform their professional value. Thus, the identity process of occupational therapy would need to shift so that the profession is not defined by the techniques used, but by the variables that determine its ways of acting.

Maria Caniglia (Machado, 1991, p. 63) strongly marks this shift in the sense of creating a body of own knowledge that would encompass the subject and object of study of the profession in the “meaning of human activity”. She suggested an etymological change for the profession - praxitherapy - as it would better translate its performance through and into praxis, having praxiology as the most adequate reference, in other words, the science of human activity. It is dedicated to the human being in activity, aiming at praxis, which is *human activity* in its theoretical and practical completeness, inseparable from “[...] spiritual and material, idealization and realization, planning and execution, thought and action” (Machado, 1991, p. 62).

This second movement was marked by questioning and appropriation of reflections on the foundation and social role of occupational therapy. The critical elaboration on the proposition of activities, with identification of the concept of *human activities*, contributed to the shift from a technical view to an ethical and political view of the profession, directly questioning its function and identity. The constitution of foundations contextualized by

social, political, economic, and cultural reflections, present in the period, were strengthened in the following movement.

The third movement, between 1997 and 2005, was related to the differentiation and consolidation of the fields of investigation and practices of occupational therapy through sociopolitical contextualization, grounding in public policies, theoretical-conceptual problematization, and proposition of emancipatory practices – they were built since, for and with the world of life, considering activities and everyday life (Galheigo et al., 2018).

Following the Brazilian territorial social policies that were being established, occupational therapy practices were able to take place beyond the restrictive institutional limits, enabling participation in the spaces of everyday life.

Galheigo (2003) observed a redefinition of the focus of occupational therapy with the understanding of everyday life that encompasses subjectivity and social relationships. For Surjus (2017, p. 902), *human activity* was taken as a fundamental element in the insertion of individuals or groups in their daily spaces, considering an expansion of the definition of the profession, “[...] reorienting by the conditions and needs of the marginalized and excluded population”.

Although social issues have permeated the function of the profession since its inception, at that time, it is appropriated as fundamental precepts, with the prioritization of citizenship in the search for “[...] producing access and guarantee of rights for subjects and collectives” (Galheigo et al., 2018, p. 730). Using the reference of the Philosophy of Difference, Lima (2003) shows that the ethical-political commitment to the population has given rise, in addition to tolerance and the defense of rights, to the desire for difference. “It is not enough to recognize the right to identity differences, with this neoliberal tolerance so in vogue, but it would be worth intensifying the differences, inciting them” (Quarentei, 1999, p. 200).

Lima (1997, p. 100) presents art as an “[...] intrinsic dimension to every form of human production and activity” and illness is understood as an impediment to creation, and the clinic is a welcome to release the creative power of life. Thus, clinical work is not exhausted by establishing a permanent state of creation and new ways of being. “It is also necessary that these new constituted forms of existence, their processuality, as well as their material productions can gain collective significance” (Lima, 1997, p. 100).

For Quarentei (2001), the inexhaustible connection with other fields of knowledge and the distance from modern rationality brought occupational therapy closer to the production of life, ways of life, subjective forms of existence, and the fabrication of worlds. For her, life is an “[...] incessant continuum of activities”, in which *human activities* are matters of life, in which occupational therapists invest intensively and in multiple ways (Quarentei, 2001, p. 2).

We see that the deepening of criticism of the activity as a positivist instrument or resource strengthens the conception of *human activity* as a cultural element, with a polysemic and complex character, related to everyday life and the sociopolitical, subjective, and affective dimensions of the human condition (Galheigo et al., 2018).

Brunello (1991, p. 31), in an article published in the previous movement, points out the influence of the cultural factor in the occupational therapy process, warning that it is “[...] necessary to know the cultural reality to understand the other”. For Barros (2004, p. 96), “[...] it becomes imperative for the occupational therapist to develop culturally

relevant activities, as it is about understanding how the most valued activities are perceived in the community”.

Barros et al. (2002), highlighting the shift to social occupational therapy, present the concept of activity as a construct,

[...] a mediation of multiple relationships, but situated in cultural time and space; it is an unfinished concept and incorporates this incompleteness in itself, constituted by the movement, by the process of communication in the language (verbal, gestural, sound, that is, iconic, indicial and symbolic). It is a concept that takes place in the experience and the lived situation (Barros et al., 2002, p. 102).

The chapter by Castro et al. (2001) on *human activities*, published in the book “Occupational Therapy in Brazil”, which became an important reference for this debate, presents a retrospective on the use of activities and updates its conception and meanings as a circuit of human relations and exchanges social involving

[...] the playful, the body, art, the creation of objects, studies, and knowledge, the organization of spaces and care for the everyday life, personal care, tours, trips, parties, the various forms of production, the cultural life, are some examples of themes that endorse, connect and broker experiences, enhance life, promote transformations, produce value (Castro et al., 2001, p. 46-47).

The activity is understood as human and cultural, an articulating element between individual and community, everyday life, and cultural productions. “The fundamental meaning of the activities is to expand living and make it more intense, never diminishing or emptying it” (Castro et al., 2001, p.55). Castro et al. (2004) and Lima (2004) also address the analysis of activities from this update of conception and practice in occupational therapy.

The fourth movement, which started in 2006, involves analysis difficulties, as it lasts until the present. There is an intense theoretical-conceptual and methodological diversification in the production of knowledge and practices in occupational therapy, marked by the progressive increase in academic production, such as book and research publications. There is also an expansion of international cooperation and “[...] a reincorporation of theoretical and methodological perspectives, theoretical and practical references and international occupational therapy models [...] with emphasis on occupational roles and Occupational Science” (Galheigo et al., 2018, p. 733).

Thus, a given change is engendered in the profile of productions in the area that also interfered in debates regarding *human activities*, especially because international occupational therapy references and models use other concepts and other understandings and, in most cases, reproduce and derive from hegemonic Anglo-Saxon models of science and knowledge.

On the other hand, investigations and historical retrospectives are also carried out on the production of knowledge and the uses of the terms in Brazil (Lima et al., 2011; Lima et al., 2013; Feriotti, 2013; Salles & Matsukura, 2016; Cardinalli, 2017; Poellnitz, 2018), noting the polyvocality of the terms, even though activity appears as the most used since 1990 (Lima et al., 2011; Lima et al., 2013; Poellnitz, 2018).

Elisabeth Lima, in her professorship thesis (Lima, 2017), deepens the investigation of the concept of *human activity* from the work of Hannah Arendt, following her historical study, from the Aristotelian proposition. Capitalist society, totalitarianism, and the conditions that produce isolation and social uprooting are problematized. As resistance strategies, there is the recovery of the spheres of *human activity* in the public space and the common world, in the sense of active life. Such strategies overlap and are articulated: in the re-enchantment of the common world through art; in the investment of action and political dignity; in the exercise of thinking and understanding; and in the reinvention of coexistence with the establishment of a friendship policy (Lima, 2017).

In 2019, the first book on the topic “Human Activities & Occupational Therapy: know-how, culture, politics and other resistances” is launched, bringing together theoretical and practical discussions by authors from different regions of the country who make up the Inter-institutional Research Group Activities Humanities and Occupational Therapy - *Atividades Humanas e Terapia Ocupacional* AHTO (Silva, 2019). The group has been investing in research and knowledge production on the topic, in addition to organizing events such as *Encanto* – Meeting on Activities in Occupational Therapy.

This fourth movement shows the multiplication of practices related to social policies, such as health, education, social assistance, culture, work, and human rights, and to varied contexts, “[...] including services, equipment, projects and actions based on households, communities, territories, institutional and private” (Galheigo et al., 2018, p. 733). As well as the institutionalization of the debate on *human activities* and culture by occupational therapy, which constituted a field supported by specific policies and rights and integrated to the symbolic, economic and citizen cultural dimensions (Gonçalves et al., 2017; Silva, 2019; Silvestrini et al., 2019).

Ethical-Political-Cultural Commitment

When dealing with *human activities* in occupational therapy from a historical-critical reading, we corroborate with Bezerra (2011), who identified two lines of thought in the analysis of the literature on the genesis and development of the profession in Brazil:

[...] *endogenous*, in which the authors analyze the origin of the profession, from the indiscriminate use of “activity” in health problems throughout human history, disregarding - in their analysis - the economic and political-ideological aspects of each moment historical [...] The second perspective called *historical-critical* places the genesis of the profession in a precise historical moment: the context of monopoly capitalism. In these authors, we note the presence of social, economic, and political factors as the foundation of professional existence and a consideration of the functionality of the profession in the reproduction of social relations (Bezerra, 2011, p. 150, emphasis added).

Galheigo (2012) presents a sensitive and critical approach as an epistemological perspective of welcoming unique experiences and problematizing macro processes and inequalities embedded in everyday life, typical of capitalist accumulation, as an ethical-political commitment that affirms resistance movements in life and explains tensions macro and micro policies. This investment seeks transformation and social justice, the

emancipation of people and collectives, respect for diversity, and a path to overcoming domination and redistributing resources.

Lima (2019) proposes an ethical-aesthetic-political perspective for activities in occupational therapy, by problematizing the relationship with capitalist productivity that involves *human activities* and the contemporary way of life. The author proposes to reconfigure the understanding of activities involving their intrinsic condition of non-activity to reestablish their production, action, and relationship with common life.

What distinguishes the human activity that increases the power of human beings to act from the one that threatens life on the planet is precisely the incorporation, in the heart of the action and doing, of impotence, incapacity, and vulnerability. In short, the possibility of not doing and not acting (Lima, 2019, p. 121).

Such positions explain how the neoliberal capitalist western way of life acts on the encouragement and understanding of *human activities*, which also promote exploitation and destruction of the human condition and nature. This contradiction is fueled by the stimulus to exploratory productivity and social inclusion through normativity that maintain the production of wealth and hegemony, or poverty and submission.

With such consideration, the use of the term *human activities* in its anti-hegemonic historical-critical construction is recognized as a contribution to the reflections of Occupational Therapies from the South, which depart from a collective construction composed of knowledge and doings of the Epistemologies of the South (Santos & Meneses, 2010; Silva et al., 2018).

Southern Epistemologies reconfigure processes of production and valorization of scientific and non-scientific knowledge, reviewing the forms of relationship between different types of knowledge and experiences, based on social realities that have systematically suffered the injustices and discriminations caused by capitalism, by colonialism and patriarchy (Santos & Meneses, 2010).

For Galheigo (2014, p. 219), the production of “Southern Epistemologies is the main ongoing identification of contemporary Latin American Occupational Therapy”, under which critical perspectives have stood out as a reference. Thus, the strengthening of productions in this sense can and should encompass an even more promising dialogue with what is possible to establish in exchanges of knowledge at an intercontinental level.

Guajardo (2016a), when designing several occupational therapies, understands this space of dispute, seeing that the Occupational Therapies of the South would have as a highlight and differential their identities, historicities, cultures, social foundation, and critical purpose of social transformation.

Silva et al. (2019, p. 172) present Occupational Therapies in Latin America from/with/in the South as an urgent commitment to make visible and connect “Engaged, critical Occupational Therapies, based on the ethical and political commitment that seek a more just and equitable society, and who are concerned that our praxis is relevant”.

Núñez (2019) presents, as constituent themes of Southern Occupational Therapies, issues such as social, political, decolonization, human rights, collective activities (*ocupaciones colectivas*), feminism and interculturality. On the other hand, Tolvett (2017) reaffirms the commitment of Southern Occupational Therapies practices to work with

communities, especially vulnerable ones, based on experiences that promote a decolonizing praxis in Latin American realities.

Southern perspectives and decolonial criticism

Barros & Galvani (2016, p. 107) propose the challenge of self-criticism and the reformulation of notions and concepts developed without connections between techniques and cultures, technical action, and political action in complexity and diversity. The authors emphasize the importance of developing South-South dialogues and relearning our knowledge based on “[...] complex political parameters linked to the great multiplicity of languages, aesthetic and ethical expressions and forms of cultural exchange”.

Valuing local production, implied in the experience of its reality, is a process of recognition by occupational therapy of cultural domination and the hierarchization of sciences, knowledge, and practices. We have to consider that hegemonic occupational therapy is also contextualized, situated, and historicized. As Hammell (2018) points out, it is the one that produced and transmitted knowledge of white, Anglo-speaking men and women, with 'good education', middle class, urban way of life, mainly related to Jewish-Christians religions.

Hegemonic occupational therapy perpetuates colonialism when theories, assessments, interventions, outcome measures, and models of practice are produced from and to respond to culturally specific Western neoliberal assumptions about what is valuable and desirable, and are further promoted and reproduced in contexts. in which politics, culture, and economics are different (Hammell, 2018).

The last World Congress of Occupational Therapists, held in South Africa, in May 2018, was the first to be held on the African continent, despite the meetings having started in 1951 and since 1952 the host country has been a member of the WFOT, in addition to 17 countries on the continent with occupational therapy courses (Zango, 2018).

In his opening speech, Ramugondo (2018) describes the coloniality of knowledge as to how endogenous, indigenous or traditional knowledge has been demonized and considered inferior by the Western world, conveniently for white supremacy. Thus, the decoloniality of knowledge must consider the historicities, recognize that there are multiple sources of knowledge, including intuitive knowledge, relative knowledge, creativity, and ethics, and also claim the sense of the humanity of (ex) colonized people, recognizing diverse knowledge as worthy contributions to the global intellectual heritage.

Occupational Therapies from the South offer opportunities for reflection, awareness, and confrontation of established hegemonic powers. As proposed by Pino Morán & Ulloa (2016, p. 245), this debate leads us to take a radical ethical-political-cultural position, because it is an “[...] epistemic detachment in the social sphere, a movement that leaves understanding hegemonic universalist, for a pluriversality of occupational therapy”.

Criticism also predisposes the interdependence between theory and practice as know-hows that constitute experience, integrated and produced in dialogicity, as truly critical reflection is not dissociated from actions: it is a conscious and engaged praxis. Consciousness, as proposed by Freire (1979, p. 42), is “a historical commitment”, comprises a humanizing work of demystification, as it is necessary to unveil the reality that sustains the dominant structure through dialogue, that is, “[...] the encounter in which

reflection and action, inseparable from those who dialogue, are oriented towards the world that needs to be transformed and humanized”.

By considering that occupational therapy practice is constitutively and necessarily political, we break with the dominant foundation to recreate and subvert the established order. Also, to rethink occupational therapy through the ethics of human rights in collective and community actions; thus, its ethical and political objective becomes emancipation, autonomy, and freedom (Guajardo, 2016a; 2016b).

Silvestrini et al. (2019) reaffirm that this is an eminently cultural process:

occupational therapists can contribute to the production of strategies, reflections, and practices against hegemonic, anti-colonial, anti heterocispatriarchal, and anti-racist in the search for rupture and overcoming the impacts generated by hegemonic and violent practices on ways of life and human relationships. The importance of seeking justice, equity, and respect for human and environmental diversity is understood, whose transformations necessarily involve the cultural dimension of human lives (Silvestrini et al., 2019, p. 934).

Make-think *human activities* as production of life

In line with the previous premises, a dialogue is proposed here with the understanding of *human activity* advanced by Mariangela Quarentei, a Brazilian occupational therapist who enunciated occupational therapy as the production of life. *Human activities* are understood as territories of existence, intrinsic and unique to people; they are its creation materials, expression of the ways of existing, and its fabrication of worlds (Quarentei, 1999; 2001).

Given the complexity in which the production of subjectivity, desires, cultural practices, social, political, and economic organizations, powers, interests, inequalities, individuals, communities, everyday life, activities, and ways of life are woven, we seek to recognize affectations between these and others elements that do not exist outside the whole. To enter this universe, we believe that it is necessary to recognize and get rid of knowledge-powers that maintain the production of hegemony in relationships, which tend to preconception unrealistic ideals, for example, of well-being and quality of life, and experience epistemological humility.

After all, who is occupational therapy for? It is understood that every effort must be aimed at reversing the logics of capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal (re)production that prevail in modern rationality. The ethical-political-cultural commitment to people and communities in their daily experiences focuses on *human activities* and the problematization of the effects of power on them, which also affects the practices of care and production of knowledge, culture, and life.

The production of life, as stated by Quarentei (2001), takes place in a continuum of activities, of multiple simultaneous activities, which characterize a territory where the meaning of existence and its potential for creation is produced. There is no such thing as “doing nothing”, because life is an incessant movement, just as there are no “meaningless activities”, they are multiple and re-signifiable. Therefore, occupational therapists are not holders of knowledge about them or conductors of sterile techniques but depend on the exchange of experiences to produce care and existence together with the people they accompany. This requires fewer manuals and more inventive becoming, as “[...] there are no recipes, even though they proliferate [practices] from the perspective of care, of

guarantees to avert discomfort. This place of vulnerability is also a place of creation” (Quarentei et al., 2020, p. 316).

Human activities are socio-historical, relational, cultural constructions, expressions of ways of life; they involve everyday life and their desires, know-how, their transforming potentials; they are the production of life and worlds. For occupational therapists, they are unsettling clues and relational opportunities for joint experimentation. When a technological dimension is presented, it is necessary to make it critical and sensitive enough so that it is not reproducible and closed in on itself, detached from its living condition. Resources help, but are surmountable and change, and should not characterize the therapeutic-occupational processes, that is, the identity of the profession should not be defined by the techniques used (Furtado, 1991).

An expanded understanding of *human activity* must incorporate historical, ancestral, collective value and the interdependence of generational processes. As a cultural repertoire, it recovers and builds values, symbols, senses, meanings and depends on orality and craftsmanship that produce experiential knowledge. By expanding the perception of its constitution and values, it contributes to raising awareness of the modes of production, consumption, and disposal and the impact of productivity on nature and life.

It is necessary to consider the crisis of ethical values in which purchasing and consumption power govern human actions and erodes notions of belonging, autonomy, and freedom, since “[...] freedom in 'Being' was replaced by 'Power to Be' and 'from'” (Furtado & Marcondes, 2013, p. 654). It is not just about denouncing the logic of “cure-productivity”, but of finding ways of resistance in search of other meanings in the production of life, a “[...] richer existence of resources, possibilities and experiences is also an existence in movement-change” (Quarentei, 1999, p. 198).

The production of meanings and affections depends on the sharing of life through encounters, and activities become precious to occupational therapy, as they constitute material for the expression and transformation of these affections that lead to new experiments in life (Quarentei, 1994).

Occupational therapy involved in the production of life and in the expansion of the power of *human activity* of complex collective-individuals unites sensitivity and criticism and commits in an ethical-political-cultural or ethical-aesthetic-political way to the encounter and exchange of experiences, diverse cultural know-hows, so that there is a joint production of care, multiple knowledge, paths with shared meanings in open-ended practices-processes, in a constant challenge of being aware and coherent with reality (Cardinali et al., 2018).

Considerations in the Contemporary Flow

The diversity of life experiences and ways of producing knowledge about the world are inexhaustible and the dedication to Southern Epistemologies offers “[...] new conceptions of life and human dignity, new symbolic universes, new cosmogonies, gnoseologies and even ontologies [...] also new emotions and affections, new feelings and passions” (Santos, 2008, p. 21). We as occupational therapists are particularly interested in these experiences, called *human activities*, everyday life, ways of life, social relationships, diversity, among other concepts, seeking to understand and contribute to the conditions of human existence and the production of the common world.

This historical-propositive text presented a reconstitution of understandings of *human activities* through the production of knowledge in Brazilian occupational therapy, highlighting the shift from 'instrument, means or resource' to the 'plural and polysemic concept' and, above all, implied in the dynamics of life sociocultural.

Thus, we see, at each time, its challenges and the production of knowledge involved in them, together with the urgencies that are present with the new health crisis and the old political, economic and environmental crisis. The intensification of inequalities and social exclusion, the precariousness of working conditions and insecurity in the generation of income, the strong conservative and totalitarian wave, violence and intolerance towards human and cultural diversity, and the vertiginous advance of information and communication technology. The changes in our *human activities* do not cease and, therefore, we will not stop dedicating ourselves to understanding and reinterpreting these processes.

However, these processes happen in different ways and depend on social markers, identity, trajectories, and life contexts. Although there is sensitivity to deal with singularities, it is also necessary to know the dynamics that collectively place us as similar to some and unequal in face of the privileges of others. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos reminds us,

[...] we have the right to be equal when our difference makes us inferior, and we have the right to be different when our equality deprives us of character. Hence the need for equality that recognizes differences and for a difference that does not produce, feed or reproduce inequalities (Santos, 2003, p. 56).

Therefore, the contributions of occupational therapy as a production of life and of Southern Occupational Therapies that mobilize epistemological and social understandings culturally in occupational therapy are valued, with openness to inventiveness and professional solidarity and with ethical-political-cultural commitment based in the right to exist, in the social emancipation and in the human dignity.

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Corresponding author

Isadora Cardinalli
e-mail: isadora.cardinalli@gmail.com

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Prof. Dr. Milton Carlos Mariotti