

Old-bodied Puppets: what children say about ageing

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ABSTRACT – Old-bodied Puppets: what children say about ageing. The text describes a way to do research with children and to learn what they understand by *being elderly*. I study here a group of children from a public school in Porto Alegre making use of five puppets that represent old-bodied men and women. I ground the research in post-critical assumptions, in the sociology of childhood and in studies about ageing. I observe how children when playing with the bodies of elderly-puppets display their understanding about an ageing body. I deal with the effect of playing with elderly-bodies in the education of children and with the extent to which this kind of body is not present in their toys and plays.

Keywords: Puppets. Children. Ageing. Body. Research with Children.

RESUMO – Bonecos com Corpos-Velhos: o que dizem as crianças sobre envelhecimento. Apresenta um modo de pesquisar com crianças e o que entendem por *ser idoso*. Investigo um grupo de crianças de uma escola pública de Porto Alegre fazendo uso de cinco bonecos que representam corpos-velhos de homens e mulheres. Fundamento a pesquisa em pressupostos pós-críticos, na sociologia da infância e nos estudos sobre envelhecimento. Observo como as crianças ao brincarem com os corpos de bonecos-velhos mostram seu entendimento sobre um corpo que envelhece. Trato do efeito do brincar com corpos-velhos na educação de crianças e o quanto esse tipo de corpo não compõe seus brinquedos e brincadeiras.

Palavras-chave: Bonecos. Crianças. Envelhecimento. Corpo. Pesquisa com Crianças.

I grew up playing on the ground, among the ants. A
childhood free and without comparings [...] for if we talk
about being a child, we make communion [...] I bring
from my childlike roots the communing and
oblique view of things –

Manoel por Manoel - Manoel de Barros

Just as Manoel de Barros's poem, this text deals with the "communing view" of being old as thought by the child, verse of childhoods and grown-olds, which is a tall order for someone who has been studying children for so long. How do I write about ageing, if I have still not moved away from the childhoods, and when I am reaching my own old age? How do I deal with children and old people despicable for so many, despised by so many? To work on the writing of this text makes emerge what the children studied say about old people, forsaking ideas imposed by modernity in which they are here to be guided, taught, spoken to, or ordered and not always listened to, given voice or called into conversation. Or old people who need to be taken care of, not always listened to, and often removed from conversation. Such controversies remind me of the wanderings in Silva (2011):

The pre-sociological images (James, Jenks and Prout, 1988) that stay with us from childhood and from children are immensely controversial and contradictory, speaking to us about a being that is at the same time evil (Hobbes) and innocent (Rousseau) and immanent (Locke), of a natural development (Piaget), but libidinous and aggressive (Freud) (Silva, 2011, p. 92).

Treading this pixie line around so many controversies and contradictions does not seem to be a privilege of when we deal with children, but is pressed upon us also when we speak of ageing. The challenge is only heightened by working upon this theme, about how children think the being old in their playing with the old-person-body-puppet. To try and deal with the researching with children about ageing, I refer back to the title of this text when I call into conversation six and seven-year-olds about what it means for them to be old, to have an old person's body, based on plays with puppets¹. I tried to think their thoughts when they think about old age, the ageing of the elderly who lived with them, or that they knew about. I brought into the work five puppets that represented old-bodies, of grandfathers and grandmothers. I tried to observe the playing of the children in how they put that theme in action. I made use of authors such as Ramos (2011), Dornelles (2007) Ramos (2013), Doll and Karl (2006), Ramos (2009), Silva (2011), Prout (2010), among others. These readings led me to invest in the small details that surround a study making use of old-people-bodied-puppets and on how they are not simply toys, but instruments that display the bodily marks of the culture of an era in a given society. In the puppets' bodies, one can also

observe the effects of the investment made in their bodies so that they can enter children's plays, the effect that playing with old-bodies brings forth in the children, and how much this kind of body is not part of the daily life of their toys. Aware of the fact that children have not had much opportunity to handle, play and toy with bodies that are beyond the Barbie-like body. To study how children think about ageing and about the constitution of the old-person-body helps to understand the effect of having and thinking only about a right-body (the body young, wrinkle-free, lean and white).

The first action of the children when they got hold of the old-person-puppets was that of make pretend, of inviting the other puppets for tea. This action in itself already shows us where children think the old being comes from. They did not invite the other puppets for a soda, for a beer, for a wine, but for a tea.

I have said elsewhere that the puppets and all the publicity around them need to be taken as a tactic block in a wider strategy of producing truths about *being a child, being an old person*, as in the case of the present work. About how children conceive being elderly today, about the adult world that surrounds them. This strategy comprises other tactic blocks in its struggle to make hegemonic the form of subjectivity thus produced (Dornelles, 2007). The body represented in each puppet is also the means through which we act upon the world. On it, certain discursive practices impinge, and these practices produce an aged body, marked by history. History, for Foucault, is constituted as an *a priori* that "[...] has to deal with the fact that the discourse does not have just a meaning or truth, but a history, and a specific history that does not reduce it to the laws of a strange becoming" (Dornelles, 2007, p. 27).

Learning about Ageing in the Research with Children

I observed how it is possible to found a different kind of research with children, showing how a given way of questioning, of ensuring, of investigating, of formulating questions, of keeping our eyes and ears open, allowed the posing of questions that helped me to build a research problem on how children understand ageing. What it means for them to become old, to be old. What they think it is possible to do when we grow old. What hindrances old people face in their daily lives. What it is cool to do when one is old. I understand that looking at children's plays and at how they articulate them, made it possible to understand their understanding about being old. Based on that, I began to articulate the theoretical tools linking post-critical theorizing, childhood sociology, the research with children, and what is being investigated about ageing.

Dealing with this topic with children was for me a type of investigation without a sure, continuous, linear and safe path to be followed, because for many people children have nothing to say about what it

means to grow old, in view of their hitherto short existence. Therefore, travelling this research path was based on its discontinuity, because of the need to allow myself drawing, composing a group of procedures for data collection, for gathering information suitable for articulation between description and analysis (Meyer; Paraíso, 2012).

I understood that I needed to make use of a theoretical-methodological perspective capable of making emerge the description and analyses about how children think, talk, say and manifest, singularize themselves, become potency of creation of other values about ageing. Children that could help me to invent new modes of description and analysis that I would wish to define as a post-critical ethnographic research methodology with children aiming at “[...] perceiving the fact of children having a voice as a progress over their being silenced or ignored” (Prout apud Müller, 2010, p. 36), the latter being so present in our questioning about how children work and what they have to teach us about being and having an aged body.

To move forwards in my enquiries about children, I borrowed some of the theoretical assumptions of the Sociology of Childhood and tried to combine them with the post-critical ethnography (Meyer; Paraíso, 2012), and also with the research with children, working on the assumption that these theorizations would give me elements to ground the methodological questions of the research with children, or what I call a methodology that seems a post-critical ethnography of research with children. Not because this is the way out, the right path for the investigations that deal with bringing forward the children’s voice, but because, as put by Gottschalk (1998 apud Meyer; Paraíso, 2012), they are “[...] more modest in their claims of having the truth and the authority, more critically self-reflective with respect to subjectivity, and more self-conscious of their linguistic and narrative strategies” (Meyer; Paraíso, 2012, p. 65). The research that takes this methodological perspective as its foundation avoids thinking the children previously to the discourse, and allows them to be the effect of the discursive practices around them. I draw from Ramos (2009), when saying that “[...] through their reports, children allow us to know not only the worlds of childhood, but also that which involves the whole society globally considered, showing us in this case how the elderly is constituted by different circulating discourses” (Ramos, 2009, p. 256).

I pay attention to how children put the characters on scene in their plays with elderly-puppets, differently from what they did in their plays with puppets. They promptly start to call them Sir and Madam: *are you ready for our tea, Sir? Many years ago, a man and a woman had a grandchild...*² (B., 7 years old, playing with a couple of puppets)³.

Figure 1 – Elderly Couple



Source: author's personal archives.

Ramos (2011) explains that “[...] in the intergenerational contact, the naming attributed by the elders also reveals the content of the relations” (Ramos, 2011, p. 168); however, what appeared in these plays were not relations of authoritarian naming, but of respectful exchange with the other.

The fact of naming the puppets “sir” and “madam” soon calls my attention for showing how children, based on the interactions with their environment, appropriate a language adequate to determine the place one speaks from, to whom one speaks, and how much we are subjects constituted and constitutors of languages. Hence, I was watchful of the multiple languages and meanings that children attributed to the things of the world, and the meaning with which they built their world. Of how much children put in every place their way of understanding the world, as when (B. 7 years old) played with elderly-bodied puppets and they needed to have tea and to have a conversation as the gentlemen and ladies that they were.

For Ramos (2011), “[...] when dealing with elderly grandparents, affectivity seems to speak louder” (Ramos, 2011, p. 144). I could observe in these activities with elderly-puppets how much the children in this study cultivated a loving relationship with their grandparents, instead of having for them only negative feelings, explaining that being older *the person has more stories of the past, more things in their lives, they have lived more and this is very nice. They have more stories to tell their grandchildren* (F., 7 years old). Dolto (apud Ramos, 2011) helps us to think about this production of affect between children and the elderly when she tells us that “[...] there is a biological life that goes from the early age to adulthood and older age, but there is also a life of the heart, and the spiritual life, which is a different thing.” (Ramos, 2011, p. 145). And, in their conversations, children showed us how much it was meaningful for them to be with their grandparents.

Learning to grow Old: the use of elderly-puppets in the research with children

Because I have been working with children since 1972, for a long time it was unthinkable from me to look at old age; however I learned with Ramos (2013) that,

[...] according to the 2003 Statute of the Elderly, an elderly person is someone 60 or more years old. Old age is an expected stage in people's lives, but growing old does not start at 60; in fact, we are growing old from the moment we are born, as we live in a process of physiological changes that take place in time (Ramos, 2013, p. 3).

It is interesting to observe how children think about growing old when they show it in their plays with puppets that being older is to be elderly, to wear different clothes, spectacles and sometimes even a cane (B.)⁴.

Figure 2 – Grandfather with Glasses and Cane



Source: research archives (drawing by B.).

Therefore, it does not go unnoticed to the children what the author is speaking about, and this is also observed by them, that is, these changes are not only in the appearance of people, such as in their *grey hair*, *grey moustache*, *in the hair that starts to fall* (F. 7 years old).

Rather, old age is also marked by clothing and apparel that are used as support to allow them a better life (cane and glasses, dental prosthetics, hair dyeing etc.); artefacts that often collaborate to make these bodies more beautiful. These are accessories that complete or complement bodies and leave more visible the marks of a body that grows old. It reminds me of Abreu (2008), when discussing the entrance

in a children's classroom of *abnormal, different* puppets, such as wheelchair users, old people wearing spectacles, or without a leg, and based on Haraway (2000), discusses the extent to which we are cyborgs, how much people eagerly seek to complete or beautify themselves, to make their bodies younger. To that author, the cyborg appears as an attempt to reach beauty, the ideal body, normal and therefore beautiful. "In the constant search to find other patterns of beauty focused on perfect measures, a worked-out lean body, any resource used makes the subject a cyborg" (Abreu, 2008, p. 27). How much someone who is quite old tries to compensate for what is missing in their body, what the body needs to get closer to a perfect and young body. This is noted by children when they speak about their grandparents: *he doesn't see very well so he bought a very nice pair of glasses* (G., 6 years old). *My grandmother thought that she was getting full of wrinkles, so she had a Botox, I'm having it as well when I get wrinkles* (A., 6 six years old). When playing with the puppets, children also found ways out of the imperfections, and they tried to put prosthetics on the one-legged puppet; they provided a surgery for the puppet on a wheelchair, so that it would walk again; at another moment, the use of accessories and clothes rejuvenated them, a rejuvenating marked by plastic surgery. Children showed that some of the bodies should be complemented; bodies that perhaps were incomplete in the children's eyes.

To Haraway:

The era of the cyborg is here and now, wherever there is a car, telephone or a video recorder. Being a cyborg does not have to do with how many silicon bits we have under our skin or how many prosthetics our body has. It has to do with the fact that Donna Haraway goes to the gym, observes a shelf full of bodybuilding energy food, looks at the machines for working out and realizes that she is in a place that would not exist without the idea of the body as a high-performance machine (Haraway, 2000, p. 25-26).

Somehow, children already speak of this old-cyborg-machine-body, as an age or a stage of life that is also recognized by them, because they say *my grandparents are old people because they have grey hair, they wear glasses and what not, they do things that generally only old people do* (A., 6 years old).

This brings us back to Ramos (2009) when she explains that to some extent we are always called upon to belong and to behave in a certain way, we have behaviors, we manifest feelings, doing what is proper of a certain age, and that is observed by children, because having the air of an old person is socially implicated in the lives of subjects and does not go unnoticed by children.

These are identity marks of a lifetime that was built during a time lived and that is exhibited through our bodily marks, for, having an

older body for children is also to have *a body slightly out of shape, some become chubby, have wrinkles that show that he or she is older than the others* (B., 7 years old). And when one of the children looked carefully at the body of the elderly-puppets, she said: *a wrinkle is a shorter skin; the skin is floppy, softer, kind of flabby* (G., 6 years old). They reaffirm what Goellner (2012) teaches: “the body results from a cultural construction upon which different marks are conferred at different times, places, economic circumstances, social, ethnic and generational groups [...]”, (Goellner, 2012, p. 106). For the group of children studied here, there are generational marks that deal with color, skin, elasticity, and flabbiness characteristic of an age. By acting upon the puppets, children show us in their dictums how much our body is not fixed, static, but how much it is changeable, provisory, being capable of constantly adapting to the interventions present in each culture, to its laws, representations, and also to the discourses that are built around them. By looking at the body of a puppet, a child may realize that *this one is chubby; this one has grey hair and moustache. This one has glasses and is skinny, I think it is nice to be old* (F., 7 years old).

Figure 3 – Barbie’s Grandmother



Source: author's personal archives

I understood that the body of such a puppet could represent for girls and boys the social markers involved in the construction of cultural differences they occupy for belonging to a social sphere and for being defined by their position in it. According to Foucault, this sphere establishes who speaks, what the status of the speaker is, and where the discourse of the speaker comes from (Dornelles, 2005).

When referring to the puppet *Barbie's grandmother*, one of the children showed that that puppet was different, that it had matching

purse and shoes, that its clothes even allowed one to see its body (short blouse).

This one in glasses and skinny, I think it's nice to be old. (A., 6 years old). As I described elsewhere, the puppets represented by Barbie's grandparents do not deviate from the aesthetics of their time, from what is displayed in the body of their granddaughter. Her grandmother is tall, slim, elegant, has highlights in her hair and matching accessories. Her body shows few marks of ageing and they can be observed more clearly in her face. This reminds us of Foucault, when he says that "[...] the body is everything that refers to it: food, climate, soil – it is the locus of *Herkunft* – provenance: in the body we find the stigma of happenings" (Foucault, 2000, p. 267).

Toys, through puppets, have been presenting to children the happenings of their time. The body that "[...] in a way ever more searched and detailed allows a kind of action for each part in the search for transformation and perfection" (Dornelles, 2002, p. 115).

However, one of the girls studied did not see the body of elderly-puppets as imperfection, but rather that each old person had a different body, some of them were even *chubbier* than others, but treated them tenderly in what for other children could be a defect.

For the children, being old is to have a body marked by inscriptions where *some use canes, but only some, to support themselves and stand where they are, and help them to hold on without falling down, isn't it* (B., 7 years old), that is, children are aware that ageing "[...] is a natural and continuous process that begins when we are born, and from it result differences between an elderly person, an adult and a child; in the elderly person some physiological changes will take place that will be directly linked with their well-being and independence" (Ramos, 2013, p. 4).

Figure 4 – Elderly-puppet



Source: author's personal archives

As one of the children said, this possibility of having more autonomy is reached when they make use of a cane or of glasses that help them mitigate pathologies typical of being old. It is known that with ageing many elderly people have their muscle tonus weakened. For many, articulations become stiff, and children notice that their grandparents move slowly, sometimes have difficulty to walk, to keep their balance, hence the use of the cane.

This is my grandfather, sometimes when he goes walking in Redenção Park he uses a cane, he is brown and I don't know when he got old (B., 7 years old), when observing that his grandfather had stopped dyeing his hair and suddenly became old.

Figure 5 – My Grandfather with his Cane in Redenção Park



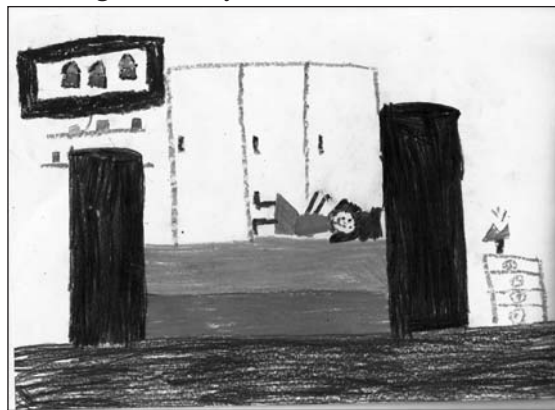
Source: research archives (drawing by B.)

The speeches made by children in their plays with elderly-puppets allow us to deduce that their experience with their grandparents and their difficulties makes them think about what it means to be old, to have an elderly-body, about what it means to live in a process of ageing. In other words, they become aware of the vital process of being born, growing and dying, as well as of the fact that with time people become more fragile. Children showed us that the body is the means through which we become visible, and that it is through it that the others recognize us; therefore it is through it that we are who we are to the others. There is, therefore, a close relation between power and body (Dornelles, 2002). As explained by Ramos:

So, the life of the elderly – and of each one of us – is directly related to the investments made on it, investments that tell the story of an era, that speak of changes, of beauty and of the dreams of culture (Ramos, 2006, p. 241).

It is interesting to observe how the experiences of children with old people intercross and how, even if nothing is said at home about the vicissitudes of ageing, the children in this study discussed the fact that some of the old people are so old, so weak, so skinny that they do not even leave their beds anymore. *But my mother doesn't talk much about my grandmother; she even cries* (B., 7 years old).

Figure 6 – My Grandmother in Bed



Source: research archives (drawing by B.).

Once again, I draw from Ramos (2006) when she says that: “In view of the fragility of health, children observe that the elderly start to need some particularities with the arrival of old age” (Ramos, 2006, p. 128). One of the girls said that her grandmother stayed only in bed, needed her medicines, but everybody took care of her.

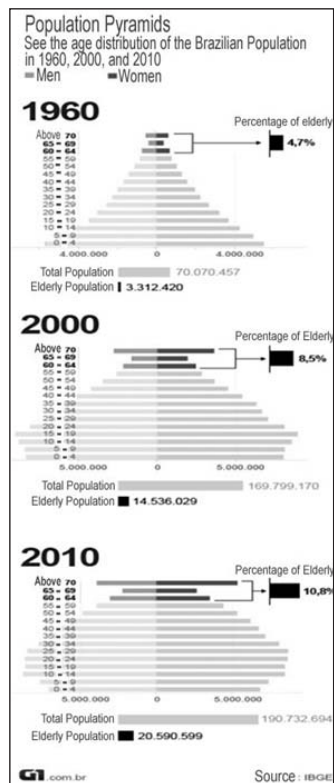
Being Old is Nice if one has a Pension and Meets Friends

This sentence by one of the children (G., 7 years old) leads us to think that they are also aware of the facts that surround ageing. For G., *we get old, but if we have a pension, being old is being free, we don't need to work*. For this child, we can do things in our old age that we could not do before because of work, leaving some time to *visit our friends*.

According to IBGE data⁵, Brazilian population is living longer. Life expectancy increased from 67 years to 72.5 years between 1991 and 2007, and should reach 74.8 years in 2015. These data, according to IPEA researchers, are changing the face of Brazil, which in a few decades will stop being a young country to become a country of old people. This poses the challenge of developing policies to deal with this generation of elderly people, considering that there will still be a large number of people receiving benefits from demands of specialized services, and that there will be a reduction in the number of active workers in the country.

This requires a fast reform that will face the needs of the elderly population emerging in Brazilian society, as we can see in the pyramid-shaped graph showing the division of population by ages in 1960, 2000 and 2010.

Figure 7 – Population Pyramids



Source: IBGE, 2014. Available in: <<http://g1.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2012/04/em-50-anos-percentual-de-idosos-mais-que-dobra-no-brasil.html>>. Accessed on: 15 July 2014.

On the other hand, we observed that the information in this pyramid does not go unnoticed by children, and that there are many elderly people in their lives, *my friends, many have grandparents, others have already died, my great-grandma has died* (B., 7 years old). That means that children are aware of longevity when they speak about their experiences with their grandparents, about the positivity of being old, *they live long and they can tell us many things* (A., 6 years old). Looking through different lens, we can see that longevity is given by improvements in health, basic sanitation and, to some extent, by the choice for a healthier life.

According to Ramos (2013), for a group of 60 elderly people researched, being old is nice when “[...] one has a good relation to the soci-

ety in which one lives, lives well with the family, friends and is a healthy person” (Ramos, 2013, p. 15). One of the girls shows us that *the nice thing about being old is being able to go out to see friends, to tell stories to your grandchildren, having a pension, having time for yourself, this is nice* (T., 7 years old). This allows us to infer how much children observe and are aware of what happens around them, when they point out the pleasurable possibilities of living one’s old age by having time to *see friends*, or to put it better, she is aware of the fact that the life of the younger is hurried, is a daily rush to deal with daily life, leaving no time to get out of oneself, that is, of living old age in a different way with the other. One of the children said that the nice thing about being old is that one has a pension and “[...] then we can find time for other people, we do need to work so much and we can see friends, go out, enjoy life more” (B., 7 years old). As Silva (2011) tells us:

A time of daily life, [...] constricted by multiform temporalities that hardly communicate, that are renewed each day amidst routines that become rituals and give some kind of order to our existences, like a palimpsest of our daily lives rewritten at each moment of the vital cycle that marks the existential time of each one of us (Silva, 2011, p. 218).

The girl confirms what Ramos (2013) points out in her research: “The elderly usually has more free time than when he or she was young. How he occupies this time is, I understand, essential for his well-being and to help him find his place in society” (Ramos, 2013, p. 6). The time of retirement marked in the children’s speeches shows us that they notice the available time there their grandparents now have to carry out activities that formerly were unavailable to them given the needs imposed by their work.

The Storyteller Grandfather

Listening to grandparents’ stories left a childhood mark in most children studied. Costa (2008), when constructing his thesis about the intergenerational pedagogies in a working-class family, deals with the relationship between a girl and her grandfather. He tells us that the story of his doctorate started like this: *Teacher, you have to meet my grandfather!* Costa’s pupil had in her grandfather a great storyteller, and Costa weaves in his work the nets created in the magic of this intergenerational, significant relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. A relationship that can be intense, given that many grandparents are there, together, in daily contact with the children, others not so frequently, but always intensely.

Many of the children in their conversation with the toys showed us how much they longed for the day to be with their grandparents; they told us what they did in their homes⁶ as a result of this adult-grandfather

experience. Costa (2008) and Ramos (2011) tell us how much children enjoy the stories told by their grandparents. Costa speaks of when the grandfather enjoyed sitting with his grandchildren to tell them stories, comforting stories of his childlike behavior. This was a feature of the family studied by Costa, in which the grandfather used to do childlike things, was a storyteller that navigated the legends of Southern Brazil, biblical stories, haunting stories in Saturday afternoons or Sunday nights.

Stories that are not in the books, stories lived by him [the grandfather], sometimes corroborated by the other adults, sometimes rejected as senile fantasies. This world of mystery with a taste of truth, a world of adventure told by the adventurer himself, attracted children and was part of their formation (Costa, 2008, p. 10).

This is what Bosi (2003 apud Ramos, 2011) shows us when he pointed out how much, instead of just stories, the old person constructs possibilities to relive, redo previous paths, lives lived, bringing to today the experiences of the past. That is to say, the authors present us with the meaning of this act in the intergenerational relationships and, perhaps because of that, in their plays children said that they *liked my grandfather's stories, of when he was a little boy, how he used to play with his friends. It was different from the way we play now* (A., 6 years old).

Around the dinner table, stories flowed (Costa, 2008), stories that repeated themselves in the memory of the bedroom, where terrible meetings with insects, monsters and elves sprung from the memory to enchant. In our bedroom, when listening to stories between children and their grandparents, we made many testing trips through Fontanelle, Lobato, Aristophanes, Rabelais, Cervantes, and Jules Verne. In the memory of the grandfather's voice returned "[...] their phrases that made us watch the way of the things, making us observe them, surround them and even pretend that we moved away and returned suddenly to catch them unaware of what they kept in their secrets" (Dornelles, 2011, p. 117).

These are memories that run through generational pedagogies, and perhaps the education of children and old people has to do:

[...] with the uncertainty of a life we may never have, with the uncertainty of a time at which we can never remain, with the uncertainty of a word we shall not understand, with the uncertainty of a thought we may never think, with the uncertainty of a man that will never be one of us. At the same time, however, in order for its possibility to emerge, perhaps from within the impossible, they need our lives, our time, our words, our thoughts, our humanity (Larrosa, 2001, p. 289).

Perhaps it is also important that parents and teachers can deconstruct, reinvent, pluralize, present different repertoires of puppets to be used in children's plays, as in the case described here with elderly-bodied-puppets, so that the question may be placed as to the different types of bodies and of what they make children and adults think about the ways of being elderly today.

Without Concluding, I can say that...

Researching on this theme with children revealed the possibility of bringing up into the discursive network of this work the analogy, the dialogicity, the conversation that works as an experience in the sense given by Larrosa (2001),

[...] that which always carries a dimension of the uncertainty, which cannot be reduced – whose result cannot be foreseen, [for] the experience is not the path to a foreseen objective, to a goal that is known beforehand, but is an opening to the unknown, to do what we cannot foresee nor “pre-view” nor “pre-state” (Larrosa, 2001, p. 28).

In the challenge that represented dealing with children and old people, I did not shy away from directing the research along the Foucauldian drive of the will to know, of moving forward, of trying at every moment to examine the changes that occur in children's school practices, as in the relations between school education, education about children, and old people as discussed in the contemporary world (Dornelles; Fernandes, 2012). Without forgetting that research is inherently unpredictable.

Among children, grandparents, grandchildren, and puppets it was possible for children, when dealing with ageing, to learn about themselves and about the other in the activities with elderly-puppets, in the plays suffused by the joy of discovery. And “[...] Joy, as Spinoza says, is always good, it is life that resists forces; this Joy is combat, and the children can be the strength of strengths on childhood and ageing. Joy is a never-ending learning, it never ends” (Dornelles, 2011, p. 118). I accepted the challenge of talking about the *childlike* roots that speak of elderly-bodies, and of treading the pixie line that dealt with so many dictums and writings, with so many controversies and contradictions, that it did not seem to me to be a privilege when I study what children say when they're playing, but it is something that is imposed when they speak, when they play with elderly-bodies or about ageing.

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Notes

- 1 I make use in this work of activities involving 10 six and seven-year-old children interacting with puppets in a central state school in Porto Alegre, as well as narrative interviews in moments of free play with old-person-bodied- puppets.
- 2 In Portuguese: “Há muitos e muitos anos um senhor e uma senhora tiveram um neto...”. Here, *senhor* and *senhora*, literally *sir* and *madam*, are formal expressions typically used to address older people [Translator’s Note].
- 3 Image source: all images of puppets in this article are from personal archives.
- 4 I make use in this text of terms such as elderly-puppet-body, elderly-puppet, and elderly-body to refer to the puppets that have bodies of elderly people. These materialities are used in the research as an artefact that composes children’s cultures. I borrow from the analysis of Ramos (2013) when she explains that “The Brazilian elderly population has been growing significantly in the last years. Matsudo (2001) says that in 2020 the population above 65 years of age will increase by 85%. This leads us to give more importance to the search of a better Quality of Life in the Third Age. Nowadays, various words are used to refer to advanced years, including ‘old person’, ‘elderly’, ‘third age’, ‘better age’, and ‘mature age’. These marks or signs confer certain identity to the people in that stage of life, thereby effecting the social construction of old age. The term ‘old person’ serves to indicate illness, solitude, inactivity; elderly is a term employed in juridical documents, in laws and rights, and the denomination ‘third age’ is used in the context of health and well-being” (Borini; Cintra, 2002 apud Ramos, 2013, p. 4).
- 5 Available on: <<http://g1.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2012/04/em-50-anos-percentage-de-idosos-mais-que-dobra-no-brasil.html>>. Accessed on: 30 July. 2014.
- 6 See Ramos, 2011, chapter “The grandparents’ home”, in which he presents the records of the children in their grandparents’ home.

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