

# The imaginary childhood: for a philosophical-anthropology of the child

[ *A infância imaginária: por uma antropologia filosófica da criança* ]

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**ABSTRACT** • This article analyzes childhood by the philosophical-anthropology perspective. Different ideologies connect children and their infancies to models or patterns that, in truth, are particular formulations and represent interests of groups, in special of those that exert some form of power to impose to society a crystallized conception of childhood. The singularity of child's caricature drawn by "philosophies" displays refractory perceptions of infancy; from them certain concepts had been demarcated, profitably reproduced and very little questioned by occidental pedagogy following developments. • **KEYWORDS** • Child; philosophical-anthropology; modern pedagogy. • **RESUMO** • O artigo analisa

a infância na perspectiva antropológico-filosófica. Diferentes ideologias referem-se às crianças e a suas infâncias a partir de um modelo ou padrão que, em verdade, são formulações particulares e representam mais os interesses de grupos, em especial daqueles que exercem alguma forma de poder, para impor à sociedade uma concepção cristalizadora de infância. A singularidade da caricatura da criança desenhada pelas "filosofias" expõe percepções refratárias da infância, pois, a partir delas, foram demarcados certos conceitos, proficuamente reproduzidos e muito pouco problematizados no posterior desenvolvimento da pedagogia ocidental. • **PALAVRAS-CHAVE** • Criança; antropologia filosófica; pedagogia moderna.

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To investigate childhood requires rethinking the anthropological-philosophical projects constituted since the classical antiquity conceived by Greek thinkers, who were consecrated and remeaned by medieval theologians in the Christian perspective and widely problematized by romantic and modern philosophers. For almost a century, however, much of the humanities has sustained the argument that childhoods are social, historical and cultural constructs, or otherwise, we cannot perceive them (childhoods) as a univocal category, fixed or preset. However, different ideologies insist on referring to children and their childhoods from a model or pattern which, in fact, are formulations and represent more the interests of groups, especially those who exercise some form of power, to impose on society a crystallizing conception of childhood. In relation to those considerations, the challenge imposed on children's scholars is that of unveiling, behind the universalizing ideologies concerning children, what is arbitrary in those elaborations, leading to new interpretative possibilities in relation to the childhoods. In fact, in presenting to the academic community the partial results of a broader research, which deals with childhood issues and the anthropological and philosophical perceptions of them, we intend to contribute to the anthropological discourse, embracing the challenge proposed by Iturra (2002, p.51– free translation):

To talk about epistemology, in the form of a debate that takes place hundreds of years, it is not only a philosophical debate of the innate, rational, empirical and dialectic origin of knowledge of concepts and reality and its facts, but a theoretical metaphor of scholars who, by remembering the shapes and ways in which reality is organized, learned and transmitted between generations, contributes to be able to understand the ways of understanding the tension between the child's logic and the omnipotent wisdom that the adult intends to have on the childish knowledge.

Becchi (1994), in *Retóricas da infância* ("Childhood rethorical"), states that vocabulary and metaphors have been used to talk about children brought from different areas of knowledge, such as biology, botany, zoology, medicine, among

others. Child-mammal, pup, pet, little thing to be guarded, cared for. Seed of tomorrow, a plant that needs to be “watered” with good moral and cultural precepts.

Kindergarten: this is the space for the child-plant-flower-sowing of tomorrow, symbol of docility and passivity waiting for the care of others, adults, “the gardeners” (KOCH, 1985; FROEBEL, 2001). Doing research on subjects of little age has been analyzing, barring few exceptions, the circumstances where life develops and evolves and does not speak of the conditions in which the child’s life is given, being them cultural, historical, political and social. Within the meaning of the word childhood, it is possible to analyze the etymology (PANCERA, 1994) of the terms that refer to the child. The youth of childhood translates the ambivalent relationship completeness-incompleteness of the child. When we call the etymology as the brand that impregnates the subject, the ambivalence of the terms that refer to the childhood/child is established. *Infans*, from latin *fans*, means speech, and preceded by *in* refers to the absence of speech. In this sense, *infantia* means period of life marked by the absence of speech (ISIDORO DE SEVILHA, 1982). And in an extreme sense, *infans* is one who cannot be worth his word to bear witness (BECCHI, 1994). The considerations that can be reached on the semantics of childhood and that go through the history of mankind are many. The linguistic framework that serves to designate the child in it prints the mental references he/she receives from his/her social group, and serves to frame it in the collective mindset, as stated Pancera (1994).

Absence of peculiarities weaves memory and imaginary about childhood: not talkative, babbling, stammering, fool. The desire of adults is placed in the condition of the studies object, imposing an analysis of how humans imagine themselves and how they were and are represented by others. Toy, little thing that’s good for the fun of adults. Child, calf, pup, cub. Minority, absence of reason. Small, diminutive, little. Angel, innocent, pure, meek. In the etymology terms that refer to childhood or to the child and in the different senses that it is acquiring, the adult represents in his/her child the one who no longer recognizes in himself/herself, the “little thing”, the “toy”, the “doll”, the “pet”, the “cub” or the “little monkey” to which Montaigne referred. Unable to biologize the adult, biologizes the “little man”.

In other words, the child is, at the sight of adults, referenced in the polyvalence. In those meanderings, we can outline an interpretation of the philosophy path in its relationship with the child as an individual, as a subject and the vicissitudes of childhood. By analogy, whether in pedagogy as in Christian philosophy, the child is compared to the inferiority, the inability of reasoning, unable to testify in his/her own favor, origin of all evil, for he/she is the fruit of original sin. Christian philosophy is strongly linked to the genesis of educational thought and consequently to social, Western, modern, white, adult and masculine thinking about childhood. Referenced through metaphors, *litos*, metonymies, the child is perceived by the lack – absence of speech, absence of reason – by naivety, meekness, innocence – ethereal and romanced vision of the other, by the distraction that offers to adults – funny little thing, animated toy. Tropological senses able to emphasize similarities that, however, we drag to the supposed “modern” evolution and the civilized process.

## THE ATHENIAN CHILDHOOD

The transnominating of childhood appears in a paradigmatic form in Plato (2002, 1993, 1999). The old philosophy worries intensely with education and, underlying it, worries also with the child, which implies remeaning our modern codes of a supposed lack of a feeling, or more precisely a perception of the child in society before the 18th century. Among the Dialogues, the Laws and the Republic, there are many childhood perceptions that are taken. Golden (1990) and Kohan (2003) analyze, from those works, at least four possible childhood perceptions among the Athenians. One of them refers to the idea of childhood as the age of life in which the possibilities arise. Thus, the child has an implicit potential to become, which mobilizes the efforts of adults for an education that is relevant to *polis*, since, as such, the child is also perceived as subject/matter of the policy and therefore is through it that can be built the possibility of a desirable, dreamed, desired *polis*. The original paradox of childhood is established: as the child is, at the same time, for the Athenians, a second-rate citizen, synonymous with inferiority<sup>2</sup>, it is also because of his/her subalternating condition, superfluous to the *polis*.

Those are topical not easily taken in a first reading of the Platonic writings. Between the inferiority/insignificance and the deviance/future of the desirable and idealized *polis*, there is the child who, for Plato, must receive a peculiar education capable of forming the virtuous man, who puts in fact the future of the *polis*, the future seated in the principle of justice and truth. In this way, education must cultivate in the child the virtuous nature, able to put the best in the human in the service of the common good.

Not at random, Plato insists that citizens must take care of the children, mainly of their education, both for what the small ones are, and for what they may be.

To understand the deviance from the Platonic perspective, we refer to the allegory of reminiscence or anamnese, which is inseparable from the idea of *Aletheia* (the non-forgotten). The pastor Er, from Panfilia, died and was led to the realm of the dead, where, according to the Greek tradition, the poets, the heroes, the artists were always led. There you find the souls of the dead serenely contemplating the ideas. They must reincarnate, and souls will be led to choose the new life. They are free to choose it according to the desire of how they intend to live. After the choice, they are driven by a plain, where the waters of the *Léthe* river run (Oblivion).

The souls who choose a life of power, wealth, glory, fame or life of pleasures drink water in large quantities, which makes them forget the ideas they have contemplated. The souls of those who choose wisdom hardly drink from the waters and, therefore, in the earthly life, they may remember the ideas they have contemplated and achieve in this life the true knowledge. They will desire the truth, be attracted to it, feel love for knowledge, because they are able to “remember” what they have seen. The allegory suggests that, when we are born, we have, in us, the wisdom and the “truth”, which, throughout our lives, will be brought to memory, gradually. The reminiscence

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2 Golden (1990) and Kohan (2003) claim that, besides children, also slaves, women and foreigners are considered inferior to adult citizens.

requires, however, an education that can bring up (or reason) this wisdom. That capacity recovered by education and creation will cause each subject to be aroused by the knowledge in him/her latent, (by this desire for knowledge) and by the love of truth, for, “It is the education and the creation, [...] because if well educated, measured men will emerge that clearly distinguish all those things and others” (PLATÃO, 1993, Livro 4, 423e).

So, for Plato, learning is nothing more than remembering. Therefore, the Athenians can confer on children different attributes, sometimes positive – the becoming child, whose nature is, in essence, predisposed to virtue –; sometimes negative, because they conceive it in their incompleteness and insignificance before the adult citizen, free; and sometimes neutral – for the child as a matter of politics must be side by side with the adult, for he/she is the promise of the desirable *polis*.

## THE CHRISTIAN CHILDHOOD

Centuries have deformed the Platonic vision of childhood and education, of Christian perception. The idea of a child as a reckless creature has its genesis in religion. Emblematic exponent of the Western monasticism, Saint Augustine (1991)<sup>3</sup> had drawn, between the 4th and 5th centuries, a dramatic perception of the child as a source of all evil. Saint Augustine employed in Christianity the principles of Platonic philosophy, which does not mean that you have disregarded the Christian precepts. The Augustinian ideas led the Western imagination of the Middle Ages to modernity, because of their thinking stems from the fundamental principles of modern pedagogy, obviously of religious status, but which imprints Western behavior in relation to children up to modernity, being able to identify essential traits of their thinking even in the 21st century.

In *A cidade de Deus* (1991), St. Augustine draws the educational itinerary by which all men should pass. In it, the Christian is led – mediated by the church – from the city of men to the city of God. In the philosophical path of St. Augustine, Pedagogy has an unprecedented centrality, whose apex is the rise to God. Through this pedagogy, the philosopher develops the educational itinerary of the good Christian, seated in the autonomy of the will, in an inward (internal) movement out (external, but as an ascetic), composing the spiritual formation as fixed in the *De catechizandis rudibus*, whose elevation is based on the gestures of reading, meditating, praying and contemplating. For the philosopher, the good Christian is the one able to walk away from sin and accept God, leading to Him.

For this reason, the repentance and continual exercise of virtue, which makes it possible to reach the fullness of moral life (Christian), are elements capable of making the individual recognize his fragility, which rationally provides him to fight evil. However, from the perspective of St. Augustine, the source of evil is intrinsically related to the child. It develops a childhood perception that deserves to be discussed in this study.

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3 Also see: Saint Augustine (1997).

When conceived, the child synthesizes the power and the force of evil, because he/she carries in him/her the original sin, hence his/her imperfection, his/her propensity to addictions. St. Augustine describes the child as an incomplete creature, deprived of reason, therefore ignorant, moved by passions and whims of all sorts. To let him/her do what he/she cares about, he/she would easily be precipitated by evil and vice (SANTO AGOSTINHO, 1991, Livro XII, cap. 22). In *Confissões* (1997, p. 277), Saint Augustine goes beyond, showing himself terrified with his own sinful origin – “It was in sin that my mother conceived me...” Augustine continues to ask where and when a child can be innocent. He casts upon the child the shadow of damnation, imputed to mankind by the myth of Eden, whose greatest emblem is the child, the most indisputable testimony of sin. Thus, diminish the distances between adults and children, because the sin of the second in nothing differs from the sin of the first. This implies a prior accusation to the child and a conviction according to the Christian and adult centric vision. A fight is fought to correct it, whose redemption is precisely in the fact that adults seek in all ways to annul childhood by means of coercive correction: thus, the spell of punishments and apparatus, such as knuckles, rods and other forms of current punishment, will remain until the twentieth century.

## THE RENAISSANCE CHILDHOOD

In the 15th century, Alberti<sup>4</sup> writes the treaty *Sobre a família* (1970), in which he reaffirms the theological propositions of St. Augustine, guiding adults to care about the education of children from a very early age, to avoid the addictions and the natural frivolities of childhood.

The establishment of the “Catholic policy”, between the 16th and 17th centuries, was the object of its concerns to noble and aristocratic children, who should be set up for the life of the future ruler, whose most important precept was the establishment of Absolutist state, led by good, strong and effective kings (HANSEN, 2002). Humanists, like Erasmus of Rotterdam, develop treaties which indicate that the infant soul is prone to anarchy, which should be contained by the correction. Erasmus writes *De Pueris*, the education treaty of the future ruler, in which he affirms that man is not born man but becomes man by education. He reaffirms his absolute belief in education. Thus, Erasmus, through his work, contributed greatly to the replacement of the scholastic curriculum by the humanist<sup>5</sup>. However,

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4 Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) – Italian humanist, architect and art theorist, whose life and work was described by Giorgio Vasari

5 We must remember that Erasmus also writes: *De Ratione Studii et Instituendi Pueros* (1512), and *De civilitate morum pueorum* (1530) the latter, a true handbook of good manners to be taught to the prince..

the philosopher recommends that Education should be based on game and play as essential elements for the child's education<sup>6</sup>.

In the same 16th century, however, moral philosophers developed a repressive attitude to the education exercised by family. In the private sphere, this education was considered inadequate for giving too much space to the displays of affection. If we resort to Montaigne's considerations about childhood, we can perceive the movement of philosophers of the time by eliminating any traces of "pampering" (MONTAIGNE, 1987)<sup>7</sup>. It is in the Renaissance that ideas about childhood will consolidate the analogy between child and blank page, or *tabula rasa*, as Locke (1986) stated in the 16th century, on which adults will "print" the moral values of society. We need to remember that, for Locke, educators should not use violence with their students, but in the 17th century, the use of violence was common. In this sense, the term "print" makes its strength by leaving indelible marks on the children.

## THE CARTESIAN CHILDHOOD

Descartes (1995) will impose rationalist thinking to education and, consequently, the perception of childhood is composed with the new – Cartesian – and the old-Platonic and Augustinian – and ultimately Descartes shall be responsible for, definitely, putting into question the scholastic thought, without, however, stripping of the key of incompleteness of childhood and the idea of the child as a synthesis of evil. If, in Cartesian philosophy, the child does not appear as the fruit of the original sin, it will be conceived as the occasion of the error. For Descartes, childhood is the synthesis of the weakness of spirit by the absence of reason. Therefore, his capacity for understanding is referenced in the body, whose impressions aroused by him are no more than confused ideas. For Cartesian thinking, the fact that we are born children makes our spirit condemned to a kind of imprisonment, only surpassed by the asceticism of *Meditações* (DESCARTES, 1973), able to unleash the spirit of irrationality, elevating it to the human condition (capable of reasoning). Insisting on the

[...] because we were children before we were men... it's almost impossible that our capacity for judgment is pure and solid, [continues regretting the fact that we are first children:] the principal cause of our mistakes and, generally, the difficulty of learning the sciences and of clearly representing the ideas are the prejudices of childhood. (DESCARTES, 1973, p. 112 – free translation).

Descartes attributed to his preceptors all the ills of childhood and said that if the child was gifted with reason from an early age and if it had led us, our wits would be more pure and solid.

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6 Erasmus defended the idea that children should be educated from a very small age, which puts it as a precursor to what we call the twentieth century of child education.

7 . Also see: Montaigne (1933).



As the age allowed me to get out of bondage to my preceptors, I wholly abandoned the study of letters; and to resolve not to seek another science that which could be found in myself or in the great book of the world, I employed the rest of my youth in traveling, to see cuts and armies, to live with people of various temperaments and conditions. (DESCARTES, 1973, p. 112 – free translation).

## THE PLAYFUL AND LITERARY UNIVERSES OF CHILDHOOD

The 18th century sees the foundation of two different universes related to childhood, on which Pedagogy is to be seen: literary and playful. The pedagogic novel inaugurated in 1762, with *O Emílio*, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, placed in the center of his work (and theorizing) the child. Rousseau was opposed to all the current ideas of his century about the education of children. In this work, the French philosopher exposed the principles of a “natural education”, conceiving man as a natural, rational and moral subject. In this perspective, he describes the educational itinerary of Emílio, by means of “returning to nature”, the centrality of the child’s essential needs throughout his/her educational pathway, respect and appreciation of the specific characteristics of each age:

Childhood is not known; in the path of the false ideas that you have, the more you walk, the more you get lost. The wisest bind themselves to what men care to know, without considering what the children are in a position to learn. Always seek in the child, man, without thinking of what he/she is before being a man. (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 238– free translation).

At the base of *O Emílio* the perception of childhood is placed as an autonomous age, endowed with distinct peculiar characteristics of the characteristics and purposes of the adult age. Rousseau insists on the tutor’s non-intervention, who must “accompany” the boy’s growth, keeping him isolated from the influence of the corrupting society. Nevertheless, the philosopher does not set rigid programs or schedules for Emílio, he restricts corporal punishments and verbal lessons, because all learning must take place from contact with “things” and, finally, the child must be educated by “nature”, that is:

[...] the romantic education inaugurated by Rousseau produced an important renewal, especially theoretical, which highlighted a new idea of training, based on the centrality of the child in the educational process. This is because for Rousseau the nature when creating the man sought to lead him to freedom. Such freedom is glimpsed in childhood, that is, human nature shows the signs of his vocation to the free state, however society holds him. (BOTO, 2003, p. 373 – free translation).



The playful character of childhood was drawn up by Richter (1768–1825) in his work *Levana* (19--), or *Teoria de la educacion*, from 1807. The *Levana* is allegorical, closes the dialogue between Richter and Rousseau. *Levana* is the Roman goddess of elevation that has led the child since birth. In Roman tradition, when the baby is born, the mother or father lifts it up towards the stars or the moon, and offers it to the goddess *Levana*, who would elevate it to the human condition and introduce it within the society.

The author places in the center of his pedagogy the aesthetic education and reaffirms the need for harmony in man's formation. Richter emphasizes the world of early childhood, the relationship of the child with the family, and the game, the latter, designed by him as a serious and typical childhood activity. In his work, there is an appeal for antiauthoritarian education, from which the educator must follow a behavior that preserves the innocence and spontaneity of the child. In this way, Richter understands the game as a specific and constant activity of the child, which is for him also the most high degree of development of the human spirit even if later in adulthood, the game is replaced by work.

## THE IMAGINARY CHILDHOOD

At the beginning of the twentieth century, we found, in the thought of Merleau-Ponty, a distinct understanding of this long road that is childhood, looking for another possibility to visualize it, the one that goes beyond the rhetoric, but aiming to know it, allowing other communications, not just the verbal expression, but from the gestures and of signals, of movements and of ways, of silences and of the babbling, giving space and right to such languages. Taking the chair of Psychology of Education at Sorbonne University, Merleau-Ponty holds in his classes the analysis of the child and his childhood in a fruitful dialogue with the humanities, especially philosophy and anthropology.

The author develops an important critique of the positivist psychology of the nineteenth century and analysis, putting into question the centrality of the sciences in the interpretation of childhood as a social category. For Merleau-Ponty, the positivist sciences produced the imaginary child – whose image is exactly the one that the adult does and from which he builds his pedagogy, that is, the child is this mirror in which the adult designs what he believes it to be.

In *Fenomenologia da percepção* (1999), Merleau-Ponty gives special emphasis to the sensitive wires that involve the subjects and the world in a single fabric, called “meat”. You can assume this definition the fact that, around the word meat, there is a significant number of references to the human capacity of grasping reality in a sensitive way, which does not imply, necessarily the awareness or the possibility of directing this reality. In other words, the human can grasp what is immediately accessible through the organs of the senses, all of it captured in a sensitive way by the body, and that already carries a meaning, a sense. Thus, we can call “the child of flesh” to refer to children – flesh and blood – who live multiple childhoods experienced in their historical-cultural and social relations (MERLEAU-PONTY,

1999, p. 111-113). In this sense, Merleau-Ponty suggests, in the early twentieth century, that childhood should be thought of as a social, historical and cultural category.

Merleau-Ponty (1999, p. 114) suggests as a task of philosophical anthropology the exercise of seeing each other, i.e.: “the enigma consists of my body being both seer and visible. He who looks at all things can also look at and recognize in what he sees then the ‘other side’ of his psychic power”. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes, however, the act of the natural view and that of the perceptive view, according to his belief conception founded on the “body-itself”. To see is to enter a universe of “things” that are shown, the perceptive is not exhausted in the representation, which makes it possible to understand the child as being-in-world, thus opposing the idea of child as an empirical subject.

The notion of representation developed by Merleau-Ponty is important for the analysis of the social imaginary on the child. More than representation, the imaginary about children is creator of senses, in the relationship of the senses that pass the sensations, acts and experiences of adults on childhood and it is from those senses that the adult centric vision builds its speech, transmitted to society through pedagogical discourse.

The body for Merleau-Ponty represents, in the expression, the symbol role of a certain meaning from which it tries to become the emblem. So, the sense of expression, what appears at the intersection of expressive gestures can be understood according to the fundamental procedures of a culture. Of all his analysis of gesture and expression, Merleau-Ponty (1990, p. 314) stresses that the perception of the other is the perception of a freedom that transpires through a situation and affirms: “we cannot not notice when the perception of the other becomes more and more comparable to language. In fact, there is also a language threatened by stereotyping and a fruitful language”.

Regarding the language threatened by stereotyping, Merleau-Ponty states that the child when he/she begins to speak, a phenomenon of deflation is observed, in which one can see disappear an amount of sounds that he/she was able to emit before, the objective speech, therefore, eliminates even certain elements of the babble. However, the child still retains sounds that do not belong to the language system valued by society and that are on the sidelines of this. He/she only employs them when he/she *daydreams*<sup>8</sup>.

The logical ones, according to the French philosopher, consider the language to be made or objective. In this way, the whole mode of sign communication is underestimated. This bias in favor of so-called objective language, we must discard it.

Merleau-Ponty states that the word becomes sketch and has behind it the hand that draws. Therefore, for the author, the spoken language, objectively structured, excludes the movement of language that is essentially expression-expressive, or otherwise said, the insertion of the child in the adult centric verbal signs eliminates the multiple capacities of communication that the child possesses, such as the gestures, the signs, the sounds, the babbling, the facial expressions, the silences, and others, such as the drawing, the symbolic use of materials and objects, the use of color.

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8 Merleau-Ponty does not explicit, however, the one that refers to this reverie in the child.

The body, in its totality, can smile and not the facial nerve. There is only full expression in the case where the total conduct of the organism is given, i.e., the living or phenomenal body. In this way, expressive or full expressions are more pronounced in the child. However, Merleau-Ponty claims that nothing is fortuitous in language (speech and expression), that is, it is a totality, the use of each sign is in relation to that of all others. There is therefore a sense relationship between different expressions. Being given a certain expressive type, a kinship is established between the different expressions that the child will produce.

## POSSIBLE CONSIDERATIONS

The uniqueness of the child's caricature drawn by "philosophies" exposes refractory perceptions of childhood, because, from them, certain concepts were demarcated, prolifically reproduced and very little problematized in the later development of Western pedagogy. A changing figure between sin and error, childhood is an evil to be fought, remains the battlefield between the child's body and the education that will correct it (FERNANDES, 1997). Period of life marked by contradictions, by the taste of the adult who perceives it and designates what is and what should be. Childhood is also the phase of life marked by inaccuracies; it is the ages cadenced by different sciences, such as psychology, medicine, legal science, biology, and pedagogy. Childhood ages are marked by adverse temporalities and temporal adversities!

The child's entry into the modern school marks a tenuous separation between two social categories: the child and the student, because the transformation of the first in the second does not indicate that the student is recognized as a child.

The supposed prolongation of childhood in school hides, on the contrary, the arduous preparatory process of the child for adult life. In other words, a student is an auto defining category that refers more to the condition of incarceration in the school institution, characterized by the preparatory stage to which it is submitted. Childhood exists, therefore, in the realm of the word "other", which is a power of the adult towards the child, or the one who talks about someone who is "unable" to speak for himself/herself. *In fans*, the one who can't talk (PANCERA, 1994).

In this way, children are overwhelmed by adults' senses, for whom they are nothing but *illness* and "weakness of body and spirit" (KATZ, 1996, p. 18 – free translation). It is with the intention of helping the child to get fortified that education will guide him/her (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1990). Thus, a battlefield between the child of the flesh and the social imaginary on what he/she must be and from which the struggle of education begins to correct him/her (BECCHI, 1994). In other words: "an unusual and surprising child... Pure negativity, she has no sex, no name, no age... an unrelated set of crazy moods" (FERNANDES, 1997, p. 57 – free translation).

Slowly, the romantic childhood, which was never a reality, is also fading away as ideal (SANDIN, 1999). We have distanced ourselves from the romantic dream of an idyllic childhood, free of obligations, as described by Richter or Rousseau. This idealization of childhood in fact contrasts with the reality of most children, whether they are poor or rich, who have different childhoods, but increasingly brief and with more obligations.

## SOBRE A AUTORA

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