

**Ethics and Aesthetics in the Production of Sense in Early Childhood: A Reflection on the Simultaneity of the Past and Future in the Present /**  
*Ética e estética na produção de sentidos no começo da vida: considerações sobre a simultaneidade do passado e futuro no presente*

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**ABSTRACT**

In this study, we explored some theoretical assumptions of literary analysis within the context of everyday situations of sense production. This operation was carried out by analyzing longitudinal videotaped sessions of the interactions between a mother and an infant. Concepts related to language, ethics and aesthetics formed the basis for the theoretical assumptions that guided our analysis. A microanalysis of empirical data illustrates the functioning of these assumptions for the production of sense. In the results, we discussed the implications of the simultaneity of past experiences and the anticipation of future possibilities for the organization of the actions in the immediate present. We concluded that the production of sense is a way to solve emerging tensions related to the simultaneity of past and future, originality, individuality, and dynamic stability when responsive situations arise. Therefore, the production of sense was considered an ethical and aesthetic human action, and we were able to verify how appropriate these assumptions were to analyze language practices outside literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Production of Sense; Early Childhood; Ethics and Aesthetics

**RESUMO**

*Este estudo é uma exploração de alguns pressupostos conceituais da análise literária em situações cotidianas de produção de sentidos. Esta exploração foi realizada a partir de registros longitudinais videografados da interação de uma díade mãe-bebê. Os pressupostos focalizados foram concepções de linguagem, ética e estética. Em uma análise microgenética ilustraram-se, com dados empíricos, o funcionamento desses pressupostos na produção de sentidos. Nos resultados discutiram-se implicações da simultaneidade de experiências passadas e antecipações de suas possibilidades futuras na organização da interação no presente imediato. Concluiu-se que a produção de sentidos é uma forma de resolver tensões promovidas pela simultaneidade de diferentes tempos, em experiências marcadas pela factualidade, originalidade e pela estabilidade dinâmica de uma situação responsiva. Com essas características, a produção de sentidos foi considerada um exercício ético e estético das ações humanas. Então foi reconhecida a apropriação dos pressupostos discutidos na literatura para análise também de práticas cotidianas com a linguagem.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Produção de sentidos; Começo da vida; Ética e estética

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## General Remarks

In this article, we explore everyday situations of language practice using the literary analysis developed by Bakhtin as theoretical assumptions (1986a;<sup>1</sup> 1986b;<sup>2</sup> 1986;<sup>3</sup> 1990;<sup>4</sup> 1993; 1999).<sup>5</sup> This initiative reflects this language philosopher's predictions about the possible similarity between the architecture of psychological processes that emerge in the relationships between the author and characters in a work and the psychological processes that happen in real life, outside literature. Originally, these predictions were initially based on his observations of how the character's psychological processes were organized in the plot in their relation with the experience of time-space units. To this extent, Bakhtin considered that the chronotopic configuration maximizes literary work, constituting a metaphor for real life.

On account of these observations, Bakhtin's work becomes essential to study human development in the early stages of life. In this perspective, there is widespread disclosure of an expectation that has led many psychology researchers to use Bakhtin's theoretical assumptions empirically (HERMANS, 2001; BERTAU et al, 2013; SILVA; VASCONCELOS, 2013). The present article follows these initiatives, presenting an approach of the processes in which a mother and a baby communicate, more specifically making sense in early childhood, based on Bakhtin's conceptual parameters. Therefore, we acknowledge the strength of his words about the "simultaneity of artistic experience and scientific study" (BAKHTIN, 1986a, p.145).<sup>6</sup>

The production of sense in early childhood was seen here as an emerging event in language practices, in which non-verbal processes showed that interlocutor

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<sup>1</sup> BAKHTIN, M. From Notes Made in 1970-71. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. McGee, Austin, TX: University of Texas press 1986a, pp.132-158.

<sup>2</sup> BAKHTIN, M. Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. McGee, Austin, TX: University of Texas press 1986b, pp.159-172.

<sup>3</sup> The English version of this work was published under the name of Voloshinov [VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986].

<sup>4</sup> BAKHTIN, M. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov; translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov; supplement translation by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1990, pp.4-256.

<sup>5</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

asymmetry prevails. We considered this to be suggestive and an inspiring scenery to activate Bakhtin's predictions as he stated very early that "[w]hat we should fear least of all is that the philosophy of the answerable act or deed will revert to psychologism and subjectivism" (1993, p.29).

Therefore, his philosophical arguments were consonant with the phenomena studied in developmental psychology related to communication in the early stages of life. Furthermore, in Bakhtin's philosophy, the production of sense was considered a highly relevant notion for artistic knowledge, as well as for science, since he asserted that "[t]he world has contextual meaning" (BAKHTIN, 1986b, p.159).<sup>7</sup> When referring to the nature of sense production, he wrote: "With meaning I give *answers* to questions. Anything that does not answer a question is devoid of sense for us" (BAKHTIN, 1986a, p.145; italics in original).<sup>8</sup>

In this approach, we used the notions of ethics and aesthetics within the context of sense, understood as answering acts in the communication between a mother and an infant. We considered that these answering acts presuppose an ethical character because they are unique configurations of inter-subjective manifestations. Besides, these acts presuppose an aesthetics experience when we consider the surplus of vision (offering information not yet known about and for the other) in this case, mainly focused on the mother's actions (as will be seen afterwards) as an interactive condition needed for the inter-subjectivities that act in the dialogues thereupon. The analysis and discussion we propose in this article were carried out by analyzing longitudinal videotaped sessions of mother-infant dyad interactions with notions and ideas defended by Bakhtin about the ethical and aesthetic dimension of human practices with language.

## **1 Human Practices with Language: Tension between Conservation and Innovation**

In his philosophy of the act, Bakhtin (1993) highlighted the existence of a fundamental and essential expressivity of a unitary and unique Being-event. However, he had already observed that it would be very hard to attribute an adequate and full expression for this Being, as soon as he manifests himself as something to be

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<sup>7</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

<sup>8</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

accomplished. Nevertheless, there is such complexity and dynamics, with an ideal of wholeness in its background, that the concept of language in Bakhtin's philosophy becomes untranslatable. On the other hand, around this notion of language we can derive the mainspring of the precious conceptual reviews that he offered mankind about the possibility of investigating one self.

The polemic situation in which language stands, on the one hand, due to difficulties to define and translate it, and on the other, as a central feature to obtain knowledge about human experience in the world, provided philosophers and researchers with the hard task of conceptualizing and defining its role in human development (HERMANS, 2001; SILVA; VASCONCELOS, 2013; BERTAU et al. 2013). Holquist's committed words in the introduction of *Dialogical Imagination* seem to echo the hardness of this task:

At the heart of everything Bakhtin ever did – from what we know of his very earliest (lost) manuscripts to very latest (still unpublished) work - is a highly distinctive concept of language. The conception has as its enabling *a priori* an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence, a ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal force that strive to make things cohere (HOLQUIST, 1981, p.xviii).

It was the aim of the present study to discuss ethics and aesthetics as presented by Bakhtin (1990;<sup>9</sup> 1993) and our search process was reflected, sometimes by coherence, and sometimes by constant bifurcations and separations between things and ideas as an expression of human development sustained by language practices. In other words, we dealt with processes related to the responsibility of an ethical act as: “[...] a unitary plane, a unitary context in which this taking-into-account is possible – in which its theoretical validity, its historical factuality, and its emotional-volitional tone figure as moments in a single decision or resolution” (1993, p.28).

These unitary contexts were interpreted here as responsive situations or production of sense. Thus, a logic of social sciences was preserved, which, according to Bakhtin, must promote an approach to the sense of Being as an event without being “[...] taken in abstraction from the once occurrent actual act/deed and its author – the

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<sup>9</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

one who is thinking theoretically, contemplating aesthetically, and acting ethically” (1993, pp.27-28).

## **2 Ethics: Responsibility without an Alibi**

When writing about ethics, Bakhtin (1990;<sup>10</sup> 1993) considered the real and responsible execution of an act. In his words, ethics “[...] is a category of the individuality, of the uniqueness of a performed act, of its once-occurrent compellentness, of its historicity, of the impossibility to replace in with anything else or to provide a substitute for it” (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.25).

While updating the characteristics of a responsible act, Bakhtin (1993) criticized the system that divided ethics into material (related to content) and formal. For him, this division resulted in the annexation of ethical duty to theoretical propositions, which cannot be founded immediately in a performed act, neither in a thought out act, nor in its real execution.

Bakhtin pointed out that universality was another failure in conceptualizing ethics through norm, for, according to him, it is a mistake to think that duty can be extended and applied to all. The universality of duty is also a fault of formal ethics, since the subjacent concept of legality is completely incompatible with ethical duty, since in the notion of legality “[...] surrender the actually performed act to pure theory [...] and the legality of the categorical imperative as universal and universally valid consists precisely in this theoretical justification of it” (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.26). Therefore, in his opinion, there is a “[...] fatal theoreticism (the abstracting from my unique self)” (1993, p.27) in the concept of formal ethics, which does not correspond to the world in which an act or action is performed.

Bakhtin (1986a;<sup>11</sup> 1986b;<sup>12</sup> 1990;<sup>13</sup> 1993; 1999)<sup>14</sup> engineered vigorous exchanges with scientific interests because his philosophy was characterized by many attributes that are recognized today due to their elastic coverage to enhance knowledge about human existence. In this articulation, he emphasized that ethics should become

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<sup>10</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

<sup>11</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>12</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

<sup>13</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

<sup>14</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

the logic of social sciences, into which it is paramount to recognize that the preformed act does not presuppose the notion of content, but a performance that somehow sustains the unitary and unique life performing his integrity. Thus, the interior of this act “[...] refers both *its own sense and its own factuality*, and within which it attempts to actualize answerably the unique truth [*pravda*]” (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.28; italics in original), bearing its concrete historicity and individuality that must be the object of knowledge of social and human sciences.

### **3 Aesthetics: Actions that Complete the Other in the Aspects that He Cannot Complete himself**

An essential moment (but not the only one) of aesthetics contemplation, in Bakhtin’s point of view (1993), is the empathy with the individual object of vision. The moment of empathy is always followed by a moment of objectiveness, i.e., the act of *placing* individuality perceived by empathy *outside* and *returning* to one self. For him, only this conscious return provides form, i.e., gives aesthetic form to originally qualitative individuality.

As viewed by Bakhtin (1993; 1990),<sup>15</sup> aesthetics is a subjacent and correlated function to the responsible ethical act once:

[...] the aesthetic answerability of the actor and the whole human being for the appropriateness of the role played remains in actual life, for the playing of a role as a whole is an answerable deed performed by *the one playing*, and not the one represented (1993, p.18; italics in original).

Therefore, there is an incorporation of the aesthetic world in the ethical responsible act of the Being in his eventfulness, in the sense that when he understands an object, the Being understands his duty in relation to him (the attitude and position it should take in relation to him). This duty in relation to the object of aesthetic contemplation was named surplus of vision and viewed by Bakhtin (1993) as a constitutive notion of the unique condition of the Being. Yet, he highlighted that a person in the act of contemplating from the outside perceives several perspectives, as

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<sup>15</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

the person who contemplates will always see and know something that the one who is being contemplated cannot grasp in his vision or wisdom.

Referring to this surplus of vision effect as knowledge ownership in aesthetic contemplation, he pointed out that the person being contemplated is always conditioned by his singularity, making it impossible to replace him considering the place in the world occupied by the person who contemplates him. In his own words:

The excess of my seeing in relation to another human being provides the foundation for a certain sphere of my own exclusive self-activity, i.e., all those inner and outer actions which only I can perform in relation to the other, and which are completely inaccessible to the other himself from his own place outside of me; all those actions, that is, which render the other complete precisely in those respects in which he cannot complete himself by himself (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.24).<sup>16</sup>

Comparing the surplus of vision to a bud, onto which the form rests and blossoms as a flower, Bakhtin (1990)<sup>17</sup> pointed out that, for this bud to blossom effectively and completely become a flower, it is necessary for the surplus of vision to complete the perspective of the observed individual without losing his originality. This process implies, thus, in the observer's axiological exercise, which, empathically, forges values (will, knowledge, and feeling) to the observed object, as he sees it, putting himself in his place.

We can summarize these concepts saying that empathy, axiology and interpretation (while concluding ambience happening in the act of the observer returning to himself) are focused in the path of ethical duty and aesthetic contemplation. If interpretation is seen here as constitutive of aesthetic contemplation as well as of responsible act, then ethics, aesthetics and language are interwoven. Besides, by recognizing interpretation as a manifestation of language that happens in the perspective between I (the aesthetic observer) and the other (object of contemplation), the constitutive function of language is confirmed, identified by Holquist (1981), when referring to the tension it supports, through the dialogical relation between the maintenance of pre-existing aspects and the emergence of something new, the natural architecture of human existence.

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<sup>16</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

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Thus, we can confirm this conceptual and analytical scenery discussed so far as the foundation for the exploratory study developed here, taking into account Bakhtin's interest in characterizing human psyche, which is able, on the one hand, to overcome rationalism of extreme theoretical behavior, and, on the other, to overcome abstract subjectivism, which alienates historicity from psychological functioning.

In the present study, the psychological processes, anchored in this conceptual notion, were taken empirically from the functioning of joint attention and from the processes it triggers. This excerpt is justified by the relevance of joint attention studies, developed with data taken from object-mediated communication between a mother and her baby, which makes it possible to learn about psychological human processes in early childhood. In his research, Tomasello (1999) mentioned the *nine month revolution* concerning the emerging inter-subjectivity in the context of joint attention that, according to him, marks the beginning of human conscience about his similarity with "the other" and about the manifestations of intent in the interactions.

A scrutiny of this information encouraged an investment in rereading the processes subjacent to inter-subjectivity based on the discussions regarding the ethical exercise and aesthetic contemplation in human actions mediated by language, as philosophically founded by Bakhtin. Tomasello's explanations about intentional behavior in situations of joint attention have proven to be unsatisfactory and were responsible for this rereading. It is believed that, in his explanations, we can find residues of traditional rationalist theoretical assumptions - the logic character be it of an empirical or deductive nature. It is hoped that the conceptual support of the ethical and aesthetic act in practices with language will provide explanations about the dialogical basis of these processes in early childhood.

Finally, in this study we also considered Bakhtin's (1986b)<sup>18</sup> notions about the parameters that should guide human and social science methodologies. Among these notions, we pinpoint the following: the wide bond in the inter-relation between the perspective of the I and the other, the adoption of an expressive and talking being, an object of knowledge, and the cognitive interpretation of sense, the latter being the main issue in this study.

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<sup>18</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.



## 4 Methodology

The general objective of this study was to explore the concepts of ethics and aesthetics, originally related to literary text analysis, in everyday situations of practice with language, with emphasis on producing sense in early childhood as a phenomenon constructed during these practices. Our analysis was characterized by acknowledging the production of sense as an inter-subjective process happening in joint attention, based on the functioning of the ethical and aesthetic act, as defined by Bakhtin (1990;<sup>19</sup> 1993).

We thought that it might be possible to gather information about the development of communication in early childhood enhancing the role of historicity and the wide environmental bond in the dialogical relationships and emerging senses between a mother and her baby who participated in this study. It is a longitudinal case study. Data was collected in videotaped sessions of a dyad interaction. The procedures for videotaping were previously appraised by an ethical committee and approved. Besides, the mother's voluntary participation was confirmed through her signature on the Informed Consent Form.

Videotaping sessions were conducted once a week, during eleven months, starting when the baby was four weeks old. The environment for the sessions was kept the same during the whole period (same place, same toy, and furniture disposition). As initial instructions for videotaping, the mother was told that she should behave as usual, looking after the baby's needs during the intervals from the videotaping. Instructions were not given concerning the use of available toys.

The data gathered amounted to forty videotapes with an average duration of twenty minutes. We watched the video twice before starting our analysis, adopting an investigative posture so as to look for processes that somehow showed shared attention. Our focus reflected the literature of child development that highlights emerging processes of inter-subjectivity related to sharing attention (TOMASELLO, 1999). In the data, these situations were pinpointed mainly when there was eye contact between the mother and her baby and when they looked at an object together. The focus on situations in which mother and baby shared eye contact was a strategy to find potential responsiveness situations, a parameter which captured the production of sense, aligned

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<sup>19</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

with Bakhtin's perspective that pointed out the "[t]he responsive nature of contextual meaning" (1986a, p.145).<sup>20</sup>

When this phase was fulfilled, we watched the videotaped sessions a third time, with the objective of marking the beginning and the end of the situations in which attention was shared. The next step involved transcribing these delimited situations. The transcriptions were performed based on the discussions held by Silva, Santos & Rhodes (2014) about transforming images into text. In their discussions, the researchers evaluated concepts of data, which were defined as a researcher's construction, without the possibility of existing in time and outside the context of the research to which they belonged. Based on these assumptions, a research group transcribed the sessions in which each transcribed event was discussed among the five members of the group during regular meeting sessions. The videotape (activated during the discussion sessions) and the description of the actions (the text of the images) were object of these discussions. The dynamics of taking shifts during the actions was the main parameter for the transcriptions. Taking into account the characteristics of mother-infant communication, we observed that the dynamics of shift taking happened mainly through non-verbal act shifting, transcribed in detail, preserving the action and response arising from this action.

Finally, we conducted a microgenetic analysis, which is defined, according to Sinha (2013) as:

[...] the employment of phenomenologically informed, structured microanalytic methods. By "phenomenologically informed," I mean (in this context) that they are oriented to the "thick description" [...] and elucidation of the experiential richness and meaning-fullness of the dialogical situation (SINHA, 2013, p.149).

This phenomenological structure is related to the high level of involvement from the researcher while gathering information about the relation between the data configuration aspects studied and their interpretation. The option for microgenetic analysis of data gathered was considered appropriate and necessary to present information about the dynamic nature and dialogical dimension of the processes being investigated (LAVELLI, et al, 2002; SCORSI; LYRA, 2012).

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<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

## 5 Results and Discussions

The results shown here refer to the full description of three selected events. We took into account the potential information that could illustrate situations in which there was production of sense related to the simultaneity of past and future experiences in the present. In our analysis, the main notion in data interpretation was the relation between the production of sense and simultaneous convergence of past experiences and future expectations in conflict resolution, which were set in the immediate communicative situation. For this reason, the analysis of this simultaneity made it possible to reflect upon the responsible and aesthetic action present in the communicative processes in early childhood.

In this study, an event was defined as a set of inter-related nuclear actions, rescued from the continuous mother-infant interaction, where we were able to artificially capture the beginning and the end of their guidance toward temporary goals. We analyzed events in which a set of actions happened in a continuous interval of time as well as an inter-related set of actions, although set in different discontinued time intervals, which were associated to compose what was defined as guidance toward temporary goals. Based on these assumptions, the selected events were named as follows: 1) Introducing communication mediated by a toy, 2) Tension between preserving and innovating experiences, and 3) Anticipating possibilities of future experiences. Defining, naming and characterizing these events were specifically related to the way responsive actions were set.

We would like to emphasize that the empirical data mentioned in our study made it possible to consider the production of sense in an exclusively non-verbal dialogue, i.e., the absence of speech from the mother and the infant. These dyad characteristics, in which the mother is a seventeen-year-old teenager, may justify the absence of mother language (SCORSI; LYRA, 2012), taking into account her complete immaturity as a mother.

### Event 1: *Introducing Communication Mediated by a Toy*

The baby was four weeks old when this event began and ten weeks old when it ended. Therefore, this event is built on integrated actions that happened in discontinued

intervals of time. In order for it to be characterized as an event, it was guided toward temporary goals, making it possible to integrate these discontinued actions.

At the beginning of this event, the mother held her baby in her arms while showing him a toy that would become a constant reference to mediate the communication of this dyad. The toy was a pink rattle, made of durable plastic. The mother put the toy in front of the baby's sight for long time intervals (some of them lasted more than 30 seconds). On some occasions, she slid the toy along the baby's arm so that he could feel the toy's texture. As a responsive situation, the baby looked fixedly at the toy when it was in front of his eyes, and he kept eye contact with the mother when she slid the toy along his arm.

The communication mediated by this toy became present in all videotaped sessions. However, as time passed by, slight changes occurred. As time went by, we were able to observe, for example, that the mother started placing the toy in the baby's hand and, while holding it in his hand, she moved it, making the rattle sound. During several occasions, these attempts made the object fall from the baby's hand, since he was not able to hold the rattle on his own. Nevertheless, the mother always took the rattle from the floor and placed it back in the baby's hand. These changes were followed by the baby's responses as he looked attentively at the object and at the mother's movements while she picked the rattle up from the floor. Around the tenth week of the baby's life, this circle closed when the baby, for the first time, held and shook the rattle on his own while the mother looked at this action smiling.

Taking Bakhtin's (1986a;<sup>21</sup> 1986b)<sup>22</sup> points of view about the relationship between sense and responsive situation into consideration, the construction of empirically argumentative assumptions to demonstrate, on a microgenetic level, how sense was constituted in responsive actions was the main goal when analyzing this event. In this specific event, we were able to observe, in recurrent moments, the relationship between sense and response for the development of communication, which, in the history of this dyad, was marked mainly by the mediation of an object. Communication mediated by an object is a relevant topic in literature that deals with human development in early childhood (LYRA, 2007). Nevertheless, to focus on the

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<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>22</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

main conceptual notion of the present article we do not intend to further this topic herein.

The production of sense was regulated by the baby's responses to the mother's initial and recurrent actions with the object, sometimes exploring the baby's eye contact, sometimes exploring his tactile impressions. Throughout the repetitions, the baby responded mainly by keeping eye contact with the mother. We suggest that this contact encouraged the mother to continue and to repeat her actions. Moreover, taking the complexity of interpretation a step further in order to include dialogical relations, a notion that was repeatedly dealt with by Bakhtin, it is possible to argue that, in this dynamic, the baby's responses can be considered actions that triggered the mother to respond; i.e., in that the baby kept eye contact, the mother responded by making her actions more frequent and lasting.

This dynamic, in which the roles of the agent and the respondent were constantly shifting, favored the emergence of microgenetic changes in the configuration of the action and in the corresponding response. An example of microgenetic change in the event analyzed was when the mother started to place the rattle directly in the baby's hand, holding and shaking it with him so that the baby could experience the sound that the rattle made. These slight changes provided new characteristics to the event. We observed that the baby's inability to hold the rattle and his look at the fallen object instigated the mother's action to pick the object up and replace it in the baby's hand.

Thus, sense was responsible for guiding actions, from the past to the future, in which the organization of an immediate present was the unique scenery. We were able to mark moments in which a perspective (temporary goals) is closed in this guidance. In Event 1, for instance, this closing can be illustrated by the moment in which the baby was able to hold and shake the rattle on his own.

We can ascertain that the experience of sense in the dyad interaction was characterized by the emergence of events aligned with action historicity and responses triggered. The achievement act, for example, in which the baby held and shook the rattle on his own, reflected changes over time. In this sense, this achievement was a past concretization, mainly linked to the present. On this issue, Bakhtin, while discussing the production of sense, said that "[...] we perceive and understand what is remembered in

the context of the unfinalized past” (1986b, p.160).<sup>23</sup> Thus, taking the architecture of production of sense into account, two dimensions of systemic functioning arise: one marked by a relation between response and sense (illustrated by moments of immediate shifting between action and response), and another marked by the relation between historicity and sense (illustrated here through achieving or not perspectives or temporary goals. In the event described, mother and baby were responsible for sustaining and shaking the object with the baby’s autonomy).

*Event 2: Tension between Preserving and Innovating Experiences: The Unfinished Past in the Present*

This event was constitutive as an interactive situation set in a continuous interval of time, with the approximate duration of five minutes. In this situation the baby was twenty-five weeks old. The mother squatted on the rug with cushions. The baby sat on the same rug next to her. On the rug right in front of the baby, the mother placed three toys that emitted sound: a *Mickey* doll, a rubber telephone and the rattle, which was familiar to the baby (mentioned in the description of the previous event). Then, the mother started to squeeze the toys to show the sound they made. The baby followed the mother’s movements, and, at a given moment, put his hand towards the rattle with which he was already familiar among the other toys. Next, the mother showed him the sound of another toy, the telephone, with which he had not played yet. However, the baby insisted and took the rattle that he used to play with (illustrating another closing of temporary goals), and started to shake it and listen to the sound that it made in his hand.

This event’s organization was extremely appropriate to enhance the analysis of the outstanding characteristic in the notion of language that pervades Bakhtin’s work: Permanent tension between centripetal forces, acting to promote integration and coherence with already known experiences, and centrifugal forces, acting to promote experience innovation. In our analysis, this tension presupposes the two dimensions of systemic functioning mentioned when discussing the previous event. The centrifugal forces are set on the level of the relation between response and sense, in which there is greater arbitrariness and vulnerability for innovation and discontinuity; the centripetal

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<sup>23</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

forces are set on the level of the relation between historicity and sense, in which there is greater appeal towards coherence and continuity.

It is believed that systemic functioning is related to the simultaneity of past and future experiences, activated in the present, transmitted in language practices. It is argued that this simultaneity is a necessary condition for historicity and a main parameter in the analysis of production of sense and its impact on human development.

Aligning these theoretical assumptions with the configuration of empirical data in Event 2, the mother's actions, when she makes different toys available for the baby, are seen as expressions of experiences of simultaneity, because shared past actions were reflected when the mother only introduced the rattle in her communication with the baby and invested in making this toy the mediator of senses in that moment of the dyad history. Yet, when making the three toys available for the baby, the mother's actions reflect an anticipation of future possibilities at this new present moment. Summing it up, we can say that this availability signaled, on the one hand, a rescue of a past relationship between the dyad, when the mother promoted the baby's interest to play with the rattle and, on the other hand, an introduction towards a new expectation: an opportunity for the baby to learn about other objects.

The systemic functioning between historicity and sense can then be illustrated in this event when the baby chose the toy that he already knew, disregarding, at that moment, the mother's investments on the possibility of playing with other toys. We understood that a past and present experience of simultaneity was also responsible for the baby's decision; there was a subjacent tension between preserving and innovating experiences in his decision. In this functioning, the sense of the actions emerged, pointing at one direction: from an unfinished and yet present past towards an anticipated future.

### *Event 3: Anticipating Possibilities of Future Experiences*

This event had the duration of four continuous minutes. The baby was twenty seven weeks old in the situation that was videotaped. He sat on the rug and was playing with the rattle (already familiar to him), while his mother sat in an armchair, observing him. At a certain moment, she laid him on his belly on the rug and took the rattle from

his hand. Afterwards, the mother placed the rattle on the rug a little farther, but right in front of the baby's sight. In response, the baby made vigorous movements with his arms, with his legs and head, trying to reach the toy that had been taken away from him.

Through this event analysis, we were able to enhance the perspective for the situation of simultaneity of the past and future in the present. When aligning empirical and conceptual assumptions to analyze this event, it is possible to highlight that the mother's action to take away the toy from the baby's hand while he was playing, placing it a little farther but making sure that the baby could see it, signaled an anticipation of future possibilities for the baby: that he could move to reach the toy; that he became aware of his own locomotion. The production of sense, in this situation as well, was considered to the extent that the baby acted responsively, signaling his effort to reach the object, even if he was not able to do so. However, the progressive intensity of his limb movements and the fact that he kept his head lifted looking fixedly at the rattle in front of him was a secure indication of his response to his mother's actions.

Summing it up, in the analysis of the history of how a toy mediated the development of communication, we highlighted, using examples of empirical data, how the simultaneity of past and future experiences acted to organize the actions in an immediately present and interactive situation, which resulted in responsiveness that supported the production of sense.

#### *Implications of Past and Future Simultaneity in the Present for Ethics and Aesthetics in the Production of Sense*

Restating the objectives of this study in order to delimit the information produced so far, a question arises: What are the implications of the experience of simultaneity referred herein for the responsible ethical and aesthetical exercise of the actions in the production of sense in early childhood? At first sight, it is believed that there is not a definitively precise and finished answer to this question. Nevertheless, it is possible to discuss the great irradiation effects of this experience of simultaneity on the exercise of ethical duty and on the performance of aesthetic contemplation in communication in early childhood.

In order to discuss the irradiation on the exercise of ethical duty, it is believed that the predominance of non-verbal actions, a feature of communication in early



childhood, promotes greater imprecision to delimit the boundary between the “I” and the “other,” in this case, between the mother and her baby. This is due to the fact that, in the absence of speech, the individual depends more on the environment (VYGOTSKY, 1978).<sup>24</sup> Thus, taking into account that the mother and the baby shared a common environment when interacting, the non-verbal actions were not favorable to clearly define boundaries between them.

Under these circumstances, the characterization of a responsible act as a category of individuality presupposes an asymmetry between the mother and the baby. It means that there is a predominance of the mother’s experiences to organize and guide sense, even though we do not defend the idea of a passive baby. Based on the data, this predominance can be observed when the mother introduced the rattle and promoted it as a frequent mediator of their communication.

It is believed that the possibility of a responsible act in the interaction under asymmetrical conditions reflected the mother’s dialogue with her own history and with her previous knowledge of the world, a determining factor for her decisions in the interaction, in the immediate present with her baby. Thus, the manifestation of the mother’s necessary dialogue with her own history was an implication of past experience of simultaneity in the present in order to exercise ethical responsibility in the production of sense in early childhood.

The need for a dialogue with one’s own history for the mother’s ethical actions in her relationship with her baby was implied in the aesthetic characterization of language practices in early childhood. For this characterization, two notions of aesthetics contemplation, according to Bakhtin (1990;<sup>25</sup> 1993), should be mentioned: the function of the surplus of vision and the axiological dimension of the performed acts. It is possible to conceive all the mother’s actions performed towards her baby as an exercise of the surplus of vision, because, through her actions, she informed her baby how he had been perceived by her. Thus, the mother’s actions functioned completing the baby in the aspects not yet known to him. Bearing in mind that the mother’s responsible acts in her interaction with her baby reflected a dialogue that she had with

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<sup>24</sup> VYGOTSKY, L. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Edited by Michael Cole et al.; translated by Alexander R. Luria, Martin Lopez-Morillas & Michael Cole. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

her own history and with the previous cultural knowledge, then, all her actions, considering the surplus of vision, reflected an evaluation that she made of her own experiences and knowledge. In this way, an axiological dimension of the performed acts was disclosed.

The dialogue the mother had with her own history while acting with her baby can be illustrated in different situations in the events analyzed. The action of placing the rattle and holding it with the baby (first event), the disposition of the three toys at the same time in contrast with previous situations in which she concentrated in repeating the same actions with the same toy (second event), and taking away the rattle from the baby's hand in order to make him move to reach it (third event) were situations that presupposed an impact of previous knowledge about human development that included experiences with her own family and a circle of close friends, because this is the process of social constitution of personal histories.

It was therefore this universe of knowledge that characterized the asymmetry of the mother's action over the baby, with implications regarding her ethical actions in those situations. In relation to ethical actions, she made relevant choices and decisions about the pertinence of previous knowledge as well as constant assessment of the performed acts. In the data, the mother's posture and attitude nuances signaled this evaluation process. The incidence of the observed recurrent situations, especially in the first event, when the mother introduced the toy as a communication mediator was an example. On those occasions, she repeated the same action over and over again (shaking the rattle in front of the baby's eyes, sliding the toy along his arm and replacing the fallen toy in his hand). The intensity of the repetitions suggested a high degree of determination and choice (a high degree of expectation; a clear investment in temporary goals); the attributed value was focused on the chosen aspect (object, action).

In this study, we interpreted that all the mother's actions functioned as a surplus of vision, because through them information for the baby as to how he was being perceived was subjacent. In the data, this functioning can be also illustrated with other examples. In the situation in which the mother placed the rattle in her baby's hand again (first event), she was informing him about his ability to hold and shake the rattle on his own. It is assumed that the baby was not aware of this information. Likewise, when the mother took the rattle from his hand and placed it a little bit farther, but within the

baby's sight, she informed him that by moving he could reach it. Taking into consideration the surplus of vision as an attribute of aesthetic action (Bakhtin, 1990;<sup>26</sup> 1993), we have been interpreted that the experience of simultaneity was also implied in the performance of the aesthetic action when communicating in early childhood. This is so because we observed that the surplus of vision engendered by the mother for her baby especially favored the anticipation of his future abilities.

## **Final Remarks**

Joint attention situations were extremely favorable to the construction of information about the ethical-aesthetic act in mother-infant communication, since in them, the "I" and the "other" were physically, psychologically and linguistically bonded by the same object, which was a toy in this study.

The results of the conceptual framework described here revealed the simultaneity of past experiences and the anticipation of future possibilities in the immediate present situation, established in literary analysis, as a relevant notion in the characterization of typical tensions in everyday practice with language.

Furthermore, we illustrated the responsive nature of sense with empirical data, seen as a momentary way to solve tensions promoted by the experience of simultaneity. It was argued that whereas the production of sense solved momentary tensions, it revealed itself as an aesthetic act, through which a stable temporary form of structuring psychological functions was made viable. This temporary form anchored a bond of horizons between the "I" and the "other" in an immediately present situation. Revealed as an aesthetic act, the production of sense was also translated as an exercise in ethical responsibility to the extent that the main aspect of the production of sense is the originality, factuality and individuality of the responsive situation.

Therefore, the analysis of sense production, as an inter-subjective process, seen here in the context of joint attention, based upon the concepts of ethics and aesthetics, revealed microgenetic processes that conflicted with rationalistic assumptions, in which the function of historicity is not taken into account. The role of the surplus of vision in the constitution of the "self," who is eminently dependent on the look of the "other,"

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<sup>26</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

can be, for example, a strong reason to neglect rationalism and consider the implications of dialogical relationships in human psychological functioning.

Besides, the simultaneous convergence of past experiences and the anticipation of future possibilities for immediate communication situations, observed here as characteristic functioning of human development in early childhood (maybe because we look at the baby thinking that he will grow up soon), can assemble properties to the responsible ethical act. It is believed that in this simultaneity there is an overload of tensions for decisions to be made in immediate situations, and, for that reason, a performed act cannot be repeated, a concept that Bakhtin worked hard to clarify.

Finally, the analysis conducted here, with the support of very usual situations in mother-infant communication, is an improvement to diversify approaches on the role of language practices for human development, in which the interest to study the far-reaching inter-relation between the environment and the perspective of the “I” and of the “other” is enhanced.

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*Received March 10, 2015*

*Accepted May 12, 2016*