

# The practices of everyday life: *experiences/practices* with children of the workshop “Body, Color and Flavor” in Leblon Art Center

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## Abstract

This article aims to demonstrate a practical/experience\* lived with *crianças praticantes* [*practitioners/children*] in the 3rd grade of a primary school, attending the “Body, Color and Flavor” workshop in Leblon’s Art Center – Research Center for Education in School of Art Teaching and sports of the Department of Education from the Rio de Janeiro city. The workshop, which aims to promote reflection, dialogue and the building of knowledge on nutrition and health, uses several methodological strategies to stimulate children’s active participation, including the scenic interpretation of their daily practices. The *practitioners/children*, by sharing their stories, collectively built scenes of their daily practices, leaving pieces of hybridity between what is desired and what is lived, especially when it comes to their eating habits. Based on Certeau’s ideas, we are invited to analyze the cultural practices that permeate the daily life of *practitioners/children’s wiles and tactics* who, with their arts of doing and nurturing, create a life that can be lived.

**Key words:** Children. Food. Education; Schools.

\* Nilda Alves, a researcher of everyday life inside/outside schools, has been using word combinations to transpose dichotomies and binarisms, giving another meaning to expressions. I am going to use such combinations throughout the text with the same intentio.

## Introduction

In this article, the aim is to narrate one of the *practical experiences* with daily lives *practitioners/children* of the workshop “Body, Color and Flavor.” This *practical experience* had as its guide the enactment of the *doings and knowledge* and the commensality practiced by the children and their families in their daily lives, from the use of the concepts presented by (French Jesuit and scholar) Michel de Certeau in the books *The Practice of Everyday Life: 1. Arts of doing* and *The Practice of Everyday Life: 2. Living, cooking*.

In the narrative of the *practical experiences*, the intention is to bring to the scene the movements, gestures, words, characters (real, idealized and hybridized) that weave the daily lives of the practitioners/children, especially with regard to the “arts of doing,” the “arts of nurturing” and the “arts of living.”<sup>1</sup> The act of narrating the practices, according to Certeau,<sup>2</sup> would be a “textual way of doing,” with their own tactics and procedures, that is, a way of “knowing how to tell,” another writing, to be able to talk about the “arts of doing” by the everyday life practitioners.

We have shared these *practical experiences* believing that they can instigate new (non-hegemonic) ways to meet and dialogue with the practitioners/children’s doings and knowledge, who cunningly (re)invent plural ways to daily make and nurture.

## Certeau and the daily lives practitioners

Michel de Certeau provokes us by bringing the ordinary man to the center stage, talking about all of us who, with our tactics, wiles and ways of doing, invent our quotidian. A quotidian that pushes us, overwhelms us and binds us every day, but that constitutes a space and time of memories of ourselves.<sup>2,3</sup>

*The quotidian is what we are given every day (or that we must share), pushing us day after day, oppressing us, because there is an oppression of the present time. Every day, in the morning, what we recognize, upon waking up, is the weight of life, the difficulty of living or living in this or another condition, with this fatigue, with this desire. The quotidian is what intimately binds us from the inside. It is a story that is midway to ourselves, almost retreating, sometimes veiled. One should not forget this “memory world,” in the words of (French poet, essayist, and editor Charles Pierre) Péguy . It is a world that we deeply love, an olfactory memory, a memory of childhood places, the body memory, of childhood gestures, of pleasures.<sup>3</sup>*

Certeau,<sup>2</sup> by making visible the “arts of doing” of the anonymous practitioners of daily life in their narratives, encourages us to research our practice and the practitioners/children live(together), dwell and (re)invent the school routine when many still insist on believing that in this *space and*

*time there is only* common sense, repetition, reproduction and passive consumption of what is daily imposed to us.

Certeau's quotidian, as well as ours, is a practiced space, lived by people who, with their speech, gestures, movements and objects, anonymously exert their tactics, operating other consumption procedures and cunningly creating the network of an anti-discipline. A network that insists on presenting us, although we do not have “eyes to see it,” new *ways of doing*, consuming and using what we is given to us and supposedly imposed by the established power.

*[...] in view of a rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular, noisy production, a production of a totally different type is presented, described as “consumption,” which is characterized by its craftiness, its crumbling in agreement with the occasions, its “piracies,” its clandestinity, its tireless murmurs, in short, an almost invisibility because it is barely noted by its own products (where would it have its place?), but by an art of using those that are imposed on it (pp. 88-89).<sup>2</sup>*

Accordingly, in their everyday lives, the supposedly passive consumers, by means of their “arts of doing” (tactics and gimmicks), produce alternative forms of use, giving rise to new *ways to use* the imposed order. The tactics, deviationist and of resistance would therefore be,

*Movement “within the enemy's field of vision,” as said von Bullow, and in the space controlled by it. [It] has not, therefore, the possibility of giving itself a global project nor of totaling the opponent in a distinct space, visible and objectifying. [It] operates blow by blow, bid by bid. It takes advantage of the “occasions” and depends on them, with no basis to stock benefits, increase property and provide exits. What [it] gains is not preserved. This non-place certainly allows it mobility, but in docility to time hazards, to capture in flight the possibilities offered by an instant. It has to use vigilantly the failures that certain conjunctures go on opening in the surveillance of the owner power. Then one goes on hunting. One creates surprises. One is able to be where no one expects. It is craftiness. In short, the tactic is the art of the weak” (pp. 94-95).<sup>2</sup>*

The tactic, while art of the weak, has no proper place nor a globalizing vision, and is distinguished from the notion of strategy that, typical of power, allows the “panoptic practice” from a place where the view transforms foreign forces in objects that can be observed, and measured, monitored, therefore, and included in their vision”.<sup>2</sup>

In opposition to the tactics, in power relations the strategies are :

*[...] actions that, thanks to the postulate of a place of power (the property of its own), develop theoretical places (systems and totalizing discourses) capable of articulating a set of physical places where the forces are distributed. They combine these three types of places and seek to dominate them by each other. Therefore, they emphasize the spatial relationships [...] (p. 96).<sup>2</sup>*

Over the tactics and strategies, the author also explains:

*[...] the difference between ones and others refers to two historical options in terms of action and security (options that in fact respond more to constraints than to possibilities): strategies point to the resistance that the establishment of a place offers to the time spent; tactics point to a skillful use of time, the occasions that are presented and also the games that are introduced in the foundations of a power (p. 96).<sup>2</sup>*

Therefore, we take ownership of everyday concepts, *ways of doing*, tactics and strategies presented by Certeau to dive into the quotidian of the workshop “Body, Color and Flavor,” realizing the “microbial, singular and plural practices” of the *thinking practitioners* of this *space and time*.

Certeau, when narrating the common practices of ordinary practitioners, shifts our “look,” inviting us to interpret the cultural practices that inhabit the everyday life from the wiles and tactics of the anonymous practitioners who, with their arts of doing, invent a life that is possible to live.

### Contextualizing the *space and time* of the *practical experiences*: Núcleo de Arte Leblon and “Body, Color and Flavor” workshop

There are currently, linked to the Municipal Department of Education of Brazilian city Rio de Janeiro, seven Groups of Art, among them Núcleo de Arte Leblon. These are characterized as Unidades de Extensão Educacional (Educational Extension Units), incorporating the role of Research Centers in Training in School Teaching of Art and Sport.

As the name suggests, the Núcleo de Arte Leblon, coordinated by the 2<sup>nd</sup> CRE, is located in the neighborhood of Leblon, southern Rio de Janeiro, in the same block of municipal schools Sérgio Vieira de Mello and George Pfisterer. The first one is for elementary schooling I and the second one for elementary schooling II. These schools, due to the geographical proximity, have established partnerships with the Núcleo de Arte Leblon, sending their student groups, during the hours of classes, to participate in workshops designed by the teachers in such unit, specially for the partner schools.

Besides the partnerships, Núcleo do Leblon [as it is commonly called] offers workshops at other times for students of other school shifts spontaneously seeking it. This Núcleo, especially, offers a wide range of workshops because of its teachers’ hybrid education. Acrobatics; literary art; visual arts; classical ballet; Body, Color and Flavor; contemporary dance; popular dance; multimedia; music, theater and video are some examples of workshops that take place twice a week for one hour along the school year.

Núcleo de Arte Leblon, as *space and time* to engage in dialogue among different pieces of knowledge in their workshops, in their “corridors,” “chatty coffee” and also in its teachers’ weekly

study center, allowed us to think of a workshop that would allow its practitioners (teachers and students) to reflect on “Food, Nutrition and Health” from the different languages of arts – among them, the performing arts.

The “Body, Color and Flavor”<sup>a</sup> workshop is offered by the Núcleo de Arte Leblon since 2012 to the classes of municipal school Escola Municipal Sérgio Vieira de Mello. The *practitioners/children*, in 2014, when we assumed the quotidian of the workshop as a research locus linked to the Postgraduation Program in Food, Nutrition and Health of Brazilian state university Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, were between eight and nine years old and were enrolled in the third year of the elementary school cycle. In the period of the research, we received three classes, totaling 94 *practitioners/children*. These, in their great majority, lived in (the largest favela in Brazil) Rocinha ((little farm), (neighborhood and also a favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) Vidigal and (subsidized housing located in the south of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) Cruzada de São Sebastião, also located in the neighborhood of Leblon.

Our meetings, which would take place once a week, lasting an hour, had the proposal to stimulate the “epistemological curiosity”<sup>4</sup> and make visible the thought and practiced curricula, as well as the networks of knowledge, doings, values and beliefs in food, nutrition and health, also allowing to know the ways of thinking, learning and teaching valued by the practitioners/children.

Moved by the thoughts of the authors that nurture our doings and knowledge, we have dived with all the senses in our quotidian and the children’s, hopeful that together we would be thinking about *spaces and times* to ensure diversity, freedom, creativity, experimentation, criticality, ethics, aesthetics, solidarity, hope, collectively thinking, learning and teaching, and everything else that were needed to awaken in our children, and also in us, the decency and prettiness of the educational practice<sup>4</sup>.

Enjoying the diversity of facilities available at Núcleo de Arte Leblon, as well as its surroundings, in the course of our meetings different methodological strategies were used to encourage the active participation by the children, such as bodily activities; drawing and painting; text writing; scenic interpretation of daily activities; theater plays, videos, films and documentaries on the topic of food; visits to markets and open-air markets in the neighborhood; a sensory workshop with food; nutrition games; family recipes and new flavors experimentation; book reading; planting seedlings and a hanging garden, among others.

The activities were designed considering the children’s singularities and potentialities and the paths that they pointed to us among meetings, always coordinated by way of pleasure, solidarity

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a In the narratives about the “Body, Color and Taste” workshop, I am going to use, “most of the time, the first person plural, not to hide myself in impersonality, but to reveal the existence of a network of subjects and subjectivities who think and practice them with the quotidians, of the workshop and of the research, even if anonymously.

and authorship, with food, nutrition and health as the linking thread. The workshop meetings were conducted by three *partners teachers* who, in most meetings, worked in duos.

The partnership established by us, besides the epistemological and political affinities, also occurred due to our hybrid and complementary education (theater, dance, video, physical education and nutrition), providing a permanent *space and time* for changes, experimentation and reflections. The solidarity, pleasure and authorship considered so dear in the processes of our workshops of art languages, were also precious elements woven in this experience, daily unwoven and (re)woven. And these elements, according to Oliveira,<sup>5</sup> are considered central in the emancipatory struggles proposed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

In 2013 and 2014, because of the struggling time that we were living in public education in the city of Rio de Janeiro, we were, perhaps without realizing it, increasingly in search of emancipatory practices both for the children and for us. The research, our educational practice (that wanted to be emancipatory) and our partnership was strengthened in the struggle, and this was one of our responses to the offense to the Brazilian public education, especially public education in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

### Staging everyday life: “arts of doing” and “arts of nurturing”

We proposed to the children staging their daily lives. At first, the waking up scene until the moment of arriving at school. In another meeting, the scenes of preparing and having one of the meals of the day in their homes.

On the staging days we all went to the theater. We thought of the stage and the backstage as facilitators of recollecting an everydayness that would be shared in its concreteness. We wanted that private area – the habitat of each, “the place of the body, a place of life”<sup>3</sup> – to be revealed to all, especially to everyone who lives, inhabits and practices the everyday on stage. In such private space,

*[...] the bodies are washed, embellished, perfumed, they have time to live and dream. Here people get closer, embrace and then separate. Here the sick body finds refuge and care, temporarily relieved from its obligations of work and representation on the social scene. Here the custom allows spending time “doing nothing,” even though knowing that “there is always something to do at home.” Here the child grows and accumulates in the memory thousand fragments of knowledge and speech that later are going to determine their course of action, suffering and wishing (p. 205).<sup>3</sup>*

As we entered the theater, we asked them to take off their shoes, go to the stage and lay down, as if they were still sleeping in their homes, in their beds. We even asked them to try and lay down in the position that they usually slept in. We thus witnessed different bodies drawing unique

designs and contours on the ground. Bodies that embraced; legs overlapping the body of the others. Support and contacts that marked the diversity and uniqueness of an everyday “way of doing.”

To sleeping, we went on adding the awakening and to this the doings that succeeded it. Each one, in the memory of their daily life, went on presenting us their ways of doing and their families’. It was possible to see them sleeping, waking up, stretching, brushing the teeth, showering, combing their hair, putting on their shoes... Ways of doing that would be differentiated by gestures, rhythm, sequence...

*In the “invisible everyday life,” under the silent and repetitive system of the daily tasks done as if by habit, the alien spirit, in a series of operations mechanically performed, whose succession follows a traditional sketch hidden under the mask of the first evidence, stacks up indeed a subtle mounting of gestures, rituals and codes, rhythms of options, inherited habits and customs repeated (p. 234).<sup>3</sup>*

These ways to doing of each were repeated a few times with the intention that the children could go on taking ownership more consciously than by habit they would perform them in their daily lives. Some children would hold the same sequence, others would alternate the doings of the previous staging. It was also possible to observe children who performed in the same scenario twice the same daily tasks.

Proceeding to the staging, we asked the children to arrange themselves into groups to talk about what they had staged and, from there, they would collectively create the scene of this everyday fragment: from the awakening to getting to school.

Observing the collective construction of the scenes would allow us to listen to the children’s everyday narratives and their families’. The children reported who they slept with; how they slept; who would wake them up; if they showered; if they brushed their teeth; if they ate breakfast; who they would eat breakfast with; who prepared the first meal of the day; how they went to school... The narratives about daily life were being woven, articulated, and crisscrossing so that collectively they would build the scene.

The final scene of this everyday plot was a hybridity of each child’s narratives about their daily lives when they set out to tell a little of their stories. This collective construction was also the result of many negotiations, where the characters were accepted, rejected, intertwined and hybridized. Some groups would be able to stage some of the daily life of each component; in others, everyday actions of the most articulate children would prevail, with greater power to influence the group.

It was possible to see, in the construction of the final scene of each group, a mixture of reality and desire, because if in some reports there was a lack of doings and family, in the scenes the absences could turn into presences.

These coordinations between the reality in which one lives and that in which one who would like to live remind a speech by (Brazilian theater director, writer and politician) Augusto Pinto Boal,<sup>b</sup> when he states that:

*One of the main roles of our art is to make these daily life shows aware, in which the actors are their own spectators, the stage is the audience and the audience is the stage. We are all artists: doing theater, we learn how to see what catches the eyes but that we are unable to see because we are so used to just looking. What is familiar to us becomes invisible: doing theater, on the contrary, throws light on the stage of our daily life.<sup>6</sup>*

Thinking and teaching their daily lives allowed the children to scenically create alternatives to live them in other ways. The presences became absences; the absences became presences.<sup>7</sup>

In the scene, the couple sleeping, who then wakes up to call their children, continuing with the shower, then brushing their teeth, then having coffee, then changing clothes... Not necessarily in this order. The mother, meanwhile, prepares coffee, sets the table and calls everybody. In another group, it is possible to see the morning rush. All talking and running around the house, having coffee in a hurry and running out to not miss the bus. This, built on the stage, takes the kids to school.

Although we can hear some reports from children who wake up alone and prepare their own breakfast, on stage there is always someone waking them up, welcoming them and caring for them. In the final scene, the result of negotiations, the children, who live the reality that no one wants to live, may choose (or not) other people's history.

In the next meeting, a new challenge: to create scenes collectively, from the group's narratives about an elaborate meal shared at home. These scenes allowed us to know a little of the daily life of each one, a little of the daily life desired by each. The scenes showed us the different family configurations and the distribution of tasks among the house members. Although a hybridity of reality and fantasy makes up the scene, we can see the female presence always in charge of the household chores.

On stage, the art of cooking, the "arts of nurturing,"<sup>3</sup> concerned mainly the women's role. These had the task of buying and preparing meals for the family, even when working outside the home. The sister had the task of heating food in the microwave oven (left ready by the mother the day before) for her brothers. The parents, children, brothers – that is, the male family members – had the "task" of waiting for the moment of eating.

The girls, when taking on stage the roles of mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, would reproduce the women's gestures in their homes by cooking beans, making cake and coffee,

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<sup>b</sup> The citations by Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal were extracted from his speech on March 27, 2009 – World Theater Day, in Paris, when honored by UNESCO.

sweeping, doing the dishes, taking care of children. Upon observing these scenes, it was possible to establish bridges with the narrative “Sequences of Gestures” of Certeau,<sup>3</sup> when he reports that

*The gesture is decomposed in an ordered sequence of elementary actions, coordinated in sequences of variable length, according to the intensity of the effort required, organized according to a model learned from another person by imitation (someone has shown me how to do it), reconstituted from memory (I have seen her doing so), or established by trial and error from neighboring actions (I have ended up discovering how to do it) (p. 273).<sup>3</sup>*

In one of the scenes it was possible to identify: three women (three girls), a man (a boy), three children (two boys and a girl) and a dog (a girl). The maternal grandmother, with memory loss, would endlessly sweep the house and her two daughters would try to make dinner while the kids would run around the room with a dog. The children’s mothers would shout at them, telling them to be quiet, as they would still run around. The mothers argued among themselves as one of them attributed to her nephew the responsibility for the mess in the house. In the confusion, the husband of one of them came home from work and said: “I am tired. I am going to my room. When dinner is ready, just call me.” The cooking oil was over and another confusion took place: who would give the money to buy it at the neighboring grocery store? One of the children interfered in the discussion and said: “Godmother! If you want to eat, you have to pay. My mother has already bought rice”. Dinner menu: rice, beans, potatoes, carrots and meat.

In another scene: two women (two girls), two children (a boy and a girl), a man (a boy). The parents arrive from work and find their children, a girl and a boy, who were being cared for by a nanny at home. All hug and kiss and the mother goes to the kitchen to make dinner. Dinner is ready and all sit at the table. Pasta with ground beef sauce and grape juice. The mother tells the older son: “If you do not eat everything, you are ground. You are not going to eat caramel candy”.

Also on stage: a woman (a girl) and three children (a boy and two girls). The mother wakes up, goes to the kitchen, makes lunch and leaves for work while the children are still sleeping. When they wake up, the children prepare their dishes and heat them in the microwave oven. Then they seat at the table and have lunch together while the mother is working outside home.

In the scenes of everyday life, when everything intersects – affections, memories, gestures, power, knowledge, ignorance, absences, presences, order, disorder, audience, spectators, desires – the practitioners/children (re)invent their stories and illuminate the stage of life because, for as the playwright advises:

*[...] we have the obligation to invent another world because we know that another world is possible. But it is up to us to build it with our hands by coming into play, on stage and in life. [...] make your theater plays yourselves and see what you could never have seen: what catches the eye.<sup>6</sup>*

## Final thoughts

The *practitioners/children*, when sharing their stories, collectively built hybrid scenes of their everyday life narratives, leaving, however, evidence of what is desired and what is lived, especially when it comes to their eating habits.

This *practical experience*, therefore, points to possible paths of research, dialogue and knowledge/acknowledgment of the children's feeding practices, as well as their networks of knowledge, doings, values, affections, beliefs and subjectivities. They are paths that, unlike the instruments and methods present in hegemony in the field of nutrition (questionnaires, reminders, records...), allow us to see/feel/hear/taste the *practitioners/children* in action, lighting up the stage of their everyday lives.

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Received: April 15, 2015

Reviewed: August 11, 2015

Accepted: September 15, 2015