

Four ideas for thinking about sensitive education through multispecies narratives^{1 2}

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ABSTRACT

In the face of the collapse of modern epistemologies, the documentary “My Octopus Teacher” is activated as a powerful narrative of possible meanings within multispecies enunciations. We develop educational understandings shaped by the foundational concepts of *time*, *trust*, *dreaming*, and *experience*, drawing from a narrative methodology grounded in dialogical and tentacular orientations. Dialogical entanglements of selected scenes—mobilized to reflect on ways of acting and thinking-with human, non-human, and more-than-human beings—displace conventional educational understandings in the Anthropocene and open space for tentacular fabulations of possible forms of educability in multispecies assemblies. These emerge through the sensitive listening and interaction afforded by a cinematic narrative capable of sparking reflection that acknowledges the full presence of all subjects involved—with attentiveness, trust, hope, and whole-bodied experience in educational contexts.

KEYWORDS: Education. Multispecies perspective. Tentacular thinking.

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Quatro ideias para pensar educações sensíveis por narrativas multiespécies

RESUMO

Frente ao colapso das epistemologias modernas, o documentário “Professor Polvo” é acionado como narrativa potente de sentidos possíveis em enunciados multiespécies. Elaboramos compreensões educativas tensionadas pelos termos fundantes *tempo, confiança, sonho e experiência* a partir da metodologia narrativa de orientação dialógica e tentacular. Entrelaçamentos dialógicos de cenas, mobilizadas para refletir modos de agir e pensar-com seres humanos, não humanos e mais-que-humanos, deslocam compreensões educativas no Antropoceno e abrem espaço para fabulações tentaculares de educabilidades possíveis em assembleias multiespécies, mediante a escuta e a interação sensível de uma narrativa cinematográfica capaz de acionar a reflexão, de modo a reconhecer a totalidade dos sujeitos envolvidos com atenção, confiança, esperança e experiência de corpo inteiro nos contextos educativos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Perspectiva multiespécies. Pensamento tentacular.

Cuatro propuestas para repensar la educación sensible a través de narrativas multiespecie

RESUMEN

Frente al colapso de las epistemologías modernas, el documental “Mi Maestro el Pulpo” se activa como una narrativa potente de sentidos posibles enunciados desde una perspectiva multiespecie. Elaboramos comprensiones educativas tensionadas por los conceptos fundamentales de tiempo, confianza, sueño y experiencia, a partir de una metodología narrativa de orientación dialógica y tentacular. Los entrelazamientos dialógicos de escenas - movilizadas para reflexionar sobre modos de actuar y pensar-con seres humanos, no humanos y más-que-humanos - desplazan comprensiones educativas en el Antropoceno y abren espacio para fabulaciones tentaculares de educabilidades posibles en asambleas multiespecie, mediante la escucha y la interacción sensible con una narrativa cinematográfica

capaz de activar la reflexión y reconocer la totalidad de los sujetos implicados, con atención, confianza, esperanza y experiencia de cuerpo entero en contextos educativos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación. Perspectiva multiespecie. Pensamiento tentacular.

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It matters which thoughts think thoughts. We must think!
Donna J. Haraway⁶

And my provocation about postponing the end of the world is exactly always being able to tell one more story. If we can do that, we will be postponing the end.
Ailton Krenak

Introduction

From Mikhail Bakhtin's perspective, creations such as "My Octopus Teacher"⁷ are part of the dialogical, creative, and subjective chain of speaking, participative, and societal subjects. Cultural productions mark the Great Time uninterruptedly in constant re-elaboration. They are full of singularity; they are open and can remodel meanings and understandings based on dialogical relationships and their contexts of creation and reception (Bakhtin, 2017).

A creation is a product of human thought's subjective creativity, producing meanings in the dialogical chain without boundaries between past, present, and future, integrating everyday statements and more elaborate productions, such as scientific discourse and cinematographic productions (Bakhtin, 2017). When guided by ideological and aesthetic elements, creations can drive thought and innovation.

⁶ In Haraway (2023, p. 116). This phrase refers to the expression "*Think we must*", by Virginia Woolf, in the work "Three Guineas", with whom Haraway dialogues as a theoretical composition in the chapter "Tentacular Thinking" of her work "Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene".

⁷ My Octopus Teacher (2020) is a documentary available on *Netflix*. The use of images and characters in this academic publication, free and non-profit, is supported by Article 46, III, of Law No. 9,610/1998, which allows the reproduction of excerpts from protected works for study and criticism purposes. If the copyright holders disagree with the use presented herein, the authors are available to make any necessary adjustments.

Here, we continue with Volóchinov (2017) from the understanding that the aesthetic is in the field of what is creatively, ethically and responsibly created in internal communication and with the interlocutor in a given context, while everyday ideology permeates the discourse as a more or less crystallized evaluative tension.

This evaluation takes into account the association between emotional and voluntary aspects in the dialogical and polyphonic contact of the enunciation process. It is the criteria of the order of the event and the encounter that led us to select the work that we bring here as an ecosystem of thought triggered by the narrator's dialogues, in order to weave possible educabilities from listening and sensitively engaging with a multispecies narrative mediated by cinema.

The production, which enunciates the gain in complexity of the narrator Craig Foster about himself, his reported reality, and the interaction between a human and a female octopus, can contribute to other ways of thinking about education that escape the dichotomous logic human/non-human and man/nature, because, according to Volóchinov (2017), complex aesthetic productions enter the experience of the interlocutor and summon them to create, re-elaborate and re-evaluate their own daily life within consciousness.

Far from understanding that the dialogical experience with the documentary ends in this production, we mobilized it as a turning point to reflect on ways of learning and teaching with a living world and with companion species, in a narrative, dialogical, and tentacular key through narrative research.

Narrative research is “one of trying to make sense of life as lived” (Clandinin; Connelly, 2011, p. 116, our translation). Thinking narratively means considering the intellectual territory of other modes of thought in the midst of formalist and reductionist tensions. In narrative research, we take into account the doing-with people, creatures, theories, temporalities, and

spaces, in a constant movement of coming and going in the methodological framework: between field texts and research texts.

We present an experience that assumes the research terms embodied in four moving ideas that dialogue with the documentary: “time”, “trust”, “dream”, and “experience”. This way, we sewed our own words with Craig’s, looking for what can be taken to the narrative education and the learning of him and his octopus teacher, in order to re-elaborate, from the narrative methodology, educational understandings marked by interest, attentive look, and negotiations of what can be learned in communication with the other, human, non-human, and more-than-human.

According to Bakhtin’s philosophy of expression and his intellectual circle, the narrative investigation highlights the complexity of the bilateral act between the knower and the known. This way, the setting of dialogical and concrete knowledge occurs in the surplus of the self-other relationship; it also occurs in the encounter, in historicity, in creation, in evaluation, in immanence (Bakhtin, 2017). Polysemy and polyphony establish interlocutions in the radicality of the word and creation, enabling other understandings: the new that emerges from the known and the repeated, consciously re-inscribed in an infinite chain of meanings. In correlations.

Therefore, we recognize knowledge as a sensitive and responsible experience, grounded in an emotional and ethical commitment to the aesthetic experience that propels senses and unsettling thoughts. Can listening, situated within a multispecies narrative, summon sensitive and critical reimagining of ways of learning and teaching in more-than-human permeabilities?

In the face of this question and the collapse of modern epistemologies, new ways of thinking and acting that break with segregating dualism are urgently needed. In the time of catastrophes, of the human as a planetary and cosmological force, we position ourselves before the need to break with human exceptionalism in the Anthropocene and experience, with different theoretical fields, our singular existences in multispecies assemblies and in alteritarian communion.

This cosmological and sympoietic activity proposed by Haraway (2023) goes far beyond temporalities and spatialities, and “in generative recursions that make up living and dying” (p. 67, our translation), individualism opens up to assemblages that cultivate response-ability. An ecology of practices of life, not death, of meaningful bonds with beings of all kinds.

For this, it is necessary to have an emotional and ethical commitment to the experiences lived in times of urgency and discontinuity that renounce the ability to think. Since “the world does not matter in ordinary insensitivity” (Haraway, 2023, p. 72, our translation), we cannot renounce the ability to think-with-fellow species, whose task is not to finish storytelling, because narrating stories is essential for the practice of correlated thinking.

When inquiring about the collective workforce “that would create the taste for demanding cooperation [...] against the evaluation that separates and judges” (Stengers, 2015, p. 21) in society and in the school, Stengers (2015) corroborates the repercussion of thought and experience “that some have, learn, make exist, becomes so many resources and experimental possibilities for others” (p. 148, our translation).

We then sketch non-prescriptive meanings for possible education. By composing with the singular experience and situated in the field of education, we intend to develop emerging knowledge in the dialogical context of education praxis that brew notions about the overflowing richness of a living world. To do so, we ally ourselves with the epistemology and cosmopolitics of Stengers (2015) through the dialogical act-thinking of Bakhtin (2017) and the multispecies ontological perspectives of Haraway’s (2023) tentacular thinking. Can the dialogical interweaving of the questions-scenes of Craig Foster’s narrative, articulated with the founding terms, displace anthropocentric education understandings and make room for tentacular fabulations for possible educations?

The time**FIGURE 1:** There is something to learn here.

Source: My Octopus Teacher. Directed by: Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed. United States: Netflix, 2020. 13'59".

The aesthetic experience summons us to a slow time. Slow time of attentive eye and active listening. Thus, we position ourselves in the drift amid the polyphonic field texts with the narrator when he realizes: There is something to learn here. What is this time that we have in everyday contamination? What is this time that we notice in (and for) creations? What is this time that allows us to be in non-human permeability? The time of encounter, of disputes, of catastrophes, of freedom, of otherness, and...and... and...

Craig dived for 365 days because there was something to learn there. While interacting with his octopus teacher there was abundance and horizontality of a time that, in its singularity, becomes different and otherly significant. That is, it belongs to the temporalities and the “other rhythms of the connected process” of the companion species, which also includes “all the possibilities activated in becoming-with, including the heterogeneous scales of evolutionary time for everybody” (Haraway, 2022, p. 34, our translation).

In the dimension of time, we can say more than the hours, the workload, the tasks, and the appropriate time to play, study, and work. We think here with an intrinsic narrator-time, which pulsates and manifests itself in every moment of existence. It does not stop, but moves in different flows, sometimes accelerated, sometimes dragged. More than a chronological measure, time invites us to open ourselves to the new, a lovingly productive dimension of being guided by the senses, by impressions perceived in brevity, in impermanence.

So it seems to have been with Craig in “My Octopus Teacher” during the nightly visits when he tried to find the new Polva nest. At this moment, he evokes an orientation through the senses in the face of the darkness (and immensity) of the ocean. In a non-linear backbeat, this orientation requires attention to detail and prediction of unique moments. It is also the uniqueness of time, the impermanence, the respect for that which is passing through and does not remain, and the brevity of the life of an octopus that was born, lived, and died independently of its human bonds. Time is a commitment to oneself and to the other “countless living species that we are dragging with us into the catastrophe” (Stengers, 2015, p. 35, our translation).

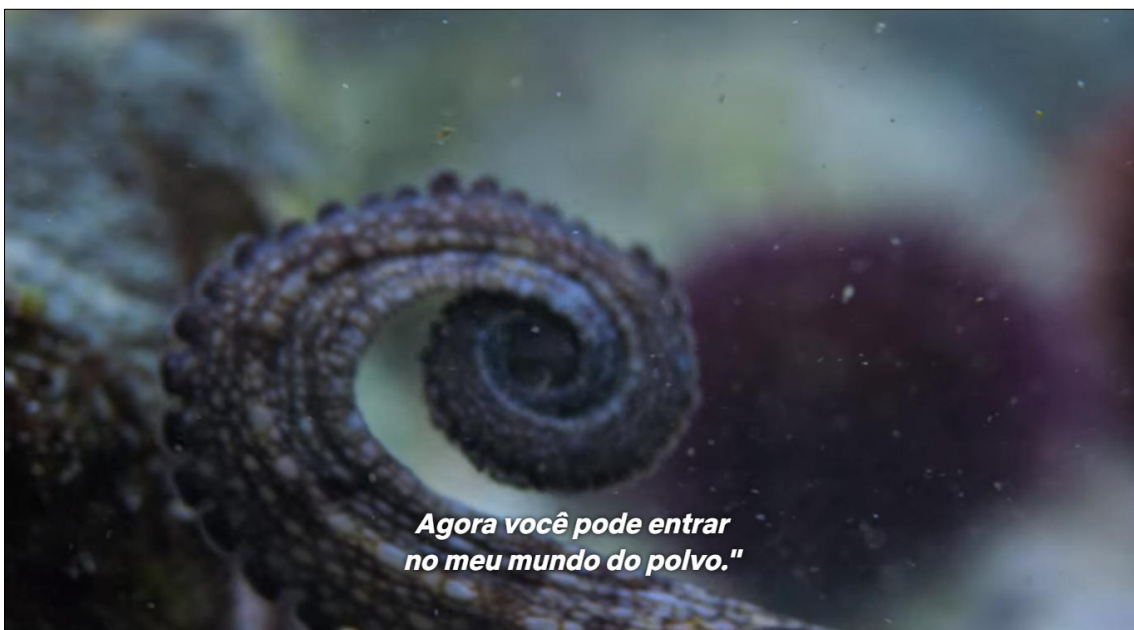
As Donna Haraway (2023) proposes with her tentacular thinking, the urgency of our times requires stories and creations that allow us to weave response-abilities between beings, fostering convergences and ubiquitous and continuous contact zones that enable sym-poietic and sym-bio-genetic activity. The author reiterates: thoughts that think thoughts, knowledge that knows knowledge, and worlds that world worlds are important, and that this activity requires pairing until the end.

From the emerging and appreciated commonplace identities, “they remain always a relational web open to non-Euclidean pasts, presents, and futures” (Haraway, 2022, p. 42, our translation). Thus, they contribute to the concreteness of the statements based on the relationships and the “simultaneity of the experience of art and the study of science” (Bakhtin, 2017, p. 41, our translation)

of a subject whose educational praxis (Freire, 1996) acts in border zones throughout the endless and chronotropic event: an act that resonates in the space-time lived dialogically during the present, in the face of the immediate past and the desired future. In the face of possible dreams.

Trust

FIGURE 2: I trust you, and now you can enter my world.



Source: My Octopus Teacher. Directed by: Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed. United States: Netflix, 2020. 29'02". (Right, I trust you. Trust you, human. Now you can enter my octopus world.)

Another space, an unusual gesture, challenging situations, looking at foreign beings and travelers, experiencing changes. Displacements sometimes cause strangeness and require one to have a more attentive and sensitive eye, an approximation of something that allows them to be welcomed, to have margin, that provides them with a feeling of confidence.

The encounter with the other is, in itself, an educational experience. In the documentary, we follow the narrative that takes place at the bottom of the sea, in a kelp forest at the Cape of Good Hope, on the coast of South Africa, surrounded by discoveries and learning, which proved possible thanks to a stripping of *a priori* knowledge and also a gentle surrender to experience and mystery. The two characters involved in this multispecies relationship convey a belief, not without apprehension, in the encounter as a learning power. Craig and Polva provoke us and summon us to witness an unlikely case of emotional interaction unfolding in bonds of friendship and trust.

However, it is not possible to teach trust. On this point, Octopus Teacher is exquisite. Starting from his desire to feel part of that environment, Craig glimpses, throughout his experience, otherness. A communication with the other that is not even human, and yet it offers such similarities. This is only possible in the desire to belong amid so many negotiations. The documentary also shows us the consequences of when trust is broken, and the return of relational negotiations that will no longer, or at least not necessarily, be the same ones that led to a certain relationship format.

According to Donna Haraway (2022, p. 350, our translation):

[...] meetings make us who and what we are in the avid contact zones that are the world. Once “we” meet, we can never be “the same” again. Propelled by the tasty but risky obligation of curiosity among companion species, once we know, we cannot not know. If we know well, searching with fingery eyes; we care. This is how responsibility grows.

The feeling of trust in processes of encounter and search, such as Education, is not established; on the contrary, it is built gradually, in a regime of cooperation and surrender. Paulo Freire calls us to think about education from the perspective of ethics, affection, and listening as basic points of the relationship between student and educator. The author states that he moves as an educator because, first, he moves as a person and that there is no teaching without being student (Freire, 1996). These two phrases indicate the dialogical posture of Freire's thought, in the face of the education process that recognizes respect for students' autonomy and dignity, as an "ethical imperative and not a favor that we may or may not grant to each other" (Freire, 1996, p. 31, our translation).

Another relevant foundation for building trust points to the need to recognize the incompleteness of the other, so that dialogicity happens significantly. Recognizing the difference in the other as a power grants truth to the learning and teaching process and recognizing in oneself the space to be filled with so much knowledge also expands and strengthens ethics among subjects who learn when teaching and teach when they learn, feeding each other. As dynamic as it is fluid, Freire's conception that the world is not, but is being, supports this reflection on trust, broadening it. Still, in the words of Paulo Freire (1996, p. 73, our translation):

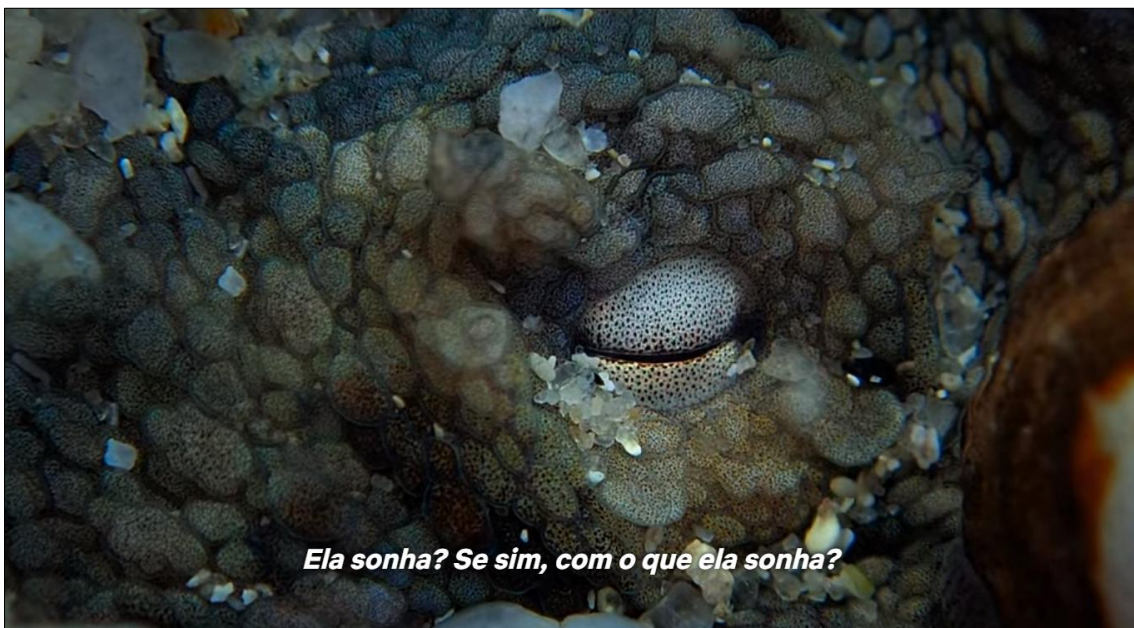
teaching and learning cannot take place outside of search, outside of beauty and joy [...] It is worth noting the capacity of the pedagogical experience to awaken, stimulate, and develop in us the taste for loving well and the taste for joy, without which the educational practice loses its meaning.

If it is through the body that we experience and apprehend the world, the issue of difference becomes even more sensitive in terms of providing real spaces for learning and coexistence. Without being aware of ethics and

otherness as pillars of relationships, discourse is emptied of meaning, thus fulfilling the agenda of the monoculture of knowledge and feeling, standardizing processes and equalizing bodies, their contexts and histories. On the contrary, trust welcomes different existences, privileging their mishaps, their layers, and lines in between.

The Dream

FIGURE 3: Does she dream? If so, what does she dream of?



Source: My Octopus Teacher. Directed by: Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed. United States: Netflix, 2020. 33'45". (Does she dream? If so, what does she dream about?)

Amid the fleetingness of time and the density of trust, we contemplate dreaming with multi-referential support. We seek to densify dreams as what takes us off the ground in a deeply hoping that emerges in intentional everyday events, in desire, joy, and resistance with Paulo Freire (1996, 2015). The dream, the unprecedented-feasible, and utopia are central to his works and guide the critical and politically implicated praxis proposed by the famous author. Freire (2015) denounces neoliberal doctrines that eliminate dreams and defends education as a viable practice for creating

contexts in the field of possibility, not certainty, and that escape fatalistic perceptions. This way, we can keep our dreams alive.

In the contemporary scenario of questioning civilizational crises, the thought of Ailton Krenak, an indigenous leader, environmentalist, philosopher, and writer, emerges as a fundamental voice in the face of the urgency of rethinking modes of existence beyond hegemonic logics and barbarism. The author institutes dreaming as “a disciplined exercise of seeking in the dream the guidelines for our day-to-day choices” (Krenak, 2019, p. 33, our translation), something far from the idea of abdicating reality but which opens as a possibility.

More than speculative fabulation, it is a practice situated in openness to the new, to other worldviews and traditions. Dreams give us clues to what is powerful, infinite, and transformative. In addition to a dreamlike experience, dreaming is related to a path of learning and self-knowledge through life, “to the formation, the worldview, the tradition of different peoples [...], and the application of this knowledge in their interaction with the world and with other people” (Krenak, 2019, p. 33, our translation).

Therefore, for Krenak (2019), dreams are ways of following, of advancing in a dream place. They are also a transcendent experience that implodes human exceptionalism and forges parachutes for our time of absence, which does not tolerate the ability to experience full-bodied pleasure. These questions are in line with Stengers’ (2015) cosmopolitics, since “[...] barbarism does not fear criticism. It feeds on the destruction of what appears retroactively as a dream, utopia, illusion, as what ‘reality’ imposes as renunciation. It triumphs when all this makes people cackle or sigh” (Stengers, 2015, p. 104, our translation).

When Craig finds the Polva in a state of active sleep, moving her cloak and changing color, his interest and curiosity are aroused: What is going through her head? What is she thinking about? Does she dream? If so, what

does she dream of? From a relationship of trust, we see, with sensitivity, the immanent interest of a shared experience:

Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these mundane, prosaic things are the result of having truck with each other. Touch does not make one small; it peppers its partners with attachment sites for world making. Touch, regard, looking back, becoming-with—all these make us responsible in unpredictable ways through which worlds take shape (Haraway, 2022, p. 48, our translation).

By inviting us to stay with the problem in the Chthlucene, this fatalistic time of absences, civilizational crises, barbarism, catastrophes, discontinuities, and creation, Donna Haraway (2023) develops generative collective thoughts with tentacular beings in situated practices. The Chthlucene has the tentacular task of composing itself with a multitude of companions, “past, present, and to come” (Haraway, 2023, p. 116, our translation), and has in the figure of the human sympoietic power.

To dream is to be composed, to be humus. Something that implies having mutual interest, doing and thinking-with, as essential to narrating stories and reimagining the world in a relational way. By practicing Donna Haraway’s (2023) tentacular thinking, the commitment to think, be, and be in a situated and collective way is to stay with the multispecies natural-cultural problem on earth. Thus, the companion species’ exercise, whose task is never to finish storytelling, and the significant alterity proposed by the author have the power for a dreamy and desiring education. Tentacular. Companion.

Experience

FIGURE 4: Tentacular experience



Source: My Octopus Teacher. Directed by: Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed. United States: Netflix, 2020. 34'40". (All of her being is thinking, feeling, and exploring.)

From what crosses and summons us, by provoking unknown places, repopulating memories, and inhabiting, experience is a place of encounter (and departure) in the pedagogical process of existing. Just as it happens between Octopus Teacher and his interlocutor, it is in the space between the different species, times, and places that the experience takes place. It is in the duration of the encounter and beyond that it is developed and understood. It is in the encounter that we empty and become disoriented from paths already known, to then create so many others. Experience is a field of feeling and knowing that stress vitality in interpenetrating worlds and beings.

For Dewey's (2010) pragmatism, experience is integrated into concrete and everyday life, vibrating in different durations with unique intensities, differing from those that occur only in pale tones. Its distinction is sensible and not at all secret from the intensity provoked in bodies and surfaces, presenting itself clearly as an experience of incarnate, emotional, and

unmistakable singularity. According to Dewey, its unity is constituted by a unique quality that permeates the entire experience, despite the variation of the parts that compose it (Dewey, 2010, p. 112).

The relationship experienced by Polvo and Craig presents us with a surprisingly dialogical quality, with non-linear but linked stages, sometimes investigative—immersed in doubt and astonishment—sometimes suspended in contemplation and ecstasy. Freed from the man-nature dichotomy, the lived aesthetic experience was able to deepen in layers of feeling and knowing from the other and with the other, in the ordinary world of things and phenomena, but differing significantly from the common experience “often infected by apathy, inertia, and stereotype”, when “the “world” is too present in us, as a burden or distraction” (Dewey, 2010, p. 450, our translation).

The relational process between human subjects and multispecies beings points us to agreements signed by bodies of gestures and languages as diverse as they are close. The tentacular experience of appropriating the world through feeling is prolonged and multiplied to the extent that it recognizes differences and finitudes and is based on them. For Bondía (2002), “sand experience is what happens to us, and if the subject of experience is a territory of passage, then experience is a passion”, and it is not possible to capture it from a logic other than that of lovingness, or, “a reflection of the subject on himself as a passionate subject” (Bondía, 2002, p. 26, our translation).

Also, for Bondía (2002), the knowledge of experience is that which “is acquired in the way someone responds to what happens to them throughout life and in the way we give meaning to the happening of what happens to us” (our translation). To allow oneself to be full in the perspective of knowledge in and of experience, “it is not a question of the truth of what things are, but of the meaning or non-meaning of what happens to us” (Bondía, 2002, p. 27, our translation).

From the perspective of a multispecies education, the body is the guiding thread of the experience and, like the process, focuses on the interaction with the other, politically and pedagogically to the extent that it resists the logic of the separation between man and nature and proposes new horizontal forms of encounter and coexistence. A sentient body, with tentacles perceiving sensitivity, unique and open to encounters and experience.

Conclusion

To be immersed in a material with didactic power is to consider it an ecosystem of thought. The aesthetic experience with the documentary, a knowing object that affects and sensitizes thoughts and emotional-volitional interactions, tells us a story through Craig's words. Dialogical interweaving of the scenes-questions, articulated with the founding terms, displaces anthropocentric education understandings and opens space for tentacular fabulations for possible educations.

We continue with Bakhtin's (2017) language philosophy in order to recognize, in the network of unfinished expression of the thought-event, in relation to the finished whole, what integrates the participatory discursive chain of the spectator-interlocutor. This way, the meanings and statements of cinematographic creation are inserted and propel singular thoughts and understandings, to be re-elaborated via knowing restlessness.

The aesthetic experience is a complete event, with a beginning, middle, and end. It is distinguished by its unity: there is an internal movement that connects the parts into a meaningful whole. Unlike fragmented experiences of everyday life, the aesthetic experience has continuity and culmination. Still on temporalities, it is not possible to define or qualify the experience by its duration, which is registered in the subject's body, signifying and imprinting its importance by the intensity felt.

This happens, however, only in openness to sensitivity, to generative knowledge, to unexpected companions. Knowing as a sensitive and responsible experience, according to Haraway (2023), takes into account the stories told by those involved and the creative and conscious bonds that nurture practices and thoughts capable of building new collectives and changes, never reduced and triggered by itself, never autopoietic or self-produced, that lead somewhere with time limits, well-defined spatial, and decision-making systems.

Therefore, we assume time, trust, dream, and experience as founding terms that guide the reflection, inspired by the plot, in order to recognize the totality of the subjects involved, with confidence, hope, and full-body experience in education contexts. The film production was able to reshape meanings and understandings, propelling thought about learning and teaching (with) nature, the environment, the event, and singularized communication that pays attention to the slow and particular time of each context, that establishes trust in a responsible and true way, that dreams of desire and criticality, and that experiences with tentacles that perceive sensitivity.

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