



Literature and education: the pleasure of the text in between the margins of the school system

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss how literary language can become a space of openness and resistance amid routine school practices in formal curricula. Methodologically, we interweave literature and education. On the one hand, we have collected records of reading and writing practices in public schools of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. On the other hand, we take the “literary event” as the object of analysis, crossing different paths between text and narrative. Theoretical-methodological analyzes are based on authors such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Alberto Manguel, and Clarice Lispector. We conclude that the power of the literary gesture as a *bildung* experience promotes other ways of learning, shifts the way and the direction of teaching, changes the formal relationship with the school time and school, redistributes spaces of knowing and not knowing, thus questioning what we are and what we have become.

KEYWORDS

literature; experience; bildung.

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LITERATURA E FORMAÇÃO: O PRAZER DO TEXTO ENTRE AS MARGENS DO SISTEMA ESCOLAR

RESUMO

Neste texto, tratamos de como a linguagem literária pode fazer-se espaço de abertura e resistência em meio a práticas escolares rotineiras nos currículos formais. Metodologicamente, entrecruzamos literatura e educação: de um lado, recolhemos registros de práticas de leitura e escrita, protagonizadas à margem do sistema, em escolas públicas do Rio Grande do Sul; de outro, tomamos como objeto de análise o “acontecimento literário”, articulando pontos de afetação entre texto e narrativa. Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Alberto Manguel e Clarice Lispector sustentam nossas análises teórico-metodológicas. Por fim, apostamos na potência do gesto literário como experiência de formação, já que a literatura promove outras formas de aprender, desloca o sentido e a direção do ensino, altera relações formais com o tempo e o espaço escolar, remaneja lugares de saber e não-saber, colocando em questão o que somos e aquilo em que nos tornamos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

literatura; experiência; formação.

LITERATURA Y FORMACIÓN: EL PLACER DEL TEXTO AL MARGEN DEL SISTEMA ESCOLAR

RESUMEN

En este texto, tratamos de cómo el lenguaje literario puede hacerse espacio de apertura y resistencia en medio de prácticas escolares rutinarias en los currículos formales. Seguimos un recorrido metodológico en el que entrecruzamos literatura y educación: por un lado, recogemos registros de prácticas de lectura y escrita, protagonizadas al margen del sistema, en escuelas públicas de Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil; por otro, adoptamos como objetivo de análisis el “hecho literario”, articulando puntos de afectación entre texto y narración. Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Alberto Manguel y Clarice Lispector sostienen nuestros análisis teórico-metodológicos. Para concluir, apostamos en la potencia del gesto literario como experiencia de formación, pues: promueve otras formas de aprender, desplaza el sentido y la orientación de la enseñanza, altera relaciones formales con el tiempo y el ambiente escolar, reorganiza lugares de saber y no-saber, planteando la cuestión de lo que somos y en lo que nos convertimos.

PALABRAS CLAVE

literatura; experiencia; formación.

What can literature, as an aesthetic education experience, teach the pedagogical practice?¹ This is the question that drives the present article. Starting from the narrative of a *marginal* experience (although it occurred inside the school) related to the reading of works of fiction by children, we reflect upon the pedagogical and literary happening, *vis-à-vis* the *text* and the *narrative*, interconnecting points of passage and of mutual influence between them. In the company of Nietzsche, Skliar, Foucault, Barthes, and Bárcena, among other authors, we underline the idea of literature as an education experience; at the same time, we make a wager that, under such conditions, literary language can become a space of openness and resistance to the production of conventionalized practices of the formal school curriculum.

The present article discusses topics of a research carried out between 2011 and 2015.² The study positions itself between two “margins”: one of them consisted in collecting testimonies of teaching experiences, records of reading and writing practices experienced in the context of public schools in Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil). The other margin consisted of a careful bibliographic survey, whose object of analysis was the detail, the minutia, the grain of sand that precipitates from the literary materials researched. We worked, therefore, both here and in the larger study, around the pedagogical and literary happening. In this sense, the objective was investigating the way in which literary language blends in, opening cracks and furrows, dissolving power-knowledge networks instituted within the pedagogic scenario.

By proposing the gesture of reading and writing as an education experience, we are referring to a practice that has to do with the subjectivity of the *reader/writer* — with what forms us, [de]forms us, and [trans]forms us (Larrosa, 2002). The hypothesis is that literature, seen in this manner, can promote a change of direction, a relocation, regarding the places of instituted *knowledge* and *not-knowledge* — questioning what we are and what we manage to become.

The report presented in the next section brings a discussion about how non-didactized reading and writing practices, conducted at the margin of the school system, have the potential of reinventing formative processes. Based on it, we seek to problematize the extent to which the presence of literature’s aesthetic and sensitive character can bring down the whole prescriptive discourse instituted in the current school curriculum. The affiliation to authors such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes sustains our analytical effort, particularly because we are dealing with thinkers that have affirmed an important concurrence between form and content, pointing to the inseparability between the construction of the empirical object, the research questions formulated, and the theoretical-methodological discussion.

1 The present text, here reviewed and expanded, was originally presented to Work Group 10, “Alfabetização, Leitura e Escrita”, at the 38th Reunião Nacional da Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação (ANPEd), in 2017.

2 The work mentioned here is the doctorate thesis entitled *Poéticas do aprender: modos de inscrever a si mesmo no mundo*, by Tatielle Rita Souza da Silva, supervised by Rosa Maria Bueno Fischer (both authors of the present article), and presented to Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (PPGEdu/UFRGS) (Silva, 2015).

By promoting a debate between “pedagogical happening” and “literary happening”, we observe relevant differences between the primacy of the word — the attitude of the exegetic reading of the text — and an attitude of pleasurable, *desiring* reading, capable of involving the reader in the threads of a plot. The article, therefore, refers to some of the conclusions of that study, according to which the literary aesthetic experience is capable of resizing the dimensions *of time, of space* and *of knowledge* in teaching and learning contexts in school.

INHABITING LITERARY TIME AND SPACE

A small community of readers was founded. The group met weekly with no purpose... Let us begin with a brief narrative.

That was the fourth consecutive week of a reading activity that had the distinct feature of being carried out collectively. The proposal started with a small group assigned to a room at the end of a dimly lit corridor of the school. A carpet in the middle of the room, colorful cushions scattered on the floor, and some flowers on the windowsill, revealed the careful preparation that tried to transform an impersonal, institutionalized space into a literary setting. In the center of the room, a box with books played the role of a “traveling library”.

The group met weekly with no purpose other than practicing literature: *reading, writing, telling* and *listening to stories*. Such unpretentious and bold habit was born out of an invitation to those that felt compelled to escape that turbulent rhythm, so common to the daily school lives that we know.

Comprised of a heterogeneous collective, such meetings did not follow any selection criteria previously established for the participants. Not all of them could read and write at the level that school stipulates as technical command of reading and writing. Those who gathered there came for different reasons: curiosity, literary taste, bonds of friendship, and of course, to escape the pretense of the classroom. In the end, they were nothing more than a bunch of “[a]dorners of forms, of tones, of words” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 38). The only criterion proposed for membership in the group was the *desire of dedicating some time* to the experience of *following a story*.

A book was usually chosen, picked at random from the travelling library, either for its title or for the images it contained. But the touchstone to initiate that practice did not have to come from written material. Sometimes, as an exercise, one chose to gather some stories that came from the students’ daily lives, sensations experienced from one week to the other, seeking to verbally share those experiences, thereby making the *word circulate*. Also, it was not uncommon to stage parts of some texts — especially when the plot captured the readers’ imaginations, kindling the desire to prolong it a bit further.

At each group meeting, we noticed the intensity devoted to reading and writing, listening intently to the voice that narrated stories to them, hence concentrated in recording bits of plots. Such presence production was inaugurated therein, inscribed in complicity, and capable of inhabiting the literary time and space. During the meetings, reading and writing practices were reinvented as school education experiences in an intermediary zone, outside of the conventional space of the classroom.

We were following the longest experience of shared reading that the group had conducted so far — four weeks to finish a book! We know that there are interminable readings that compel readers to repeat pages over and over. With patience, one rediscovers the significance of each page in between their lines. There are certain types of readings that never feel as finished — because the stories continue to exist in the readers, beyond the written text.

In the interval of this supposed closing, whose objective was to finalize the reading of the book, eight-year-old Anna, a member of the group, queried the teacher. Backpack on, she asked where she could find the book they had just finished reading. As a justification for the question, she said that her grandfather wanted to know the approximate cost of the book, and that he had already tried to acquire it, without success, at some bookstores and newsstands in the neighborhood. Anna also said that the school library had a single copy, of an edition that was not the same as the one they had read, and that even if they asked the librarian to acquire a copy, the *waiting time* would be infinite, “because that book was always reserved for other pupils”.

The teacher was silent. She had brought a copy of the book from her home library, and had left it there, like someone who selects a few ingredients to create a degustation, much more occupied in transmitting the experience of *the taste, of the rhythm, of the melody* that each word, verse or story contained in themselves, than to draw a supposed “moral”, didactic subject, or content from the book’s narrative. That book had inhabited for a time the travelling library, silently and timidly. Until the day when someone took it out of the box, provoking an almost collective interest in the story.

Now we had already finished reading that story — thought the teacher, turning her eyes back on the girl, who waited anxiously for an answer. The ethical dilemma was announced: the teacher was about to make a gesture that, under institutional evaluation, would deserve disapproval. A moment later, she responded to the pledge, traversing a zone that would make her close to, and an accomplice of, the little reader: she gave Anna the book.

— Here, Anna. You can keep the book as long as you want.

Anna took the teacher’s book in her hands, pressed it against her chest, and filled her eyes with surprise and delight. She was beside herself with joy. She left the room bewildered, carrying her small body along steps that hesitated between running, jumping, smiling. Her whole existence vibrated.

The surprise of this fact did not lie in the borrowing of a book from someone invested with the teaching function. Rather, it pointed to a *relationship with time*, amidst a scenery in which everything was marked by *chronos*: to be able to “keep the book for as long as she wanted” — an indeterminate, infinite time — was a greater joy than having the book exclusively for herself.

“Why for her and not for the others?” and “what would she say to her colleagues if accused of having favored one pupil by lending her the book indefinitely?”. From that moment on, the teacher was taken by a sudden guilt, by giving the book

to someone who simply wished to read it. How could she explain the spontaneity contained in the gesture of *giving to read* (Skliar, 2014)?

After a few days, Anna and the teacher bumped into each other in the school courtyard, almost at the end of the day shift. Immediately, the girl opened her backpack and pulled out the book: it now had a transparent plastic cover, either to avoid wear and tear, or to allow others to read it later if they wished. Beyond the care and the tenderness of the young reader towards the *book-object*, we cannot fail to observe that Anna and the story had now become inseparable. The girl carried the book to every corner of her existence. The book was her companion during the most imprecise hours of the day — before falling asleep, in the intervals between classes, in the closeness of her bedroom.

To Anna, the story the book contained now meant more than a mere collection of printed pages enclosed with a sturdy cover — the given form of a volume of some edition, easily purchased in a bookstore.

For a reader like the girl Anna, the book is a personal object of singular value. We can, no doubt, affirm that certain books endow special readers with some given characteristics (Manguel, 1996). For Anna, the plot the book contained took form, it had become flesh, it now existed before the eyes of the girl who read it.

That “keep the book for as long as you wish” was a kind of license akin to the “boldness of desiring, of wishing the book for herself only”.

LITERARY EXPERIENCE AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Faced with often lifeless pedagogical practices, witnessed during our time as teachers in public schools in Rio Grande do Sul, we asked ourselves how to re-establish the etymological link between *saber* (knowledge), *sabedoria* (sapience, wisdom) and *sabor* (savor, flavor) in the relationship between *teacher* and *learner*, which seems almost lost in the normative processes of schooling? What can be learned from the reading and writing practices that take place outside the conventional classroom space, removed from the rigidity instituted by a formal curriculum, with regard to a genuine education experience?

Within the teaching and learning relationships, we observed that shifts, operated through the inscription and presence of the aesthetic and sensitive character of literature, can effectively occur. The experience with literature is a subtle fissure opened in the interstices of a rarefied discursivity with the ability to transport those who surrender to the tenderness contained in the attitude of *following a story* to the imaginary, fictional universe.

We witnessed the presence of two distinct language flows in the school system. In one of them, we observed teaching and learning relationships instituted by a pedagogical discourse that defines and separates the places of *knowing* and *not-knowing* beforehand. There seems to be a manifestation of a certain scholastic vestige in the *school modus operandi*: the pastiche of the classroom from which pupils want to escape has to do with a certain relationship with the text that instantiates the primacy of a teaching grounded in the Word, transmitted as a vehicle of knowledge, that puts in motion an exegesis of the content to be learned. To capture the book,

to capture the content, to keep possession of the cognizable object, is to inscribe oneself within the level of command that anchors the instituted, stratified teaching and learning relationships. In formalized spaces of knowledge transmission, the text takes the place of object-content to be communicated — it functions as a pivotal point determining roles previously occupied in the pedagogical scene.

In this kind of relationship, both characters — *teacher and learner* — are separated by a kind of critical, epistemological distance (Bárcena, 2012), whereas in the unforeseen path of a different language flow that is part of this same school system, we observe the presence of an indeterminate, scintillating, movable and empty opening, that permeates the interstices of the school-based power-knowledge. This imminent opening, put in play by the literary gesture as art material, has the power to dislocate the whole apparatus of stratified knowledge transmission procedures and forms.

Literary encounters that take place at the margins of the school system impart flavor and texture to learning — the girl Anna feels her whole body vibrating and hugs the book tightly against her when she finds out that she will be able to read it in furtive hours during the day, in the intimacy of her home. A word-body that erupts unexpectedly and that, in its constant becoming, weakens and unsettles the whole instituted *status quo*, inaugurating new education experiences. Literature inscribes itself in the opposite path of a structural, systemic paradigm fixed on the stage where conventional school practices are played — it introduces an eccentric, unstable language that emerges in the ruptures and collisions with the text laid out and with the order established by a certain formal school curriculum.

We know how much the critical, epistemological distance that separates the cognizant subject from the cognizable object is persistently updated in the contemporary pedagogical scene. Such distance, as described by Roland Barthes (1996), is nothing more than “modern ‘innocence’” (Barthes, 1996, p. 365) — a way of situating a difference in position between those who possess knowledge as an object and those who are deprived of it. The pedagogical discourse tends to put in practice a whole apparatus of normative procedures and mechanisms suited to a cycle that goes from the classifiable to the assessable, seeking to measure what each one is capable of “apprehending”. In this yearning for measurement, the *saber* (knowledge) is separated from the *sabor* (flavor), and is then transmitted as a rapid metalanguage, uprooted from life. The school system reiterates a logic of dominion, of possession, instituting a circuit that resembles the economy of goods in the scene of transmission.

It would, however, be naive of us to state that the power present in the pedagogical relationships is reduced to the possession or dispossession of *knowledge*. Power cannot be expunged, removed, or swept away from relationships — it is an integral part of the very structure of language, if we understand it as Barthes (1996) as legislation, as code. It is germane to the very structure of language to function as classification, as division, and it is from this effect of *ordo* — an operation that turns the sign into a cohesive, stratified unit, aligned according to rules — that power as a discursive category fans out and spreads everywhere.

Power cannot be excluded from language because it is not only plural, but also circular, microphysical (Barthes, 1996; Foucault, 2008). Roland Barthes (1996)

qualifies power as a “legion” of demons that appear and reappear everywhere. And he completes: “I call discourse of power any discourse which engenders blame, hence guilt, in its recipient” (Barthes, 1996, p. 365). Power in its function as *ordo* relates to everything that is authorized to confer commercial value to syntagmas, regulating functions and positions in language, turning it into an instrument that sets places of *knowing* and of *not-knowing* as someone who produces and consumes stereotypes.

We have identified here two language flows that comprise the school scenario: one is structural, conformed, directing; the other is a scintillating, subtle, cutting fissure — the latter, material for the production of shifts and perdition, promoter of all deflation and instability that alternates and modifies the places and functions instituted and determined by the former. However, if we point out those two flows, we do not intend to suggest a dialectical relationship in a supposed polarization between them. It is not the case of attempting a reconciling synthesis between the parts. In our view, there is a somewhat sinuous complicity in the school scenario between the linguistic practices described here. One flow “runs”, “streams” interdependently of the other, realizing itself on the other’s reverse flow through a dissonant, disjunctive structural accord that allows composing and inscribing certain adulteration movements “between the contesting and the contested forms” (Barthes, 1975, p. 55).

Reading and writing practices conducted at the margins of the domination logic prescribed by a formal curriculum have the gift of inaugurating a kind of knowledge transmission that emerges from the effect of a cut promoted from the inside of the pedagogical discursive practice structured in the school scenario. The atopia of the signs, shifting, deflation inscribed in the interstices of a discourse established with the purpose of conveying and legitimizing power within the school institution. The literary experience as art material opens up a space of contention and resistance amidst the formal relationships of teaching and learning, allowing a language-of-becoming to promote reading and writing practices that are different from the exegesis of the Text. The relationship with the text is no longer conducted from a place of dominance or apprehension that normally actualized in the classroom, but rather takes on the form of a *fabric* — a tapestry that surrounds and enmeshes the subject in the *texture* of its web (Barthes, 1975; Benjamin, 2010).

Barthes (1996) tells us that literature is “neither a body nor a series of works, nor even a branch of commerce or of teaching, but the complex graph of the traces of a practice” (Barthes, 1996, p. 367) — the practice of *reading, writing, telling and listening to stories*. The definition of Barthes (1996) confers to reading and to writing the axis around which the whole experience with the *literary text* is organized. Because of that, it is not the case of taking literary language as a cognizable object that must be apprehended, turning it into a mere instrument-vehicle of a supposed knowledge to be transmitted by the master/teacher and apprehended-repeated as nonsensical content by the pupil/learner. Rather, we must think about it as something that puts in motion a specific word game that takes language as its theatre, as a stage for a performance.

The experience of “playing with the signs” promoted by reading and writing practices produces shifts in meaning in the teaching and learning relationships:

it opens up spaces for the *listening*, the *reading*, the welcoming of singularity. “A person who is not capable of placing him/herself in a position of listening has cancelled his/her potential of formation and [trans]formation” — tells us Jorge Larrosa (2002, p. 137, translation of Jessé Rebello de Souza Júnior). We observe in the tenderness inaugurated by the gesture of *giving to read* a certain change in the position occupied with respect to the *logos* — if we think the latter not so much as a scientific category that authorizes itself to pronounce the truth about the content of a knowledge field, but rather as *lego* — a narrative that enunciates and shares something of the order of the experience, of what is lived.

The shifting effect, exposed and sustained in the relationship of a girl-reader, who emerges from the situation as a *desiring subject* in search of a book, makes scintillate and apparent the order of knowledge where one would not expect it (Barthes, 2004). *Reading, writing, telling, following a story* is an education experience that operates as a two-way road: at the same time, it changes us and alters the whole relationship established with the world around us: “One can transform a place by reading in it” — reminds us Manguel (1996, p. 152).

This makes us think: what is there in literature that somehow revolutionizes the discourse instituted by science — if we consider that Barthes (1996) identifies the latter with the discourse of power, when he tells us that “Literature works in the interstices of science”, in the ways to fight it (Barthes, 1996, p. 368). We can identify, in the conformity of pedagogical practices conducted within the school scenario, the presence of a technical-scientific discourse contested by the tenderness of a *minimal gesture* — the gesture of reading and writing as material of an art.

From the contributions of Barthes (1989, 1996), we gather that he does not talk about “science” exactly when he criticizes the gregarious tendency of signs — set as fixed, noncorporeal, ahistorical characters. Barthes (1989, 1996) refers to a *certain discourse of science* that uses language as its instrument, as *metalanguage*, legitimizing, so to speak, a supposed critical, epistemological distance established between the subject of knowledge and the cognizable object. “[T]he subject of science is that very subject which is not shown” (Barthes, 1996, p. 374). The sentence, uttered in 1977 during the well-known lecture in inauguration of the chair of literary semiology at the Collège de France, only confirms what Barthes (1989) wrote almost a decade before in his text “From science to literature”, the first chapter of his *The rustle of language*. There is an important differentiation here concerning both the way in which distinct levels language take, and the forms of transmission in which each one of them operates.

The border or the limit that separates science and literature is so tenuous and so subtle, but at the same time so important, that what distinguishes it is only *the speech position*. Science operates within the order of the utterance, and that is why the place of the subject is protected, “is not shown” (Barthes, 1996, p. 374). On the other hand, literature works with the position of enunciation, disclosing the (missing) place of the enunciator. There is something pressing between these two levels, and that makes one of them to *inscribe, to introduce*, while the other *removes, subtracts* the dimension of the body from the relationship of knowledge.

The discourse of science is that which takes language to enunciate it, to teach it, to transmit it; its medium of dissemination and teaching is that which aims to guide by the voice. Let us recall that literature is “the complex graph of the traces of a practice” (Barthes, 1996, p. 367). The substantial difference between science and literature lies in the form of transmission: one language level “guides”, while the other is realized in the “gesture of following” the voice that tells a story, the hand that writes the text.

The practice of literature is that which not only exposes and inscribes the body in the scene of learning, accomplishing a genuine education experience, but also promotes the encounter between reader and writer, having the *text* as its primordial space. Reading and writing reside in the experience of letting oneself go along the lines and in the outline of a literary space that performs the gesture of writing. Thus, it is the body that writes [itself], it is the body that reads [itself]. It is the body that does the work and makes the signifiers change their places, and subverts the conventional meaning of the signs, removing them from a supposedly conformed, fixed, stereotyped place.

In a common school scene, such as the one we collected in our research and reported here, the invitation to read, to embark on a story, demands a shift in the position of the teacher — he/she is no longer someone that guides, that controls or conducts the group; by telling a story, the teacher becomes someone that *follows* and that allows him/herself to be guided by the very journey of the text-reading. What Barthes (1989) proposes is nothing more than a didactic and methodological proposition: “following” means to put oneself alongside, is to keep company, to live together, to travel-with, it means to be close; on the other hand “guiding the teaching”, as a supposed pedagogy science prescribes in the current curriculum, results in taking a notional position of neutrality: it implies having a clear objective, defining the purpose, a specific finality, a *telos* — one might say that “guiding the teaching” puts the teacher in the position of someone that points to a path, whereas “following” requires that the companion commits to “not letting go” of the partner’s hand, to follow them side-by-side, taking risks together when conducting the proposed journey.

READING IS PUTTING THE BODY IN MOTION

[...] *it was a book to live with, eating it, sleeping it.*³

LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 10

To read delicately. To peruse significances. To allow the feet to fathom the floor on which reading takes place. To traverse the words step-by-step. *To listen* to the text. To be attentive to what is between the lines, to sentences said and in-

3 The English quotations of Clarice’s short story are taken from Rachel Klein’s translation available on: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/ clandestine-happiness/> (accessed on 9 Sept. 2018). Citations refer to the Brazilian edition.

ter-said, to the gaps created in the *chiaroscuro* in which the relief of a page invites us to wander. To venture. To expose oneself to the force that emanates from the dissonant conjunction between the threads of life and fiction — which only the narrative can make scintillate. To allow oneself to be *knowingly* tied to the literary web that surrounds us. To ruminate the reading — to use a Nietzschean term.

The relationship with literature that we propose to investigate in this article cannot be reduced to the mere deciphering of the Text, to the decoding or scanning carried out by the ordinary reader in search of a handful of evident information, in a certain order that is predictable in the written signs. The reading we speak of is not characterized by the accomplishing of a posture, or even by a learning that is susceptible to generalization. To Nietzsche (1911), reading has to do with experience. The gesture of opening a book is an event that forms and transforms us, that makes us immigrants in a foreign country, that makes us recognize a plurality of the “I” that inhabits us, that invites us to listen to the rustle of an inaudible song, whispered in one’s ear and uttered by an alterity that already constitutes us, that already exists prematurely in us as *body*.

The girl Anna, character in the school narrative that emerges from the pedagogical scene analyzed, desired a book, even though she already knew the story told in the book. What was it that sustained her in this indefinite place, in a restless search for reading? What made her endure the *waiting time*: asking her grandfather to enquiry at the neighborhood bookstores, going to the library, checking up the book’s reservation list, until she waited for a moment to be alone with her teacher? And, finally, we asked ourselves: what could Anna have in common with the girl from Clarice Lispector’s (1998) “Felicidade clandestina”?

In that short story, we observe Clarice disclosing and giving us a glimpse of her “bio”, fictionalized in a childhood memory that allows her to inhabit a certain fleeting moment of her past. With Clarice, we witness language traversing and intercrossing distinct temporalities through a work developed around the “brevity of instants” (Moser, 2011). In the plot, the writer mixes reality and fiction: between the time of school friendships in the city of Recife and the search for a book, emerges the pleasure of the intimate surrender to something that gradually takes on the form of a love for the narrative.

In “Felicidade clandestina”, a short story also known under the title of “Torture and glory”, Clarice Lispector (1998) wishes to portray a kind of expectation — the escalation of desire that culminates in the erotic reading scene. More than delight, what sustains the searching condition of the character-narrator is the preparation. In a type of subjective loss of herself, the “I” of the writer finds itself visiting clandestine and secret places that inhabit her.

At a preliminary layer of reading this short story, we are easily tempted to locate two characters vying each other in the narrative plot. Undoubtedly, what transpires and gains evidence in a naive interpretation of this story is just the presence of two voices in the text — at times an “I” stands out, at times a “she”. However, there is certainly a third voice, around which the whole plot is articulated. It deals with two girls, and between them there is an object, not just any object, but a book. And, as we are reminded by Italo Calvino (1988, p. 33): “in a narrative, any object is

always magic". A force field revolves around it. It is the focal point, the axis around which the relationship between the two is established. Without it, certainly there would be no event to be narrated. It is the object-book, the distinct value attributed to it in the uneven relationship between the girls that generate certain mismatch, certain discomfort, sustaining the rivalry present in the plot.

At the level of culture, of classification, of status, of goods, objects tend to easily draw us into an attitude of not precisely *search*, but dominance, possession. Only the experience of glimpsing that of which we are deprived, subtracted, that which is not within our reach, tends to exert a magical power upon us that puts us in the direction of its consumption. Certain fetishist magnetism awoken by the mercantile world falls upon us, making an inebriating roar echo over all of us.

A book is still an object with material exchange value. We know that it is not removed or saved from the market circuit that impregnates the disposition and economy of goods. Just like the word "apprehend", the word "dispose" also carries an ambiguity of meaning. In a mercantile culture, fetishism is actualized precisely to the extent that it disposes of power to expose something that is outside our reach before our eyes. The object is exposed perversely: with the purpose of putting a number on the amount of dominance exerted by its possessor. It is as if we were told all the time: "I dispose of it, there it is; therefore, it is not yours!"

Violence. Market torture that marks not the difference between positions, but the inequality existing in the tripartite relationship between the object, its possessor, and someone who desires it. What happens between the two girls in Clarice's short story has to do with a promise that excites and feeds, more than properly the waiting: it has to do with the desire for reading something that is in the possession of someone else. The intriguing part lies in this — as one of the children finds out that, by having an object that maintains her colleague tied to ritual of search, she not only puts in practice a sadistic exercise, which makes the other child suffer with the experience of deprivation by postponing the promise of delivering the book, but also, when finding out that the possession of the book allows her to manipulate the desire of the other, relegates it to the condition of object. We apparently see the index of child mischief which, when realizing where the desire lies, articulates a perverse structure of dominance and manipulation.

Clarice Lispector situates the two girls in diametrically opposite positions: it is not the case of taking the same object in identical ways. One of them feels pleasure with the deprivation — in making the other suffer while waiting for something that she would probably never reach if not for the intervention of one of the girl's mother, who "finds out horrified" about her daughter's trace of perverse personality almost at the end of the story: "but this book never left the house [she says] and you didn't even want to read it!" (Lispector, 1998, p. 11). As for the other, she does not want the book for herself, so that she confesses in ecstasy when she takes the book in her hands: having the book for as long as she wanted was worth more than *owning* the book — "this is all that a person big or small may dare to wish" (Lispector, 1998, p. 11).

For the second girl, what matters is the pleasure of prolonged reading, forgotten of herself, abandoned to fruition, and not the dominance or possession of the object. We insist, a shift is operated here: from a pleasure that is situated

in the field of the disposition of goods to a pleasure that is oriented in the sphere of the *aesthetic nature, of the beautiful*. These are not only different levels, but also different ways of pursuing desire and of sustaining oneself in a situation of search, absolutely distinct.

When having the book in her hands, Clarice's girl-reader describes us a reading experience that can only be likened to an erotic relationship that combines desire and seduction.

Once I got home, I didn't start reading. I pretended that I didn't have it, only so that later I could feel the shock of having it. Hours later I opened it, I read a few wonderful lines, I closed it again, I made a pass through the house, I postponed things even more by going to eat some bread and butter, I pretended not to know where I left the book, I found it, I opened it for an instant. I created the most unbelievable difficulties for this clandestine thing that was happiness. For me happiness would always be clandestine. It was as if I already sensed it. How I dragged it out! I dwelt in the air... I had pride and modesty within me. I was a delicate queen. (Lispector, 1998, p. 12)

We asked ourselves: what is suggested by this opening and closing of the book, by this pretending to surprise oneself, by this delayed pleasure pushed into the future? What is suggested by this reading, always paced, unfinished, delicious, that leads to the loss of oneself in clandestine places hitherto uninhabited? What is pointed out by this floating attention that takes one's body to ramble around the house in the middle of the reading?

Undoubtedly, there is the presence of a vibrating chord that loops around and captures the reader in a desire of reading: "reading" — intransitive verb without complement to fill it. The reader is thrown here through the text, which is very different from projecting the text upon him/her (Barthes, 1975). To conduct a "drowning man's" reading, that bobs up and down in the water, submerges and pops his head out, without ever being content to stamp on solid ground that is full of certainties, one has to be disposed to accomplish the vertiginous movement of holding on and moving out; of coming close and being thrown afar. Literature as an education experience relies on the subjective discovery of an "I" that exposes its own missing place and takes risks, of an empty and movable point, that inaugurates itself as subject from a plurality of distinct enunciation positions.

REDISCOVERING THE PLEASURE OF THE TEXT

The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas — for my body does not have the same ideas I do.

BARTHES, 1975, p. 17

Roland Barthes (1975) addresses us a provocation right at the start of *The pleasure of the text*. He asks us: what man would be able to endure, without any shame,

all kinds of logical contradictions? What man could take pleasure before a Babelic confusion among the languages? What man would then be disposed to experiment all accusations and resist stoically all infidelities? Undoubtedly, this man would be considered, par excellence, a *social abject*, the prototype of an anti-hero — someone worthy of every disrespect and public dishonor. An existence easily condemned to the condition of the deviant, quickly converted to the position of a foreigner in a territory — exactly for not aligning with the norms, for not corresponding to the order of what is expected and socially instituted, for not subscribing to a formal pact with the codes of reference established in a given culture. Well, “this anti-hero exists” — tells us Barthes (1975, p. 3), and he says: “he is the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure” (Barthes, 1975, p. 3)

This pleasure experienced by the reader in the moment of his surrender to reading accepts everything without demanding anything in return. It is a kind of relationship whose only negation insinuates itself at the moment when the head brings the eyes away from the page and turns its gaze away for one instant, only to dive back into the existence in words. This lengthy and abandoned reading that we saw recently in the short story “Felicidade clandestina” — where the “I” of the narrator gives itself to the intimate pleasure experienced in its relationship with the text —, is not far from the careful and delicate gesture demonstrated in the school scene in which we witness the girl Anna insisting in her restless search for a book *whose story she already knew*. Both positions, in the school scene and in the literary scene we have just narrated served to expose a rather different way of relating to knowledge, of guiding oneself in the literary text — as it has been conventionally taught to us through reading and writing practices that are decoding, functional, didactic.

This gesture of a reader that “takes his pleasure” Barthes (1975, p. 3) requires a kind of *poetic* disposition for the reading, which is only capable of realizing itself if there is equilibrium, boldness, loss and suspension amidst the interstices of language. It is a certain type of disposition and of opening to the literary text that can no longer coincide with the kind of reading reduced to the level of the *intellection*, of *comprehension* or of *understanding* of the “content” enunciates. It is not a case of going through a sequence of utterances, according to Barthes (1975), in an effort to apprehend what the *text wants to say, inform or represent*. Far from it. A literary practice that moves itself within this sphere of the *aesthetic nature*, of the *beautiful*, inaugurates a certain kind of occupation with the word that translates itself into a solitary and inviolable gesture — opening up a book not only modifies our whole relationship with space, but also gives us the feeling of being able to stop time (Manguel, 1996).

Indeed, reading raising one’s head, with fluctuating attention; reading postponing the end of the book ad infinitum — without giving in to the consistent call promised by the spasm of meaning — requires a relationship with the word that is not divorced from a dedication to time *lost/found* in between the lines: to trim the text minutely, not devour it, not swallow it, but *ruminare* it. Reading in portions, rediscovering oneself in the tone and texture of the voice that writes. Nietzsche (1911) speaks of a reading-experience that runs substantially through the body of the reader and that, in order to realize itself, demands an intensive [and not

extensive or quantifiable] selection in which existence may trust its pains and joys, seeking shelter in the hospitality offered by the pages of a book: “I almost always take refuge in the same books: altogether the number is a small; the books which are precisely my proper fare.” (Nietzsche, 1911, p. 57) This reading-experience that finds in the relationship with the text the *right body* to which trust itself inaugurates, therefore, a relationship that can only exist to the extent that desire opens up a space — a necessary *poetic distance* — to start an infinite erotic game, thereby performing a certain practice that pushes the reader to the surprise of significances collected in his/her surrender to the pleasure of the text.

However, let us not be naive: such erotic dimension cannot acquire the status of a generalizable scientific proposition integrated into a supposedly positivist system. We know that it is not just any reader that gives him/herself to the pleasure of the text. Neither is just any text put in circulation within a culture that fulfils the function of awakening our desire to the point of leading us to the pleasure of surrendering to reading. This reader, anti-hero — who withstands the logical contradictions of a Tower of Babel in reversal, instead of punishing himself or rebelling against the variety of dialects that preclude communication among speakers — is the one who alludes to a certain type of relationship with the literary space, taking it as a privileged stage to perform the erotic scene of reading, taking refuge in the complicity between the distinct margins of the language.

Now, this reader is only capable of withstanding everything without demanding anything in return, is only able to sustain him/herself at the irreconcilable abyss between the distinct margins, because he/she proceeds like the lover who desires to see the [veiled] body of the loved one. Let us recall that: if language is this strange being condemned to represent the absent, nothing will be more fascinating than *going after it, seeking* the face of the one who hides behind the cloth. After all, was that not the way *Eros* seduces and enchants *Psyché* in Greek mythology — precisely because the loved one *denies* the possibility of her seeing his face (Kury, 1990)? Is that not also the mask, fabric, cloth that at the same time *exposes* and *hides* the face of the other, and that will be the disturbing and intriguing theme of René Magritte’s (1928) *The lovers*?

In this erotic game, the unknown, the mysterious, guides the not-knowing. It is precisely the state of “literary tmesis” — the position of loss, of deflation, of a cut in the immediate apprehension of meaning — that throws the reader between the lines of the text and keeps him/her tied to, enmeshed in the desiring condition, in search of reading. Roland Barthes (1975) suggests that the reader will be seduced by nothing more than a cut in the language — a mysterious and magical atopia where the garment is just slightly open. And he/she will be more abandoned in the erotic game that the relationship with the text invites the more he/she is able to maintain balance within the unpredictable emptiness between the two margins; the more he/she allows him/herself to experience the subjective loss of oneself, in clandestine places of existence, the more he/she is able to [re] discover anew in the perusal of significances produced by the relationship with reading.

We have, therefore, collected at least four lessons, which answer (provisionally) the initial question that motivated the lines of this article:

1. literature as an education experience inaugurates other forms of recasting *time, space, and knowledge* amidst the school scenario analyzed here;
2. it is a non-chronological, imaginary time, unstable knowledge, that sustains the condition of searching by the reader — exactly because he/she recognizes where the part of *not-knowing* acts mobilizing the order of his/her desire;
3. surrendered to the practices carried out at the margin of the system, readers and writers find space for resistance and contestation, to recreate themselves in a distinct manner from the uniform way in which the primacy of the Word is usually conveyed in the formal school curriculum;
4. reading is now a gesture that allows us to traverse distinct worlds — travelling from one word to others.

Intransitive verb, without complement: “I read”; “I desire”, simply. A surrender to the pleasure of the text allows us to know that there is life beyond that that we know. Reading is finding one’s way in another space. It is losing oneself in another time. It is allowing unknowing oneself, inhabiting a different level of knowledge.

Literature as a static education experience inscribes the body in the relationship of knowledge, putting in motion a whole set of physical senses: the eyes run over the text, the ears echo the sounds, the nose smells the paper, the ink and, who knows, perhaps even the fragrance of other readers that preceded us in that reading, touch identifies consistency and the weight of the volume we have in our hands and, in some cases, even taste is at work, wetting fingers to turn the page (Manguel, 1996).

To Fernando Bárcena (2004), by adding one letter, we can transform education (*e-ducere*) into seduction (*se-ducere*). Our wager is that surrendering to literature as an art of education can promote a whole redimensioning of school-based teaching and learning practices — transmitting a knowledge rooted in life, that is gestated in the body, capable of carrying the mark of different times and spaces that constitute experience.

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