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## EXPERIENCE, CHILDHOOD, AND PEASANT CULTURE: A Benjaminian Reading of Play

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**Abstract:** This article examines the recovery of traditional games and popular play in early childhood education as cultural practices that are decisive both for children's formation and for the preservation of peasant culture. Its objective is to understand how such ludic practices may function as formative mediations capable of reactivating collective experience and strengthening the intergenerational transmission of knowledge within rural communities. The study is based on bibliographical research grounded in the philosophy of Walter Benjamin, particularly his reflections on childhood, experience, memory, and tradition. From this theoretical framework, it is argued that the progressive disappearance of traditional forms of play, under the determinations of modern capitalist society, is part of a broader process of impoverishment of experience and dissolution of communal modes of cultural transmission. The analysis demonstrates that, within the peasant context, popular games constitute not merely recreational activities but historical forms of sedimented collective memory, through which childhood actively participates in the symbolic continuity of the lived world. Finally, the paper contends that the critical recovery of these practices in early childhood education does not represent a nostalgic return to tradition, but rather the reactivation of an experiential dimension capable of confronting the fragmentary logic of modernity and reinscribing

childhood formation within the horizon of shared memory.

**Keywords:** Walter Benjamin; Education; Childhood. Games and play; Peasant culture.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Playing is a fundamental dimension of human existence since childhood, configuring itself as a practice through which children relate to the world, to others and to themselves. Play is not reduced to a simple pastime, but plays a central role in the development of the individual's social, intellectual, affective and physical capacities, contributing to the expansion of their potential, as well as to coping with the limits and difficulties inherent to the training process.

In this sense, Marinho stated that: "Play is considered an activity that takes on peculiar characteristics in the social, historical and cultural context" (Marinho, 2007, p. 33). From this understanding, it becomes possible to recognize that the act of playing allows children to apprehend elements of culture, such as customs, regional traits and different forms of expressive manifestation. When playing, the child not only reproduces social practices, but actively and effectively

participates in the construction and resignification of the culture in which he is inserted.

The knowledge and appreciation of culture, appropriated by children through play and play, are therefore extremely relevant in the educational process. A repertoire of playful practices learned, invented, transmitted or appropriated by children in their various social contexts contributes directly to the constitution of children's culture. Games, toys and games thus act as structuring elements of children's experiences, favoring processes of socialization, learning and production of meanings.

However, it is observed that the objectives and purposes historically attributed to games, toys and games have been weakening over time. In contemporary times, such practices are, to a large extent, replaced by activities linked to cartoons, video games, movies, websites, electronic games, magazines and other products of the cultural industry, which guide the communication and information system widely disseminated in today's society.

This scenario directly impacts the experience of playing, moving children away from traditional practices and closer ties with the local culture. In line with this reflection, Benjamin reported that, in addition to pleasure, games favor the child's integral development, as they "control aggressiveness, provide the fulfillment of desires,

adaptation to the social group of conviviality, the development of affection among peers, the experience of different feelings, among other aspects" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 52). However, as the author himself pointed out, the difficulties are intensified in the face of technological advances and the growing rationalization of social life, which tend to impoverish children's experiences and reduce the space for free and creative play.

In this context, the problem that guides this article emerges: how can popular games in the context of early childhood education contribute to the strengthening of peasant culture? It is also intended to raise reflections on the importance of the game in early childhood education as a dynamic of knowledge and socialization of the child, considering its cultural, historical and formative dimension.

Thus, the general objective was to understand how the rescue of popular games in the context of early childhood education can contribute to the strengthening of peasant culture. As specific objectives, it is sought: to analyze the concept of childhood presented by Benjamin from his criticism of modern pedagogy; understand how games and play can help in the process of children's formation based on Benjaminian educational reflections; to identify the main games and games present in the imagination of peasant cultures; and to reflect on the

importance of the game in early childhood education as a dynamic of knowledge and socialization.

Methodologically, this study consists of a qualitative bibliographical research guided by the hermeneutic method. As Minayo emphasized, “hermeneutic interpretation seeks to understand the meanings that subjects attribute to their actions, practices, and symbolic productions, situating them within their historical and social contexts” (Minayo, 2014, p. 79). From this perspective, the analysis was developed through a circular movement of understanding—the so-called hermeneutic circle—in which part and whole illuminate each other reciprocally, allowing concepts to be interpreted in light of their context and the context to be reinterpreted in light of the theoretical categories mobilized. As Gadamer stated, “hermeneutics is not a method of the human sciences in the sense of a set of technical rules, but the explication of understanding as a mode of being of human existence” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 386).

Thus, the main theoretical corpus consists of texts by Walter Benjamin that directly address the categories of childhood, toy, experience, and tradition, among which *Reflections on the Child, the Toy, and Education* (2009), particularly the essay “Toys and Games: Observations on a Monumental Work,” and the text “Experience and Poverty,” published in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*

(1994), stand out. The selection of these works is grounded in the centrality they attribute to the notions of experience (*Erfahrung*), impoverishment of experience, memory, and formation—categories that structure the present analysis. The methodological procedure consisted in interpreting these categories in light of the problem of childhood within peasant culture, seeking to establish a dialectical articulation between Benjamin's theoretical framework and traditional ludic practices understood as historical forms of cultural transmission.

The article is structured around three complementary movements. Initially, it examines the Benjaminian conception of childhood, highlighting its formative implications through the categories of experience, memory, and tradition, as well as his critique of modern pedagogy. In a second movement, it deepens the analysis of the relationship between games, toys, and childhood experience from Benjamin's perspective, emphasizing play as a form of symbolic elaboration and as an active mode of participation in the cultural constitution of the lived world. Finally, the discussion shifts to the context of peasant culture, where traditional forms of play are examined as historical practices of cultural transmission embedded in communities shaped by labor relations, territoriality, and shared memory. By articulating these moments, the article demonstrates that play within peasant culture constitutes a concrete form of

resistance to the impoverishment of experience in modern capitalist society, insofar as it sustains the collective and narrative dimensions of childhood formation.

## 2 THE BENJAMINIAN CONCEPTION OF CHILDHOOD AND ITS FORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Throughout history, although children have always existed as a concrete presence in societies, childhood has not always been recognized and understood as a specific category, endowed with its own meanings. The theme of childhood began to constitute a systematic object of reflection only at a certain historical moment, becoming, since then, a field of investigation for different researchers. Several statements and theoretical approaches contributed to the opening of new horizons of understanding about children and their ways of being in the world.

Understanding childhood requires recognizing it not as a natural or universal condition, but as a historical, social and cultural construction. The forms of participation attributed to children vary according to the social organization, cultural values and ways of life predominant in each society. In this sense, each historical context elaborates specific representations of childhood, producing conceptions, expectations and practices that guide the way children are seen, educated and inserted in social life.



Within the scope of this discussion, Benjamin's reflection displaces childhood from the normative perspective present in the explanatory manuals of child development and reinserts it within a broader critique of modernity. In his work, childhood is not understood only as a preparatory phase of adult life, but as a singular experience, capable of revealing fundamental aspects of human relations in contemporary times. From a critical conception of history and language, Benjamin analyzes childhood in opposition to the processes of rationalization, repetition and commodification that characterize modern society.

In this context, childhood appears as a dimension that tensions the logic of superficial experience and automatic adaptation to the world of commodities. Benjamin associated modernity with the production of subjects increasingly subjected to repetition, sameness, and the loss of profound experience. The child, in turn, not yet completely integrated into this logic, establishes a distinct relationship with objects, spaces and time, opening up the possibility of a less instrumental and more sensitive experience of the world. In addition, Benjamin's reflection on childhood was crossed by memories of his own childhood experience, especially those lived in Berlin.

However, such recollections are not configured as an autobiography in the traditional sense. It is, rather, a narrative that articulates social, historical and psychic

dimensions, in which the adult's gaze recovers the child's perception to critically understand the reality of his time. Benjamin was interested precisely in the child who, in the eyes of the adult, appears as clumsy, naïve or out of place, but who, in his relationship with the world, reveals singular forms of perception and experience. It is in this horizon that, when reflecting on childhood and its cultural productions, Benjamin's philosophy brought an analysis that evidences the way in which children perceive the world from a perspective not yet conformed by adult logic.

From this perspective, in *"Old and Forgotten Children's Books"*, Benjamin highlighted that the child sees the world with eyes not yet adjusted to the conventions of the dominant capitalist rationality:

It is that children are especially inclined to seek out every workplace where the action on things is visibly processed. They are irresistibly attracted to the debris that originates from construction, from working in the garden or in the joinery, from the tailor's activity or wherever. In these waste products they recognize the face that the world of things returns exactly to them, and to them alone. In them, they are less committed to reproducing the works of adults than to establishing a new and incoherent relationship between these remains and waste materials. With this, children form their own

world of things, a small world inserted in the large. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 103-104)

From this reflection, Benjamin's philosophy moved away from any attempt to naturalize childhood as a stage marked by naivety, passivity or lack. On the contrary, this theoretical perspective reveals the child as a subject endowed with his own form of relationship with the world, which is not immediately submitted to the functional and instrumental logic of adult life. Childhood thus appears as a field of experience in which the gaze has not yet been completely shaped by the habits, usefulness and repetition that characterize modern rationality.

In this critical reading, the child relates to culture from a point of exteriority. Because it is not yet fully integrated into the conventions of the adult world, it observes, manipulates and transforms objects in an inventive way, inaugurating new possibilities of meaning. The child not only reproduces the existing order, but reinvents the world from the remains, fragments and discarded materials, establishing free and creative relationships with them. It is an experience that escapes the logic of immediate purpose and productivity, making room for play, imagination and creation.

In this way, childhood brings with it the power to recreate the world, precisely because it is not yet completely conformed to the established forms of social

reality. By recognizing himself in the "face that the world returns to him", the child establishes a unique relationship with things, marked by curiosity, experimentation and the possibility of transformation. This capacity for displacement and estrangement reveals childhood as a privileged moment of implicit criticism of the existing order, since habit has not yet "done the work", as it occurs in the adult universe.

It is in this interpretative key that the German philosopher resorted to allegorical figures to think about the childhood experience and its relationship with modernity. Among these figures, the character of the Hunchback stands out, which expresses, in a symbolic way, a form of perception deviated and not adjusted to the normality imposed by modern life, allowing for a deeper critique of the forms of adaptation and conformism produced by bourgeois society. This reflection is developed below:

The hump was of the same species. However, he did not approach me. Only today do I know what it was called. My mother revealed her name to me without my knowing it. "Awkwardly sent greetings" was what he always told me when I broke or dropped something. And now I understand what he was talking about. He spoke of the little hunchback who had looked at me. The one who is looked at by the hunchback does not

know how to pay attention. Neither to himself nor to the hunchback. He is startled in front of a pile of shards: "When I want to drink soup/ It's the kitchen I go to,/ there I find a little hump/ That my bowl broke." (Benjamin, 1995, p.141)

From the allegorical figure of the hunchback, it becomes possible to apprehend central aspects of the way childhood perceives and experiences the world. The image of the "awkward", recurrent in the narrative, does not refer to a failure or deficiency of the child, but to a specific form of relationship with reality. What, from the adult point of view, appears as inattention or disorientation is revealed, in this reading, as an expression of a gaze not yet disciplined by the demands of functionality, order and adaptation.

From this perspective, the children's experience is marked by insecurity, fragility and estrangement, but also by creativity, curiosity, fantasy and perceptive openness. These elements do not indicate a lack in relation to the adult world, but another logic of apprehension of reality. The "awkward" thus becomes a constitutive trait of childhood, evidencing a form of dispersed attention that allows the child to perceive what escapes the adult's accustomed gaze. It is a sensibility that is guided less by purpose and more by experimentation, play and imagination.

This understanding of childhood is associated with a critical stance towards pedagogical models that tend to correct, normalize or suppress such forms of experience. Benjamin's philosophy rejects the idea of an education aimed exclusively at the adaptation of the child to the norms of the adult world, recognizing in childhood a critical power that manifests itself precisely in its unadjusted character. Inattention, far from being a deficit, is configured as a singular way of paying attention to the world, in which the child opens up to the unexpected and the fragmentary.

This reflection also appears in other writings dedicated to the relationship between childhood, toys and culture. In *Toys and Games: Observations on a Monumental Work*, the author argued that "the world of children's perception is marked, everywhere, by the vestiges of the older generation, with which the child is confronted" (Benjamin, 1984, p. 72). This statement shows that the child experience does not develop in isolation, but in direct contact with the objects, spaces and practices inherited from adult culture.

Even so, this relationship does not take place passively. The child elaborates his own symbolic way of relating to the world, appropriating the available cultural elements and resignifying them through play and imagination. The toy, in this sense, is not only an object imposed by the adult, but a material to be transformed,

reinterpreted and incorporated into the child's playful experience. This capacity for resignification reveals childhood as a space for the creation and production of meanings. It is in this horizon that the philosopher deepened his reflection on the relationship of the child with the materials, the remains and the fragments of the adult world, indicating how these elements become raw material for the playful experience and for the construction of a universe of their own. This discussion is developed below:

Children form their own world of things, a small world inserted in a larger world. One should keep in mind the norms of this small world when one wishes to create premeditated for children and does not prefer to let the activity itself – with all its requirements and instruments – find its way to them by itself (Benjamin, 1984, p. 77-78).

The understanding of childhood as a producer of a small cultural world of its own allows us to move towards a broader reflection on the role of play in the preservation and transmission of popular cultures. When children freely appropriate the objects, spaces and cultural practices available in their surroundings, they not only reproduce traditions, but re-actualize them based on their unique experiences. The game, in this sense, is configured as a privileged form of mediation between the child and

culture, operating as a space for creation, experimentation and symbolic elaboration.

Benjamin's philosophy maintains that childhood experience maintains a deep relationship with memory and tradition, especially when linked to practices not entirely subsumed by the logic of the commodity. Popular play, transmitted between generations, preserves marks of collective experiences that resist the oblivion imposed by modernity. As the author himself wrote when reflecting on the experience, "memory is the medium in which the experience is fulfilled, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities are buried" (Benjamin, 2012, p. 105). This statement allows us to understand popular games and games as true deposits of cultural memory, in which knowledge, gestures and narratives of the peasant world are sedimented.

Playing cannot be understood only as a spontaneous or recreational activity, but as a historically situated cultural practice. Brougère argued that the game is always a cultural production, socially learned and crossed by shared values, norms and meanings. According to the author, "there is no game outside a cultural context; to play is always to learn a culture" (Brougère, 1998, p. 23). Such understanding reinforces the idea that popular games and games, when experienced in childhood, function as forms of cultural insertion and community belonging.



In the context of peasant culture, these practices take on even greater relevance, as they are deeply articulated with the territory, collective work, the cycles of nature, and neighborhood relations. Traditional games, songs, circles and street games are forms of sociability that strengthen community ties and transmit values that are not reduced to individualistic logic. As Arroyo pointed out, rural cultures produce their own knowledge, rooted in life experiences, work and historically constructed social relations (Arroyo, 2012).

Thus, inserting popular games in the context of early childhood education means recognizing the school as a space of mediation between childhood, culture and experience. It is about creating conditions for children from the peasant environment to recognize their own cultural practices as legitimate forms of knowledge, breaking with pedagogical perspectives that hierarchize knowledge and devalue popular experiences. This proposal dialogues directly with Benjamin's critique of adaptive pedagogy, by affirming the importance of an education that preserves the creative power of childhood and its capacity for a sensitive relationship with the world.

### **3. GAMES, TOYS AND CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE FROM THE BENJAMINIAN PERSPECTIVE**

The reflections developed within Benjamin's philosophy allow us to critically problematize the way in which games and toys are conceived, produced and inserted in the children's universe. When analyzing the choices made by adults in relation to toys intended for children, the author wrote that such options "characterize what the adult likes to conceive as a toy rather than the child's demands in relation to the toy" (Benjamin, 2009, p. 86). This finding shows that toys often respond more to the expectations of the adult world than to the needs and forms of the child's experience, which ends up limiting the child's creative and imaginative capacity.

From this perspective, playing is not reduced to the simple use of previously defined objects, but constitutes a creative activity in which repetition plays a central role. The author highlighted that, by repeating the same game, the child satisfies his own imagination, elaborating small victories in the face of the conflicts imposed by the playful activities. Repetition, far from being mechanical, presents itself as an inventive process, in which the child incorporates, transforms and resignifies real-life habits according to his own needs and desires.

The staging present in play grants the child the freedom to create provisional realities, open to constant transformation. These realities do not depend on the authorization or consent of adults, as they are structured according to internal rules of the ludic activity itself. By

resorting to small narratives of children's daily life, Benjamin's thought valued apparently banal scenes of everyday life, revealing in them a formative power that is manifested in the child's ability to transpose elements of adult reality into their own, singular and creative universe.

By dealing with toys in their historical and social dimensions, the author moved away from a purely economic or utilitarian understanding. Although he recognized that "[...] the toy is conditioned by the economic culture and, in particular, by the technical culture of the collectivities" (Benjamin, 2009, p. 100), this determination does not exhaust the meaning of playing. The production of toys, crossed by class relations, shows that the objects intended for children reflect specific forms of social and economic organization.

In this context, handmade toys from popular art appear as bearers of a simplicity often despised in the social circles of the bourgeoisie. For the author, this simplicity "[...] it is not in the shapes of the toys, but in the transparency of their production process" (Benjamin, 2009, p. 98). The distinctive character of popular art resides, according to him, "in the combination of refined technique with precious material being imitated by the combination of primitive technique with more rudimentary material" (Benjamin, 2009, p. 99).

This transparency of the production process allows the child to recognize the origin of the objects and

transform them freely in the game, strengthening a sensitive and creative relationship with the material world. In modern society, however, the production of toys has undergone a profound reconfiguration. The rhythm of artisanal life ceased to meet the demands of industrial capitalism, and toys became specialized products of the cultural industries. As a result, they lost their singular character, and the children no longer recognized the production processes in which these objects were inscribed, having access only to the final product. The toy ceases to be an object shared by hand in the relationship between adults and children and starts to be built according to an adult logic that tries to capture a supposed childish essence, often falling into simplified and mistaken representations of the universe of childhood.

This transformation reveals a central contradiction of modernity: although the social system claims to offer all the elements necessary for a complete education, it does not create objective conditions for children to fully experience their childhood. In this process, children's creativity — a central element of play — is progressively limited, as playful objects begin to impose previously defined uses, functions and meanings.

In the field of early childhood education, play plays a fundamental role in the processes of cognition and socialization. Through play, the child externalizes individual capacities, builds social bonds and learns to

live with others, developing respect for differences. The game is thus configured as a privileged form of cultural insertion and relational learning, articulating imagination, language and social interaction.

Playfulness intensifies as fantasy and imagination are integrated into culture and relationships with peers. However, game theories indicate that playing is never a solitary experience, but always relational. In the contemporary context, the insertion of digital technologies has favored forms of isolation, even when the game takes place in apparently collective environments, significantly altering the experience of playing and impoverishing the bodily and face-to-face dimension of interaction. Benjamin's philosophy contributes to this debate by understanding children's cognition from the notion of *mimesis*, understood as a creative movement of learning about oneself and the world. When playing, the child imitates and creates simultaneously, developing sensory and expressive skills. Gesture, dance, theatrical staging and body play constitute fundamental languages through which the child appropriates the world and relates to the other.

In this sense, the author wrote that "the child demands clear and intelligible explanations from adults, but not childish explanations [...]. The child perfectly accepts serious things, even the most abstract and heavy, as long as they are honest and spontaneous" (Benjamin,

1985, p. 236–237). This statement expresses a direct criticism of pedagogical practices that underestimate the intellectual and symbolic capacity of the child, reinforcing the need for an education that recognizes their reflective power.

When dealing with play in the school space, Benjamin's thought highlighted that "children's games are impregnated with mimetic behaviors that are in no way limited to the imitation of people". This mimetic dimension reveals that, when playing, the child not only adapts to the adult world, but interprets, displaces and transforms it. Thinking about education from this theoretical key implies breaking with the monotony of daily school life, without resorting to pedagogical fads devoid of cultural roots.

The child has the ability to resignify spaces, improvise uses and repopulate the world according to his imagination and desires. Children's memory constitutes, in this process, a space in which past and present are intertwined, forming a temporal fabric proper to experience. The toy, as an inseparable element of playing, enables symbolic development, stimulates imagination, reasoning and self-esteem, configuring itself as a culturally recognized object in the ludic universe. In this horizon, Silva warned that "there is a clear feeling that playing is becoming mere fast food, where the plasticized and robotized object of play momentarily supplies the

desire to play and soon after is replaced by another desire, not allowing the construction of childhood memory" (Silva, 2012, p. 15). Such a diagnosis reinforces the need to rescue playful practices that favor the construction of memory and experience.

This discussion acquires special relevance when articulated with peasant culture, often marked by forgetfulness and devaluation in contemporary discourse. The rescue of popular games and games constitutes, in this sense, a form of cultural resistance, capable of preserving historically constructed knowledge and ways of life. When reflecting on narrative and experience, the author wrote that "telling stories has always been the art of telling them anew, and it is lost when stories are no longer preserved" (Benjamin, 1994, p. 205). Associated with the statement that "the actions of experience are in decline", this reflection highlights the urgency of educational practices that reactivate collective memory and cultural transmission.

Even in the face of material inequalities, childhood preserves the possibility of establishing meaningful experiences with the elements available in the surroundings. The absence of industrialized toys does not impede child development, as emotions, imagination and creativity exceed the material object. Children from different social classes reinvent their games from scraps, fragments and organic materials – the so-called "detritus"

- which, devoid of a predetermined function, further expand the creative freedom and diversity of experiences. The teaching-learning relationships must ensure, through play and play, the integral development of the child. It is up to the school to offer physical, spatial and temporal conditions that favor meaningful playful experiences, recognizing play as a constitutive dimension of human formation, the construction of thought and cultural preservation.

In view of these reflections, it becomes possible to understand that playing, as a formative and culturally situated experience, goes beyond the individual scope of childhood and is inscribed within broader social and historical practices. If games and toys express unique ways of relating to the world, to objects and to memory, then their erasure or replacement by standardized forms of entertainment also implies the weakening of cultural and community bonds. It is in this sense that the rescue of traditional games acquires particular relevance in the context of peasant childhood, to the extent that these practices carry knowledge, gestures and narratives transmitted between generations. By reactivating such experiences in the daily lives of children, the possibility of strengthening formative processes rooted in the territory, in the collective memory and in the forms of sociability of the countryside is opened, a theme that will be developed below.



#### 4. THE RESCUE OF TRADITIONAL GAMES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEASANT CHILD

Play constitutes a fundamental dimension of childhood experience, not merely as a recreational activity but as a historical form of symbolic elaboration and cultural insertion. From a Benjaminian perspective, childhood does not represent an incomplete stage of adulthood but a singular mode of relating to the world, through which the child appropriates reality by means of mimetic and inventive activity. By stating that children “create their own small world of things within the larger one” (Benjamin, 1984, pp. 77–78), the author demonstrates that play does not occur on the margins of social reality, but in constant dialogue with it: the child gathers fragments of the adult world, displaces their functions, recomposes their meanings, and in doing so creates a distinct experience. Play, therefore, is not mere reproduction; it is a form of productive mimesis through which reality is reconfigured and rendered inhabitable by imagination.

This point is decisive, as it allows us to distinguish—within the Benjaminian horizon—between dense, transmissible, and shareable experience (*Erfahrung*) and a succession of isolated and fragmented lived events (*Erlebnis*), increasingly characteristic of modern capitalist society. It is within this framework that Benjamin

diagnosed that “the value of experience is declining” (Benjamin, 1994, p. 236).

The impoverishment of experience does not refer to the absence of events, but to the erosion of communal forms of cultural transmission, particularly those sustained by orality, meaningful repetition, and collective memory. When bonds of sharing weaken, experience ceases to sediment and circulate as lived knowledge; it becomes episodic, interrupted, incapable of constituting historical continuity.

Within peasant communities, this issue assumes specific contours, since childhood formation tends to occur in close relation to territory, peasant production, and collective rhythms of life. As Caldart, Paludo, and Doll aptly state:

The life of families in and of the countryside is shaped and organized around peasant production, building its own cultural roots. In this insertion and interaction, children have, among the members of their families, their closest interlocutors. It is in these relationships, actions, and experiences with different subjects and aspects that produce the everyday life in which they are embedded (a life largely organized by their parents) that children elaborate concepts, attitudes, values, and behaviors, learning about themselves, about life, and about the world around them [...] As the father of one of the children studied

tells us: One only learns to do by doing and by watching others do (Caldart; Paludo; Doll, 2006, p. 117).

The quotation makes explicit a form of learning rooted in practice and coexistence: one learns “by doing and by watching others do,” that is, through active imitation, participation, and situated repetition. This dynamic is particularly relevant for a Benjaminian framework, as it refers to a mode of cultural transmission that is not reducible to abstract content but is realized as embodied experience. Rather than a merely informational relation to the world, it is a process in which knowledge is constituted within common life—and it is precisely this dimension of transmissible experience that tends to be eroded when social life is reorganized according to strictly productive and mercantile parameters.

However, peasant childhood cannot be conceived as a harmonious space immune to material determinations. The centrality of agricultural and domestic labor imposes a specific rhythm upon daily life, subordinating social time to necessity and production. This determination is crucial for analyzing play: play does not appear as a natural given, but as a practice that disputes time and space within a life organized by concrete demands.

Here, the articulation with Benjamin must be made explicit: if the modern crisis of experience is linked, among other aspects, to the transformation of lived time into

functional and administered time, peasant childhood historically already reveals—albeit through different mechanisms—tensions between the time proper to formation and the time imposed by material survival. In this sense, play can operate as a “breach” in experience: an interval in which the child reconfigures the world and symbolically reorganizes what social life imposes upon them. It is within this horizon that Ravenna’s observation gains meaning:

Memories of peasant-children are also rare. In this world of rural labor, the child has long been counted as an extra pair of arms in the fields and in household work, although their status as a worker has never been fully recognized. For this reason, time does not belong to them either, since the logic of the world of labor prevails over the child’s time (Ravenna, 2020, p. 14).

The excerpt above reveals an expropriation of childhood time: when “time does not belong to them,” what is at stake is the reduction of childhood to function. This directly affects the conditions of play, as it restricts the possibility of prolonged, shared, and formative experience. Even so, under these determinations, traditional games and forms of play may constitute symbolic elaborations and modes of socialization through which children experiment with rules, conflicts, and

cooperation, producing collective meaning for the lived world.

Games such as marbles, spinning tops, dodgeball, tag, hopscotch, hide-and-seek, as well as the making of toys from cans, wood, cloth, or bottle caps, do not represent merely recreational activities. They configure practices rooted in territory and direct coexistence, in which the child becomes the author (rather than the consumer) of their ludic forms of life. In these games and forms of play, there is not merely the execution of a script; there is negotiation, invention, adaptation, and sharing — elements that reconstitute experience as a collective process.

Moreover, the crafting of toys from simple materials reaffirms a mimetic relation with the environment: the child transforms what they encounter, assigns new functions to objects, and thus re-enchants fragments of the world. This dimension is decisive for a Benjaminian reading, since play and handcrafted toys do not operate as closed commodities but as open material for imagination, favoring the creation of meaning and the transmission of practices.

In contemporary society, however, the logic of consumption and technological mediation profoundly reconfigure play, including in rural contexts. The growing presence of content and devices produced outside the community tends to replace open experiences with pre-

formatted lived events. Collective spaces—the yard, shared backyards, dirt roads—give way to the interiorization of childhood experience mediated by screens, often organized by rapid and fragmented stimuli. In this displacement, play loses part of its narrative and communal dimension: instead of producing stories and rules with others, the child begins to receive ready-made sequences, becoming a spectator of already organized worlds. The crisis here is not merely moral; it is historical and formative, for it involves a transformation in the conditions of production of experience endowed with communal value.

At this point, the Benjaminian diagnosis of the impoverishment of experience becomes materially intelligible: the living transmission between generations weakens, spaces of coexistence are emptied, and play is reduced to the logic of consumption. As Arroyo underscores:

Rural cultures produce their own knowledge, woven from experiences of labor, communal coexistence, festivities, play, rituals, and struggles for land. These forms of knowledge are not residues of the past, but living forms of knowledge that educate children, youth, and adults (Arroyo, 2012, p. 33).

This statement allows us to understand traditional forms of play as part of a fabric of knowledge that is not limited to school content, but consists of

historical forms of socialization, symbolic continuity, and collective memory production. Therefore, reactivating them in rural early childhood education does not imply a nostalgic return; rather, it means recognizing play as a concrete formative mediation capable of sustaining the collective dimension of experience.

This perspective gains further support when Benjamin states that the child is capable of “remembering the new” (Benjamin, 2009, p. 435). The expression points to the singular potency of childhood to actualize the past in the present: childhood does not repeat tradition as mere preservation, but creatively reconfigures it.

Behind the curtain, the child transforms into something white and wavering, becoming a ghost. The dining table under which she has crouched turns her into a wooden idol in a temple, where the carved legs are the four columns. And behind a door, she herself is the door, having incorporated it as a heavy mask and, transformed into a priest-magician, enchants all who enter unsuspectingly. (...) Whoever discovers her may petrify her as an idol beneath the table, entertain her forever as a ghost in the curtain, banish her for the rest of her life into the heavy door (Benjamin, 2009, pp. 107-108).

In this sense, the recovery of traditional forms of play does not consist in the mechanical reproduction of inherited practices, but in the inventive actualization of

cultural forms inscribed in the collective memory of peasant communities, so that the past once again becomes legible and practicable in the present.

Thus, thinking about play in rural early childhood education implies recognizing traditional forms of play as central formative practices capable of articulating experience, memory, tradition, and territory. They may function as concrete spaces of resistance to the impoverishment of experience in modern capitalist society, insofar as they preserve—and reactivate—the mimetic, communal, and narrative dimensions of childhood formation, reconnecting childhood with shared and historically situated forms of life within the peasant mode of existence.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The reflection developed throughout this article has shown that the Benjaminian conception of childhood offers a decisive interpretative key for understanding play as a historical form of the production of experience. By distinguishing between shared and transmissible experience (*Erfahrung*) and fragmented lived experience (*Erlebnis*), Benjamin demonstrates that the modern crisis does not stem from a lack of events, but from the dissolution of communal forms of cultural transmission. Within this horizon, play cannot be reduced to a methodological resource or an auxiliary pedagogical



strategy; rather, it constitutes a formative mediation through which childhood symbolically elaborates the world and reinscribes collective memory into the present.

Within the context of peasant culture, this issue acquires concrete density. Childhood formation in rural communities, traditionally structured around territory, labor, and family coexistence, reveals that learning occurs through participation, observation, and meaningful repetition. However, as discussed, this dynamic has always been marked by tensions between the time of childhood and the time of productive necessity.

In contemporary society, such tensions are intensified by the expansion of mercantile logic and technological mediation, which reorganize play according to parameters of consumption, speed, and fragmentation. The progressive replacement of traditional forms of play by pre-formatted experiences does not merely represent a change in habits, but a transformation in the very historical conditions of the production of childhood experience.

Traditional peasant forms of play—rooted in orality, improvisation, and cooperation—thus emerge as practices that preserve the mimetic, narrative, and shared dimensions of formation. The point is not to preserve cultural forms as relics of the past, but to recognize in them specific modes of meaning-making that articulate memory, territory, and experience. By enabling children to create

rules, stories, and meanings from simple materials and collective interaction, these practices challenge the instrumental rationality that tends to capture childhood under the logic of productivity or consumption.

From this perspective, the recovery of traditional forms of play in rural early childhood education cannot be understood as mere cultural appreciation or compensatory strategy. Rather, it entails critically interrogating the formative conditions imposed upon childhood in modernity. Reactivating play as shared experience means creating fissures within a social model that reduces childhood time to function—whether productive or mercantile.

In this scenario, rural schools are called not merely to incorporate cultural practices, but to adopt a critical stance toward contemporary forms of the impoverishment of experience. Thus, the dialogue with Benjaminian philosophy allows us to sustain that play, when understood in its historical and cultural density, constitutes a field of formative dispute.

By reinscribing childhood within the horizon of collective memory and shared creation, traditional forms of play reveal themselves as practices that challenge the naturalization of modern fragmentation. To think rural early childhood education from this perspective is to recognize that formation cannot be exhausted in adaptation to the existing world, but involves the

preservation and renewal of forms of life capable of resisting the reduction of experience to the logic of functionality instituted by modern capitalist society.

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