

Learning to walk with turtles:
Steps towards a Sacred Perception of the Environment

GUSTAVO RUIZ CHIESA

Professor of Anthropology at the Federal University of Pampa
Email: gustavorchiesa@gmail.com
Address: BR 472, Km 585 - Uruguaiana, RS, Brasil - 97501-970

LUZ GONÇALVES BRITO

PhD candidate and researcher in Social Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul
Email: luzgonbrito@gmail.com
Address: Av. Bento Gonçalves, 9500 - Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil - 91509-900

ABSTRACT

What can we learn from the open and attentive perception of children and poets? How does this perception contribute to a methodology that reaches the intricate entanglement of worldly phenomena in its entire otherness? In this essay, we aim to answer these questions, taking into account the phenomenological grounds which lead us to achieve a singular state of perception and, therefore, a more crystal clear knowledge of the beings and things in the lived world. We seek to explore other forms of rationality and aesthetic sensibility, by considering poetic language and a phenomenological understanding of the environment. We argue for a modality of thought that encompasses the foundations of Goethe, Husserl, Bateson, Ingold, Leiris and Krishnamurti to collapse the dichotomy between person and environment.

KEYWORDS

Apprenticeship; Ecological Epistemologies; Education of Attention; Immanent Sacred of Nature; Phenomenological Methodologies.

*I pay respect to unimportant things
and unimportant beings.*

I cherish insects better than planes.

I cherish the speed of turtles

Better than the speed of missiles.

I bring in me a delay from birth.

I was equipped to like birds.

I have plenty of being happy about it.

My backyard is bigger than the world.

(Manoel de Barros, 2018)

*A child doesn't look at a forest and
think: 'Ah, there's Weather, Biology
and there's also Geology', right? A
child simply moves with the forest, like
the Surrealists did, like Bateson also
did.*

(Nora Bateson, 2013)

1. INTRODUCTION

In many Western languages the words 'sacred', 'holiness', 'salvation', 'health' and 'healthy' present very similar (or identical) etymological roots, which are in some way connected to the ideas of totality, wholeness, or integrality (Burkert 1996). As Bateson (1975: 24) pointed out, 'the sacred is peculiarly related to the healthy'. A healthy childhood, according to the view of many psychologists and educators, is a period of life during which the human being must feel

stimulated to fully exert their creativity through play, games, stories and activities favouring the production of relations or connections between beings, things, environments, sensations, images and words, frequently unthinkable for a ‘reasonable’ adult.

Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros seems to be right when he suggests that ‘the child errs in grammar, but is correct in poetry’ when, for instance, they make up words or expressions inexistent until the moment, or when they attribute new meanings to pre-existent words. Let us remember, as an example, the report of French anthropologist Michel Leiris about some moments of his childhood and the improbable connections he established between words, expressions and apparently unconnectable things, such as *Rebeca*, *Meca* and *impeccable*, or *Moïse*, *Moisse*, *Seine-et-Oise* and *oiser*. ‘One would have said that language was suddenly twisted and that, in the very slight gap separating the two vocables [...] a breach opened that was able to let through a world of revelations’, says Leiris (1988: 30) in his beautiful essay titled *The Sacred in Everyday Life*.

This creative capacity of the child (as well as the poet) of ‘twisting’ language and, by this twisting movement, of widening (or revealing) the meaning and perception of the self (their ontology) and their very world (their cosmology), somehow allows an approximation between childhood and the sacred. Both are powerful forces that help us in the process of ‘enchancing’ the world, in the search for the ‘marvelous’, the capacity to ‘amaze’ (Ingold 2011), or of being surprised by small things, the ‘insignificances of the world and our own’, as the poet Manoel would say. It would therefore be valuable to think about childhood less as a biological period or phase of life and more as a state of mind, a particular way of perceiving, experiencing and describing quotidian situations independent of age. Childhood is a sacred way of walking on the world or, to be more precise, a way of moving *with* it.

This article seeks to explore other forms of rationality and aesthetic sensibility, encompassing a poetic language and a phenomenological understanding of the environment.

We analyse how the open and attentive perception of children and poets contribute to a phenomenological methodology that enables us to perceive and relate to the environment in a different way. We cultivate the search for a more attentive approach to the relationships and continuities that connect all beings and things. In dialogue with a particular set of thinkers, we would say that this specific modality of attention is a ‘sacred perception of the environment’ that seeks, among other things, to overcome any division between ourselves and the world we inhabit. Our proposal is based on the grounds nurtured by Goethe and his delicate empiricism as a key to the phenomenology of nature; Husserl and the understanding of his epoché as a practical exercise during phenomenological observation; Bateson and his commitment to an ecological approach to mind, nature and society; Leiris and the notion of the sacred in daily life and Krishnamurti and the notion of the always renewed empty mind. We present this reflection as a contribution to different academic disciplines and policy-making processes, as the methodological approach we cultivate implies sensibility and respect towards the things and beings we aim to know in the world.

2. CHILDREN, POETS AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF NATURE

During their walk through the street, as Ingold and Vergunst (2008: 4) remind us, the child is spellbound by everything they find on the way: ‘the flight of birds and the barking of dogs, puddles and autumn leaves, and the myriad trifles from snails to conkers, and from dropped coins to telltale litter, that make every street a place of such absorbing interest to the miniature detective whose eyes are still close to the ground’. As a ‘little detective’ guided by the ‘clues’ found on their ‘investigation’, the child perceives the street or is engaged with the environment, being attentive to the subtleties of the small things, their differences and similarities; an enchanted gaze, amazed and perplexed by everything it sees, more interested in the discoveries

that may be revealed in the promenade than in the final destination that would end that movement (Ingold 2016).

The perceptual movement of the child, always ready for the surprise and enchantment of a world that is always revealed anew, evokes the contemplative, or even meditative, exercise proposed by Jiddu Krishnamurti. In many of his speeches, collected in dozens of books and, more recently, in websites, Krishnamurti proposed that, to obtain a crystal-clear knowledge about the observed phenomena, the observer's mind should surrender to a 'total attention'. According to the Indian philosopher and educator, to understand something (be it a thing, a phenomenon, or an observed fact), it is necessary to free oneself from the innumerable ideas and theories limiting the thinking process.

It is only the empty mind that can see clearly, not the mind that's crammed with a lot of information and knowledge, nor the mind that's incessantly active, seeking, achieving, demanding. But a mind that's empty is not just blank. To be aware of an empty mind is extraordinarily difficult. And only in that emptiness is there understanding; only in that emptiness is there creation (Krishnamurti 1962).

The empty mind would be the calm, quiet mind, ready to put aside the previous knowledge and to perceive attentively, without condemnation or acceptance of what is being observed. Emptying the mind to achieve total attention would be the equivalent of suspension of the 'natural attitude' (Husserl 1982), where the previous experience of the observer, the previously accumulated knowledge and previous judgments are abstracted and stop interfering in the perceptual process. The *epoché* or phenomenological reduction would allow, according to Husserl (1982: 25), one to distinguish between the domain of 'inner psychological experience' and the domain of 'inner transcendental or phenomenological experience'. Whereas the former refers to common modalities of reflection, remembrance and memory that

are brought to light during the quotidian perception of something in the objective world, the latter is grounded

in our *looking at* and describing the particular transcendently reduced *cogito*, but without participating, as reflective subjects, in the natural existence-positing that the originally straightforward perception (or other *cogito*) contains or that the Ego, as immersing himself straightforwardly in the world, actually executed. (Husserl 1982: 34).

The ‘empty mind’, even if not encountering nothingness, liberates perception from the weight of what is known and the names used to label things and opens the mind to self-perception – in a process of perceiving its own perception and the elements that constitute and influence it, constraining it or making it clear. This situation of openness to the infinity of actual forms and life potentials dissolves the conflict or duality between the observer and the observed together with the conditionings imposed by temporal experience, as proposed by Krishnamurti:

If you look at a tree, if you look at the beauty of the sky and the loveliness of a still night, you - the centre - remain, and therefore you are the observer. The observer creates round himself space, and in that space he experiences that which is experienceable. That is, if you observe as an observer, then you are always creating the thing which is observed. If there is no observer as the centre from which he is looking, there is only the fact. (Krishnamurti 1966).

The process of suspension of judgment allows the subject to know the world and, knowing the world, to know oneself, one’s *transcendental self*, ‘the Ego himself, who bears within him the world as an accepted sense and who, in turn, is necessarily presupposed by this

sense' (Husserl 1982: 26)¹. This phenomenological procedure points assertively to the possibility of achieving a deep and acute perception of the things and beings in the world. And, contrary to all its apparent complexity, such assertions are translated simply in the gesture of curiosity of the child facing the world. A curiosity not yet bound by the accumulation of preconceptions about the observed, which allows mingling with the world and feeling entirely part of it. In this way it is possible to see a butterfly and to imagine oneself flying lightly with wings on the wind.

The child's mind is always youthful and renewed, with a pervasive attention, skilled in establishing connections between themselves and the things and beings in the world. A genuine connection, because it has no previous knowledge to limit perception. In the words of Alberto Caeiro, one of the heteronyms of Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1997), the child perceives

...how funny the stones are
When people take them in their hand
And look at them slowly
And as if every stone
Were a whole universe
And as if it were a great danger
Should one fall to the ground...

¹ We understand that recognizing the subjectivity of the process of perception also implies recognizing the intersubjective domain of reality, as well as the relevance of the body to almost every phenomenological approach to perception. According to Abram (1996: 44), 'only by acknowledging the embodied nature of the experiencing self was Husserl able to avoid the pitfalls of solipsism' because the body enables the insertion of the self 'in the common, or intersubjective, field of experience'. The body is porous and not self-contained, and can be understood, for instance, as the interstitial mediator of the perceptual experience of otherness. We intend to consider this topic further elsewhere, and in order to retain the thread in this present text, it is sufficient for us to emphasise the inextricable connection between self, body and environment.

Wandering by night without a clear destination, the *flâneur*, like a child, also seems to have this knack for being enraptured by the smallest details offered by their environment, i.e., the streets, the galleries, the fairs and the cafés of the great cities (Benjamin 1983). A skilled observer of urban life and, for this very reason, also compared to the role performed by a detective, they make the street their sacred abode, the place where they can truly feel at home. ‘The street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; [...] The walls are the desk against which presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done’ (Benjamin 1983: 37).

A being that walks through the city with the simple objective of *experiencing it*; this is the *flâneur*, according to the vision of poet Charles Baudelaire. An earnest critic of the ‘progress of civilization’ and the specialization process induced by the division of labour, he found the crushing routine fabricated by industrial capitalism to be responsible for mechanizing and merchandising subjects. The *flâneur*, in a deliberate form of protest against this social model, enjoyed their free time in the 1840s, walking with turtles through Parisian streets and galleries, letting them establish the pace (Benjamin 1983: 54). In defiance of the speed and automatism imposed by the capital, we should learn to walk with turtles, slowly, wandering around and digressing², with our attention open to everything around us. It is, once again, a specific way of perceiving, experiencing and describing daily situations, another way of capturing and moving through the urban space. An attentive reader of the city and its inhabitants, the *flâneur* does not observe the crowd from a fixed and distant point; instead, they seek to mingle with it, living (cohabiting) and moving with (being moved by) it. Just like the child who ‘simply moves with the forest’, with no intention of fragmenting it into specialties, subdivisions or taxonomies, or

² Translation note: in Portuguese there is a word play between *slowly* (devagar), *wandering around* (a vagar) and *digressing* (divagar).

as the poet who likes better ‘the speed of turtles rather than the speed of missiles’, so walks the *flâneur* (and his turtle) through the city.

‘What color has the very notion of sacred itself?’, asks Leiris (1988: 31), at the end of his essay. It has the colour of childhood, the colour of poetry, we would answer him. After all, the child, the poet and also the *flâneur* establish a different sort of *sacred involvement* with the environment. Deeply immersed in what Brazilian poet and composer Chico César called a ‘state of poetry’, the child, the poet and the *flâneur* possess the capacity of perceiving and enjoying what is around them, producing other ways of thinking, feeling and telling about what they live. These are thoughts, feelings and narratives with an awareness of the inter-relation between things.

In the story lived and told by Michel Leiris, we have the understanding that the sacred (in daily life) is derived exactly from the establishment of those relations between things and beings that meet in a certain environment. The places, things, beings, words, stories, affections, memories, everything, are constituted or defined from a *relation*. A relation of similarity – a feature not only of childhood imagination, but also of magical thinking – where each thing can be like any other thing. Therefore, insofar as things do not define themselves, it is only through the relationship between things that we can in fact understand what they are³. In this worldview, everything, essentially, has to do or is connected with everything else and our role would be precisely to try to discover the ‘pattern that connects’ all things that compose the universe. ‘What pattern’, asks Bateson (1979: 8), ‘connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to me? And me to you? And all the six of us to the amoeba in one direction and to the backward schizophrenic in another?’ ‘Relation’, ‘comparison’,

³ The use of the word ‘thing’ is inspired by that understanding of Tim Ingold (2012a; 2012b), i.e., as an ‘aggregated of vital threads’, a ‘happening’, or rather, ‘a place where various happenings are interlaced’.

‘correspondence’ and ‘similarity’: bases for a magical thinking, analogical, Surrealist and systemic; the foundations, we would add, for a *sacred perception of the environment*.

The sacred, then, would correspond to the establishment of contiguity or, more exactly, to the creative search (*recherche*) for those associations or analogies between things and not to the idea that such things exist *a priori* and are essentially sacred. The quotidian spaces or environments would become sacred in the moment they started to be felt, lived, remembered and/or imagined as a skein of relations or ‘vital threads’. In the terms of Leiris (1988), it is a passage from a ‘common state’ to a ‘privileged state, more crystalline, more singular’ or, even yet, the transformation from a profane outlook to a *sacred perception* of quotidian life.

Walking with turtles evokes the exercise of a perception that is not fractured in the encounter with the *immanent sacred of nature*⁴. To perceive all the complexity and the intricate relations between the threads that entangle beings and things in the world, it is necessary to open oneself to awe before the beauty of the ‘sacred unity of the biosphere’ (Bateson 1979). Then, in a glimpse only reached by the sudden shock of an interrupted dream, the depths of the world will be revealed, not from the outside, but from the inside. So, as the turtle dives in the water to later return to the surface, the person who dives in the world to understand its meanings comes back with a knowledge which would be inaccessible otherwise. There is no better metaphor for the perceptual movement we propose here than the image of the turtle. Now, in a general way, the turtle’s shell evokes the opening to the endless sky, in contrast with its short earthbound legs. The turtle is a symbol of the cosmos and the eternal human search and, in its

⁴ The notion of the immanent sacred of nature encompasses the sense of connection with Earth and nature as an immanent sacred space in which all living beings are entangled. Instead of the experience of the sacred as an entity out there, completely detached from the earthlings and the processes of the world, the notion of the immanent sacred of nature refers to the sacred perception of the environment as a bodily experience from within the world, from the standpoint of beings who inhabit it not as a separate entity, but as the “web of life” itself (Capra 1996).

animal strength, evokes unshakeable serenity – the power of calmness. Calmness and serenity are exactly the necessary characteristics for perceiving the world in a different way.

Perceiving life from the standpoint of its delicate relations of interdependence implies rejecting a worldview (and an intellectual stance) that fractures reality and human beings themselves in different specialties, disciplines, hierarchies or conceptual binarisms made up by modernity. It implies, therefore, rejecting that

there is something like psychology, which is different from sociology, and something like anthropology, that is different from both, and something like aesthetics or art criticism, which is different from both, from all three, whatever. And the world is made of separable parts of knowledge which, if you were a student, could be examined by a series of unconnected questions, called quizzes. The first point I want to convey to you is that the world isn't like that; not at all! Or, let's be more polite: the world where I live is not like this in any way, and in your case, it's your business to live in whatever world you want (G. Bateson *apud* Morim et al. 2013: 270).

In a certain sense, this is linked to the creation of an epistemology or, if we want, of a new aesthetic sensibility heedful to forms, patterns, similarities, repetitions, relations between everything that composes and characterizes the 'living world' in which we live, without 'compartmentalizing it' in autonomous disciplines. After all, as Nora Bateson (*apud* Morim et al. 2013: 208) reminds us, 'disciplines are built to be separated. If you ask a university to build a jungle, you'll end with a reptile department, a bird department, a tree department and a water department'. Such a jungle, adds the movie maker, educator and daughter of Gregory Bateson, 'would not work in a dynamic and integrated way'.

For the German Romantic poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'a stem is that which bears leaves; a leaf is that which has a bud in its angle; a stem is what was once a bud in that

position' (Bateson 1979: 16). It should be noted that his gaze is directed to the relation (or 'integration') and the action (or 'dynamism') of things, inserted in a certain context (or 'system') and not to their isolated attributes. Definitions arrive, then, through 'relations between stem, leaf, bud, angle and so on' (Bateson 1979: 16) and not through what they would supposedly be 'in themselves' (for instance, 'a green flat thing', in the case of a leaf, or 'a cylindrical thing', referring to the stem).

The Goethean conception of a *phenomenology of nature* fits very well with the aforementioned modality of thought. It is a methodology that implies an interested attention, which can only be achieved by an accurate perception of the thing or being under observation. Such perception implies openness to the other in their entirety. It is so penetrating that the perceiving subject can even describe what they perceive in a precise way, even with eyes closed and in the absence of the *percept*. In this process, the observer 'really starts from a very exact observation and moves towards a thinking with water-like mobility (imaginative thinking) and then arrives at contemplation, which corresponds to the union of feeling with thought – in an exact way' (Ghelman 2001: 266).

We are presented with a methodology that allows an opening to the beauty of life. By looking at a tree, the observer can imagine the circuits of roots connecting it to other trees. Instead of confounding the observed thing with the name it received, the observer goes beyond the surface of the name and the subtle suggestion that what is observed, because it has a name, is already known. Besides performing a process of perception which highlights the imagination, the perceiving subject is freed from their preconceptions about what is being perceived.

In this process, instead of still, inanimate objects, we discover the movement inherent in the flow of life, pulsing in the interiority and depth of things and beings mistakenly relegated to eternal fixity. We face what Goethe called 'delicate empiricism', which 'does not fragment the organism of a being to understand its subjacent vital principle. Neither does its

phenomenology of nature speculate about any phenomenon without establishing some sort of relationship with it' (Bach Jr 2016: 66).

The most interesting aspect of Goethean phenomenology is perhaps the understanding that a thing or a being can only be precisely described or known through an intense and respectful relation between subject and phenomenon. There is an *ethics of care* and respect in the process of knowing. And, at the same time the observed phenomenon is known, the subjects also put themselves aside to know it. By knowing it, the subjects paradoxically forget the knowledge they believed they brought within themselves regarding the phenomenon and, also, know themselves.

The method of 'delicate empiricism' therefore provides the formation of the person as a whole and challenges them to 'establish a judgment not derived from subjectivity' (Bach Jr 2016: 77). Whereas the process of perception is freed from the observer's shackles and previous conceptual conditioning, perception is only possible by recognising the existence of subjectivity and that the phenomenon only reveals itself when there is somebody through whom it may be known. And only by liberating perception from accumulated concepts is it possible to expand the knowledge of phenomena which unveil all the vibrant beauty and poetry in everything there is to be known in the world.

Another poet, the already mentioned Manoel de Barros, suggests that childhood is the best existing source of poetry. Childhood, he says, has the power of providing new behaviours and meanings to things, beings, sentences, situations... When, for instance, a child says that 'the butterfly is a color that flies', or that she 'listened to the color of birds', she overcomes intuitively the limits established by the set of conventional grammatical and orthographic rules,

going with, or orienting her attention by, other ‘rules’, perhaps closer to the aesthetics and poetry of daily life than those from school books⁵.

What can we learn with the flexible, open and creative language of children and poets? It teaches us to get away from conventional rules that restrict attention. When the mind is crowded with categories, ready to label what is perceived in the world, there is no space for the new, for creativity⁶. This does not mean that categories are unimportant, but that predetermined names for phenomena which may be observed in the world limit almost entirely the possibility of an attitude of curiosity and genuine interest in the other.

Under this perspective, perception becomes like the attention of the child because language was made flexible, in the sense that perception is freed from the natural attitude of simply attributing categories to things and beings that present themselves on the way. Even if the child wants to know the name of the beings and things, they usually do not refrain from combining names in a creative manner. Indeed, the curiosity of the child leads them to emulate the beings they have just named. The child becomes the thing they have just known, as if their perceptual process were not based on the separation between the world and themselves. Consequently,

⁵ The sentences quoted above were extracted from the film ‘Só dez por cento é mentira: a desbiografia oficial do poeta Manoel de Barros’ (‘Only ten percent is a lie: the official desbiography of the poet Manoel de Barros’), by Pedro Cezar (2009).

⁶ In agreement with our understanding of the categorical frame of language, Ingold (personal communication) suggests that ‘language does not have to be locked into a categorical frame, and that many languages – especially those that do not follow the standard Indo-European subject-verb-object structure – are not’. Different forms of language do not require categories to communicate meaningful experiences. Non-human language is a good example: ‘In a languaging language – one not semantically locked into a categorical frame but creating itself endlessly in the inventive telling of its speakers – animals do not exist, either as subjects or objects; rather they occur. The name of an animal as it is uttered, the animal’s story as it is told, and the creature itself in its life activity are all forms of this occurrence. Animals happen, they carry on, they are their stories, and their names – to repeat – are not nouns but verbs’ (Ingold 2011: 175).

Under the phenomenological perspective, the flexibilization of language is a resource to indicate meanings not expressed by a limited language. So, the overcoming of the split between subject and object passes through a process of surmounting the dissociating language. It is a dissociating language that provides to the subject using it a dualist sense of the cognitive phenomenon. Overcoming the split between self and nature is the task of a subject who amplifies the quality of their approach in relation to otherness (Bach Jr 2013: 156).

A child, says Brazilian educator and writer Antonio Severino, feels empathy toward all things they meet during their promenade; ‘towards the people around her, the toys, the animals, the stones... to the child, everything is alive, has a soul... and she belongs to all this, she is part of all this’⁷. The child (and also the poet) establishes a relationship of *affection* with the environment, affecting and being affected by all beings and things. Feeling *with* the other and *as* the other, the child seems to materialize a way of being, knowing and inhabiting the world (or their ‘backyard’, as the poet would say) which is deeply relational or analogical.

Analogy-based thinking means being aware of similarities, correspondences and continuities between things, establishing patterns that are frequently unnoticed in a ‘careless’ or ‘negligent’ reading. As Ingold reminds us, inspired by Michel Serres’ *The natural contract* (1995), the word ‘religion’ is derived from the Latin *relegere* or ‘reading again’ which, in a Medieval sense, means ‘being advised by the world and by what people say’. The opposite of this, i.e., a non-religious view or reading of daily life, ‘is not Atheism, not the lack of belief, but negligence, *negligere*, not paying attention to the world, not being advised by the world, not being prepared to learn with the things around us’ (Ingold *apud* Mafra et al. 2014: 307). Ingold, then, concluded that religion or the religious, a sacred manner of perceiving the

⁷ Testimonial presented in the film ‘O começo da vida’ (‘The beginning of life’), by Estela Renner (2016).

environment, would ultimately involve a question of ‘ontological commitment’, where being and knowing are constitutive parts of a single process of engagement with the world.

Medieval History scholar Franco Jr (2008) notes that the use of analogies was a structural element of European thought during the Middle Ages, present in both ‘erudite’ and ‘vulgar’ cultures. Rich in metaphors and analogies, the Bible served as the main source of inspiration (and imagination) for Medieval thought, orienting not only the moral conduct of individuals, but also their ways of perceiving and acting in the world. There is no shortage of examples: the righteous man, the historian reminds by quoting biblical passages (Franco Jr 2008: 3), ‘is like a tree planted by the margin of a brook, giving fruit in the fullness of time and its leaves never wither’; he asks God to ‘make my feet like the feet of a deer; cause me to stand on the heights’; he defines the Lord as ‘my refuge, my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’. Or even, in a clear manner, we have Christ, ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’.

Be it through *contagion* (where things once in contact keep forever acting upon each other, even at distance) or by *similitude* (where the similar evokes the similar, so that acting on one is acting on the other),

Thinking by analogy meant establishing links between the divine world and the human world, between the Model and its images. The universe was seen as a great web of analogies because in Christian culture the starting point of those relationships was evidently the Creation, which means the presence, albeit incomplete, of proprieties and forms of the *primum analogatum* (God) on the *secunda analogata*, especially in man, made ‘in His image and likeness’ (Franco Jr 2008: 6).

Medieval Christian thinkers aimed at observing and interpreting the ‘greatness’ and ‘beauty’ of nature (including all its creatures) to better understand the grandiosity and beauty of His

Creator. ‘To Dionysius the Areopagite, God is knowable through the analogies of which He is the cause; to Thomas Aquinas, all Revelation occurs through analogy’ (Franco Jr 2008: 5). Nature was observed, adds Franco Jr (2008: 14), ‘not to search natural, causal laws, but to find comparative and simultaneous relations’. Analogy, in this context, was an *affective and dynamic depiction of the world*, intending to identify both the links between people and their links with the universe. Indeed, according to the medieval mentality, God spoke by analogies. In a similar way, to Gregory Bateson, the Surrealists and, also, in a certain way, to the schizophrenics, life operates through metaphors. For Bateson (1988), metaphor is the logic upon which the biological universe was built⁸. Besides, it is also the point of contact between reality and imagination, as defended by the Surrealists.

It is not always easy to perceive or (re)cognize the relational similarity between apparently disconnected things. Such an attitude requires a lot of imagination, a great creative capacity; therefore, it demands an ‘education of attention’ (Ingold 2001). And to all appearances we were not trained or ‘equipped’ for this, as the poet Manoel de Barros (2018) would say. We forget or unlearn the ability to hear the language of other living beings that co-inhabit our world (even if they have never stopped speaking to us), says indigenous scientist Robin Kimmerer (2015). Another indigenous intellectual, the Canadian poet, activist and educator Jeanette Armstrong (1996), reminds us of the ability that Okanagan language – her native language – has to establish connections (“links”) between different “active pieces of reality” rather than

⁸ In ‘Men are Grass: Metaphor and the World of Mental Process’, Bateson (1988) talks at length about metaphor and the world of mental process, establishing an interesting comparison between ‘Socrates’ syllogism’ (Men die. / Socrates is a man. / Socrates will die.), whose logic would be based in the subject and its classes and the ‘plant syllogism’ (Plants die. / Men die. / Men are plants.), common with the schizophrenic way of thinking, which would refer to the identification of predicates (i.e., what dies is equal to that other thing that dies) and no longer subjects (in this case, the subject Socrates being identified first as a man and, consequently, as a mortal). To Bateson, biological, or, more precisely, embryonic evolution is based exactly on this second type of syllogism, of metaphoric and relational character, which biologists and zoologists currently call ‘homology’. It should be noted that the anatomy of the human body, as well as all living beings, is rhythmic, repetitive and analogical: ‘Humerus in the upper arm corresponds to femur in the thigh, and radius-ulna corresponds to tibia-fibula; the carpals in the wrist correspond to tarsals in the foot; fingers correspond to toes’ (Bateson 1979: 10).

isolating them⁹. To the contrary, our traditional school education, fragmented in disciplines, tends to instruct our mind so we learn to define things by what they are in themselves, separately, instead of through their relations with all other things in the environment. In that way we lose the sense of unity capable of connecting or establishing (re)connections between all things, creatures and ecosystems that compose the world we live in. A grave problem, as Bateson would add, because it puts at risk not only human existence, but also the existence of our planet and its remaining dwellers. Such way of perceiving reality, reminds Austrian physicist Fritjof Capra (1996: 296),

has led us to treat the natural environment – the web of life – as if it consisted of separate parts, to be exploited by different interest groups. Moreover, we have extended this fragmented view to our human society, dividing it into different nations, races, religious and political groups. The belief that all these fragments – in ourselves, in our environment, and in our Society – are really separate has alienated us from nature and from our fellow human beings and thus has diminished us. To regain our full humanity, we have to regain our experience of connectedness with the entire web of life. This reconnecting, *religio* in Latin, is the very essence of the spiritual grounding of deep ecology.

Going against this fragmentary and potentially destructive logic, Bateson proposes another way of thinking, another epistemology, involved with more affect, humility and wisdom. Acting with wisdom means being attentive to the ‘system’ of interactions as a whole. It means being attentive to its relations and transformations and recognizing the systemic

⁹ Similar to the analogical thinking, previously mentioned, the “Okanagans teach that the body is the Earth itself. They say that our flesh, blood, and bones are Earthbody; in all cycles in which the Earth moves, so does our body” (Armstrong 1996: 463). According to Okanagans, the self is entwined with the Earth in such a way that their word for body literally means ‘the land-dreaming capacity’. For them, concludes the author, humans are everything that surrounds us.

dimension of organisms, life and the world (Bateson 1972). Such dimensions or ‘systemic forces’ can be called ‘mind’ or, even, ‘God’. To act with more humility and less arrogance implies perceiving that we are part of this greater system, that we are part of ‘God’, adds Bateson. In this sense, it is a ‘sacred’ perspective, focused on the unity of life, on the ‘pattern’ that connects all creatures, responsible for generating meaning to existence itself. The sacred, then, according to this conception, consists in the *integrative dimension of human experience* capable of (re)establishing connections not only between beings and things inhabiting the universe, but also between being and environment, spirit and matter, subject and object, reason and intuition, truth and imagination, dream and reality.

3. CONCLUSION

To conclude, we would like to mention a passage from one of the works that served as an inspiration for this essay. In ‘Dreaming of dragons: on the imagination of real life’, Tim Ingold (2013) tells the story of a Benedictine monk who, uncertain about the monastic life, decides to abandon the Medieval monastery where he was sequestered. However, when he was leaving, he finds himself facing a huge dragon with an open mouth ready to devour him. Terrified and shaking with fear, he yelled, calling his monastic brothers. Even without seeing any dragon, but alarmed with the terror-stricken expression of his colleague, they quickly took him back into the monastery. After that momentous experience, the monk never again considered leaving the monastic life.

We ‘moderns’ could say to the Medieval monk all that was nothing more than a hallucination or a nightmare induced by a mind with a very fertile imagination. Something, therefore, very distant from reality. After all, dragons do not exist. However, his Medieval colleagues would not say with such certainty that the encounter with the dragon was only a

simple dream or delirium. Certainly, they did not believe that dragons (and other similar creatures) could exist as beings pertaining to the natural kingdom, but at no moment did they doubt that what the monk experienced was as real as any other experience capable of generating fear, anguish or suffering. So,

when the monk cried out to be saved from the jaws of the dragon, the brothers understood his predicament at once. They did not react to his outburst – as the modern psychiatrist might react to the ravings of a lunatic escaped from the asylum – as the idiosyncratic, possibly drug-induced hallucinations of a fevered and unsettled mind. Rather, they immediately recognized, in the vision of the dragon, the form of the monk's otherwise inarticulate agitation, and imperilled themselves in responding, affectively and effectively, to his distress (Ingold 2013: 736).

Without treating it as something unreal or inexistent, they, in fact, took seriously the *experience lived* by the monk. The latter, in his turn, according to the story, was already being accompanied by the dragon for some time, which would explain his doubts and uncertainties about his religious and existential choices. However, he could only perceive the dragon in the moment he stopped looking exclusively with the physical senses and adopted, *intuitively, another perception*, another way of seeing (and imagining) a reality. A sacred (and healthy) attitude or manner of perceiving and participating in the world, able to transform or attribute new senses to daily life.

So, by proposing we walk with our dragons, Ingold suggests that we learn to deal with imagination in a more adequate and balanced way, without denying its existence or separating it from the world, as modern Western science has done, so that such dragons maintain a 'more sustainable' size. Such a path involves the exercise of a reading, a look or epistemology able to *reconnect* us or teach us to *read again* the world. It also involves the production of a sacred

writing and reading that somehow seeks to bring a little more poetry to our academic prose¹⁰. Finally, it involves our also learning to walk with the turtles, for only in this way – when we learn to walk a little slower and with the attention focused on the ‘insignificances’ of life – will we be able to perceive that which surround us in another way, with other eyes, other lenses, perhaps more *analogical*, or less digital than the present lenses of our daily use.

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¹⁰ Ingold, with whom we share this same conception, has recently written that ‘the practice of thinking we often call ‘theory’ doesn’t mean having to lift off into a stratospheric realm of hyper-abstraction, or to mingle in our imagination with concepts that have drifted so far from the ground of experience, to which they owe their origin, as to have lost all touch with it. Quite to the contrary, theoretical work can be as much grounded in the materials and forces of the inhabited world as the conduct of any other craft. To practice theory as a mode of habitation is to mix and mingle, in one’s thinking, with the textures of the world. This means, if you will, not taking literal truths metaphorically, but taking metaphorical truths literally. The theorist can be a poet. For example, inspired by the poetry of Seamus Heaney, I might compare my digging for words to the crofter’s digging for peat, and my pen to a spade. I would be urged on by an intuition that a deeper truth lurks within the comparison, and in my theorizing, that’s the truth I’m trying to find. And I know that I’ll have a greater chance of finding it by going to ground than by lifting off. I should pick up a spade and dig! I should think, as I do so, of what the spade is telling me about the earth, or rather of what the earth is telling me through the spade. And I can then bring the lessons I have learned to my thinking on the page’ (Ingold forthcoming).

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