

Pandemonium Education – or a Teacher’s Manifesto Against “Social Distancing

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Abstract: The year 2020 began with two momentous social-metabolic turmoils: the deepening of the global capitalist crisis and, since mid-January, the planetary diffusion of the new coronavirus. Since then, from mid-March on, schools, institutes and universities of basic, professional and superior level have suspended their activities and different sectors are being forced to interrupt part of their production processes and services, although unevenly across the Planet. What should it be the teachers’ stand on all of these world-historic processes and events? Will emergency remote instruction and the digitization of learning processes be written in the stars of our collective destiny? Will the physical and psychic development of children and youngsters go unscathed? Can objective knowledge be reduced to competence descriptors? What role should information technology play in public education? Is there a viable hegemonic alternative to this new academic dystopia 4.0? What is to be done? And where to begin?

Keywords: Covid-19, education, teaching, technology, schools

"To these (fallen angels) Satan directs his Speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining Heaven, but tells them lastly of a new World and new kind of Creature to be created, according to an ancient Prophesie or report in Heaven; for that Angels were long before this visible Creation, was the opinion of many ancient Fathers. To find out the truth of this Prophesie, and what to determine thereon he refers to a full Council. What his Associates thence attempt. Pandemonium the Palace of Satan rises, suddenly built out of the Deep: The infernal Peers there sit in Council."

(Milton, In: Paradise Lost, 1668 Argument.)

Introduction

The Sars-Covid pandemic made possible the unimaginable – a laboratory, in a scale of millions of students, professors, parents and guardians – in a simultaneously global “here-and-now”, in almost the entire Planet Earth, with human subjects to what is called “*Ensino à Distância*” (EaD, in Portuguese). The quotation marks are due to the hard translation to idioms from the Global North, by one side, and, by another, demarks what was once understood, both legally and conceptually, as *remote teaching* and/or *e-learning*. The results of emergencial remote instruction were unambiguous: it is virtually impossible to teach at and with what is called now “social distance”. Or – if you will – actual education presupposes all its very opposite.

This quick-fix with distance education does not produce authentic knowledge. It’s a homeopathic dose of fragmented information.

This transforms the professor into an instrument of a computer that commands programs, contents, methods, times and rhythms of work. The teacher passes from that to become a machine's appendix, such as a new Chaplin of *Modern Times*. It will increase, for that, the so-called "Burnout", the alienation, the dismay. It is the factory-teacher – a new level of proletarianization and discontent of teachers worldwide – that opens up a standard test, at the worst American style, and students respond, prepared to a future assembling line in which they will be inserted by this educational neoliberalism. Expropriates – even more – students from working class and middle classes. Distance teaching also expropriates creativity from professors and deprofessionalizes them, more even, besides destructing their personal, family and social life. At the end – transforms its own house in a productive unity of global capitalism.

Naomi Klein, the well-known North American intellectual, explains in her book *Shock Doctrine* how governments and companies use "catastrophes" to apply measures that, before them, would be unacceptable to the population. The era of learning automation has arisen and offers itself as a true dystopia. Without social and political resistance to the lack of professors or to the control of their wages, they will be replaced by artifacts incapable to replace the teaching work. Because, in all countries where "remote education" is being introduced, the ratio of students per teacher/computer increases (which becomes a hybrid type of computerized teacher). Should that be called the state-of-the-art "brave new world"?

Students – these relational social mammals and their highly developed cerebral telencephalon – will not be able to acquire or produce any knowledge, because knowledge depends on a volitive-emotional relation, both collective and intentional, that is established in time and space and creates itself between human beings – will only consume informations that they can look for in search engines, such as Google, this up-to-the-minute post-modern Oracle. With distance teaching we objectify teachers and students. Do we love a computer's bidimensional screen or those we can hug, smell or feel? However, *Ipads* and/or *Softwares* are being massively bought by counties with our taxes. And, the icing on the cake, the personal datas from "students" and "teachers" are, automatically, "given" to market-study companies and public-opinions researches so well used by people with such indole as Steve Bannon hired to elevate popularity of people with the character of Jair Bolsonaro (students from Portugal are already using tests, in public school, elaborated not by teachers, but private non-scholarly companies). This is the actually existent so-called "brave new world" of labour automation in education. It is all about the fact of learning privatization through those "partnerships" and the brutal reduction of costs with teachers, generating a market with public funds, through those partnerships, and decreasing public debt; paying less to teachers and creating one more

generation expropriated from art, culture and science, dependent on computers – being prepared to a new automatized labour market.

Finally, all studies proved that more than 2 hours of screen daily, in kids and teenagers, produce severe neurological effects. How is it possible that educational leaders are the ones to impose or authorize even 30 minutes of screen to children that passes already the hole day, outside school, stuck at home, alone, with smartphones, obese, dissocialized, hyper-stimulated, and depressed? This so-called distance teaching is no teaching at all. It is the automation of present (professor) and future (students) labour.

Sickness, death, unemployment and/or *lay-offs* are not much of soothing terms. However, to write present history, is imperative – unfortunately – to make use of them. The combination between brutal international economic crisis and global pandemic emergency brought a general frame, all catastrophic, to the lives of millions of workers around the world. It is not possible – nor even desirable – to ignore the magnitude of social, economic, political and/or cultural problems involved, above all for those who live from their own work. In this sense, we consider the attempts to elude an exceptionality in the diverse spheres of life a true outrage to human dignity, in general. In education, particularly, it is about something just as much or even more disastrous — having in mind that it comprehends precisely that vital activity in the formation of full human beings. This present manifest-essay starts from an essential defence to the fundamental rights of life and work, without leaving aside the right to education and culture to everyone. As different teachers from a variety of fields of knowledge, neither could we agree with so-called "shock doctrine" that aims to adduce a "technological dystopia", what political analysts alerts us – in their books, essays and breathtaking articles of in its specialty.¹

The impact of measures adopted in the matters of COVID-19 in the world of labour

The several strategies adopted to contain the spread of coronavirus or COVID-19 had an impact on approximate 2.7 billion of workers in the whole world, and around 1.6 billion students in over 170 countries. The World Bank defends that an interruption of the academic calendar for

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¹ Naomi Klein (Montreal, 1970) is the author of books such as *No Logo: The Tyranny of Brands* (2000), a kind of manifesto of the alterglobalization movement, and *The Shock Doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism* (2007), the latter in which she described how companies take advantage of natural disasters, wars and / or other "shocks" to advance with austerity policies, which, according to the author, produces the impoverishment of populations, the enrichment of an unscrupulous minority and, usually, riots, which the State tries to curb with violence and fraud. In a recent piece, she states that: "Google and Amazon use chaos to shape a digital future under their control with more confinement: work, schools, doctors and delivery at the door - in a hyper-vigilant partnership between the State and corporations": <https://outraspalavras.net/outrasmidias/naomi-corporacoes-tentam-acelerar-distopia-tech/> (Accessed 03/06/2020).

a lapse of “indeterminate time” will cause unavoidable “educational losses.”² Having as a premise the initial regime of quarantine and the necessity of physical distance, a true front of multilateral organisms were formed – a sort of global coalition of emergent “distance education” –, that, with a level of coherence and unity seen few times in the history of humanity, organized itself to guarantee, galvanize and coordinate the use of institutional packages, digital platforms and virtual technologies – from basic teaching to the academic postdoctoral degree itself: without the lines and scruples as such as from UNESCO or ILO, e.g., The WHO, UNICEF, WORLD BANK, OCDE, BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION, LEMANN FOUNDATION, VALHALLA, BANK OF AMERICA, AT & T, NOVARTIS, GOOGLE, MICROSOFT, FACEBOOK, ZOOM, MOODLE, HUAWAI etc. etc. etc. aligned themselves, more than in one coalition for global education, in a true “business counter” of school certification – turned to create surplus-value. Beyond that, there is a whole paraphernalia of institutes, NGOs and public-private partnerships – with a “philanthropic-mercantile” character or similar – which every year invests, massively, in converting it capital through, both curricular and extra-curricular propositions, to public education, in the most diverse levels.

The centrality of classroom schooling education or, in short, *de facto* education

Our position as educators is clear. “Distance teaching” cannot (and should not) replace classic classroom education, based on school or university institutions. Already for a number of fundamental reasons. Objective knowledge – taught in schools or universities – presupposes the process of forming intellectual and moral capacities that the student **does not yet have** and that he will start to acquire, as the new scientific, philosophical or artistic concepts produce new subjectivations in his thinking and language. This requires that the students’ study-activity be pedagogically guided by the teacher, who offers the necessary didactic support so that the appropriation of the new categorial complexes is, therefore, objectified by each of them, with their different rhythms and intensities of development. The act of teaching is a non-material production of a simultaneous type similar to what is, for example, the medical act. We explain. In addition to producing materially, human beings stand out from other species not only for transforming nature, which surrounds us, but also for transforming the very human nature that inhabits us. In addition to hospitals, mobile phones, schools and vaccines, we previously produced concepts, images, values or habits – that is – non-material goods.

² Link accessible: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/edutech-covid-19>. (Accessed 03/06/2020). More, Leher 1999, pp., 19-30.

Within **non-material** production, there is one that separates itself from the producer, just like a canvas painted by the artist, and one that does not separate from it, such as the profession of the physician and the teacher. Diagnosing a patient and teaching a student is always a **simultaneous** “production” to the “product”, whether it is the cure of the patient or the education of the student. It is because of these specific characteristics of labour from physicians, nurses and teachers that it becomes so difficult to “dehumanize” them in such vital activities. Education is produced-consumed in the same space-time and therefore assumes a direct relationship: *that actual interrelation*. The didactic resources, hence, are mediations for the realization of such an act that is interpersonal and, therefore, presupposes the presence, of teacher and student, in reciprocal, dynamic, real interaction. The fact that there are resources does not mean that such an act ceases to exist or should be replaced or mediated in essence by artefacts.

Obviously, we consider the work of the doctor and the teacher to be quite different. In this sense, colleagues could ask us why the comparison with a profession so steeped in overfragmentation, hyper-specialization and so subsumed in the very fabric of the commodity, in addition to being highly hierarchical, from the dichotomy conception–execution. But despite the fact that the medical work is much better paid and, obviously, with greater social prestige, both are fundamental for the production – and reproduction – of the social being.

The applications of – scientific-social, technical, historical-philosophical, and artistic – knowledge related to the social use of language (and thought) in social practices, require the decisive mediation of teachers and their social relations in educational institutions. Teachers can and should elaborate syntheses, selection of information and contextualization, in the academic environment, considering the situation of all students. The pedagogical work of teachers, therefore, is not liable to be developed in a systematic and in-depth way by distance education – increasingly linked to competency descriptors that suppress knowledge and its social application. Questioning common sense – and the ideological dispositions that make it up – demands theories, methods, programs, categories, and experiences, which are then brought to life by the school institution as a whole. They cannot be replicated by simulations or simulacra.

This act is not reducible to the event of assimilating new information. It is a whole process – the formation of new cognitive, affective, motor and sensory capabilities. In addition, it presupposes the student's integral involvement in the learning process, not limited to the so-called logocentric scope, but necessarily requiring the mobilization of various affective processes, co-participating in the very construction of meaning in what is learned. We need to mention that school education is not an individual activity, for each student, which merely occurs

in a group-context; but a system of activities, collective, which is, in its fundamentals, shared, in which reciprocal fertilization, between children and young people, has a decisive role in the affective-cognitive development of each other. Considering this whole complexity in the act of teaching, it is clear that it can not be produced, in all its potentialities and/or plenitude, with our students confined at their homes, without possibility of meeting and sharing with teachers and their colleagues except by virtual means, when these are available. The curriculum is not a mere “list” of themes and contents that should be subjected to a kind of final “check-list”. The complete replacement of classic lecturing master classes would be the ideal way for any meaningful education, and emergency remote instruction will only be able to mitigate exceptional situations, no more than that.

The central importance of integral development

“Distance learning” – non-classroom activities, remote classes and/ or *e-learning* – brings in itself a series of complex problems, very serious, to integral development of children and the youth beyond the growing inequalities in education and situations of suffering. From the perspective of human motricity, society already suffered huge radical alterations,³ because we live today in a digital world that is overpowering, especially to children and young people. Children today live their bodies at their fingertips. Digital information technologies have forced our bodies to other unexpected functions, since the phylogenesis of human anatomy. At early ages, we need to move the body, we need to be active, to gain more autonomy, to take risks. It is also interesting to exercise this activity that all animals do when they are small: exploring, discovering, taking chances – to play. The management of the concept of free time⁴ after the advent of the new coronavirus pandemic across the globe decreed a kind of “emergency of play”, as suggested by Prof. Dr. Carlos Neto, from the Human Motricity Faculty. Suffering, of a psycho-physical nexus, implied in situations of anguish and discouragement, in this crisis, was aggravated by the large-scale imposition of docile bodies, empty minds and cold hearts. The metabolic syndrome caused – diabetes, obesity, etc. – boosted COVID-19 itself. It is the deepening of an authentic epidemic of “motor illiteracy” of students. If the traditional school was already absolutely concentrationary, what about – then again – this new technological fetishism?

3 See BBC Portuguese: Dos pés à cabeça, os problemas de saúde que a tecnologia pode causar: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/geral-46559922> (Accessed 03/06/2020).

4 NETO, Carlos. “Decreto o estado de emergência para o brincar na infância” (Jornal I): <https://ionline.sapo.pt/artigo/697544/carlos-neto-decreto-o-estado-de-emerg-ncia-para-brincar-na-inf-ncia-?seccao=Portugal> (Accessed at 03/06/2020).

Pathogenic risks exist, say authorities in the matter

It is almost a scientific enlarged consensus – being from defenders or detractors of digital media – that a non-interrupt and continuous exposition to the stimulus and response scheme, from virtual platforms, is a pathogenic risk factor, especially severe to developing children. Repetitive behaviors are assimilated there – by the cerebral cortex – as a form of “satisfaction.” This stimulates the release of neurotransmitters – such as dopamine – known as the “pleasure hormone.” The use of electronic games for only eight minutes – according to studies – already causes this to happen. This interaction, via digital media, also activates these same brain mechanisms. It is practically the same feeling as casino customers in slot games and is analogous to the consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic drugs, such as heroin or cocaine. For that was decided – in the new OMS International Classification of Diseases – to include this condition under the name “gaming-disorder”.⁵ The pattern of frequent and persistent behavior in screen addiction can lead to prefer screens over any other interest in life. The criteria established to this diagnosis will include: not having control over frequency, intensity and duration with connection with equipment, prioritize this kind of virtual interaction over other activities and keep or add time of use, even after negative consequences. Even so when we must take a critical stance in relation to the perspective of neurosciences or analogous ones, which in general are very marked by a scientific neopositivism with a “biologizing” basis – which is evident in the textual bases and perspectives of DSM-4 – after all, there is no room for social subjects in dopamines and no human agency can be found in the synapses range, the risk involved is self-evident in terms of human development. And we could talk even more at length about the so-called “attention capitalism” – an alert popularized by the recent feature film *The Social Dilemma* – regarding “social media”, to fiercely dispute the social forms of consciousness, the elevation to umpteenth power of Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord’s cultural pessimism stood for.

The development of digital platforms in the field of education, however, is much more serious. The digital interface shifts the student’s attentive focus from typical terrain to inferential synapses, on which advanced cognitive functions are founded, to areas where motivation, skill and triggers become one and the same. There it does not count if the student developed his / her superior psychic processes, *e.g.* complex thinking, directed attention, volitional memory, abstract reasoning, aesthetic sensitivity, creative imagination and scientific conceptualization, in a consistent and sophisticated bias. The regress is self-evident – for any specialist in education, psychology and/or

5 OMS webpage: <https://www.who.int/fr/news-room/q-a-detail/gaming-disorder> (Accessed 03/06/2020).

neurology. But it becomes as or more blunt when it comes with the seal of all Ministers of Education. In addition to the usual social media, television, mobile phones, and video games, there are now hours of “tele-school” and / or “distance learning” for much, much more than the maximum ratio of 2 hours per day. There will be no incentive program for free street-play or public use of bicycles capable of reversing this if part of the public educators does not speak clear, effectively, against this vile debacle.

In defence of the teaching act against “competence pedagogie”

It is past hour and time to speak seriously about the generalization of “pédagogie par compétences” (Philippe Perrenoud) instead of the act of teaching objective knowledge. The various illusions of the so-called “knowledge society” are absurdly ingrained in school curricula, methods and programs. Too much water has passed under the bridge of educational controversy among traditionalists and renovators so that what is essential comes to the fore, for critical theory in these domains. Perhaps the most primal mystification is precisely this. Listen carefully CEOs and “markets”: knowledge and information are not the same thing. So-called “competencies” cannot and should not replace objective knowledge. For whom and what is public education for? The educational thinking produced in the field of the European Commission for Education can be summarized in the so-called *human capital theory*: “improving skills and access to education”, “focusing on market needs”, “helping Europe in globalized competition”, “Training young people to the current labor markets” and, of course, “responding to the consequences of the economic crisis”. In the post-COVID-19 scenario, and in the slogan of “new normal”, “new” bias of digitization 4.0 is accentuated. European leaders in the last quarter of the century considered that the school's main mission is to support the markets and that the solution to the issues of unemployment and inequality lies in a better combination between “education” and the “social” and “needs” so-called “economic”. The new “shock doctrine” radicalizes, now, the aspect of “tech dystopia” in the global context. A true abyss looms in the asymmetry between McJobs, *short-term on-the-job training*, in reference to undifferentiated jobs, without labour rights and of very low remuneration, and MacJobs, fix jobs, of high qualification and with social security, the *higher education schooling*. But the contrast between the basic and the top job market, McDonald’s Corp. or Apple Macintosh, is not enough to talk about integral formation. These changes in the labour market should be enough to arrest the official discourse – of “knowledge society” – in educational policies. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is then forced to cynically recognize that “not everyone will have a career in the dynamic ‘new economy’” – in fact, not the majority – so curricula

should not be conceived as if everyone could “get there.” The replacement of objective knowledge by the so-called “competences” respond, then, to a social and economic demand flourishing, for labour flexibility and plastic adaptability of workforce around the world. The education program, for capital itself, is quite clear – even didactic! – in its “noble” aspirations.

But an authentic education can only be conceived as a social production of the humanities, that is, in the sense of the social appropriation of real world properties (the good or “what we can know”; Science), of the valorization (the just or “what we should do”; Ethics) and, finally, aesthetics/symbols/allegories (the beautiful or “what attracts us”; Art). Such spheres of life are inserted in the production of ideas, projects and signs that characterize us as humans. In a nutshell, it is about the production of objective knowledge about culture, that is, the whole of mankind production and about nature – including human nature itself. The teacher’s work deals with mediations, of different orders, aimed at the appropriation / objectification of the very world of mankind, although second nature – or autotelic self-creation – both *praxis* and *poiesis* and, therefore, should not be reduced to the commodity-form. The instrumental, pragmatic and utilitarian rationality prevalent in the order of capital cannot dominate critical rationality aimed at the horizon of social emancipation. In general, competences are associated with learning descriptors, which are purely operational and utilitarian content, which keep them away from science and knowledge. For this knowledge to become a commodity itself, it is necessary to re-signify it as a “competence”, because, in this way, it is possible to incorporate it in technological artefacts – or, more precisely, in the predictive algorithms of artificial intelligence – and, also, in the various large scale standardized tests. Mass Distance Learning Courses (MOOCS) are anchored in the Tuning Project of global competencies. It is in this way that capital exercises active control over what is thought of in schools and universities. An example here can be illustrative. In the last national examination of the Portuguese language there was some basic revolt among the best teachers of language, literature and culture. They asked the same question: why does a discipline like Portuguese have its examination elaborated from base-models of the hard sciences? They answered themselves. There is a kind of primacy, of these same, that has already become an official ideology. It is necessary to have a certain model of scientific objectivity in which all questions ask for a single predicted answer, a certain kind of “ortho-answer”, then fixed with the force of the law in the so-called “solution scenarios”. Only in this way would an “objective” quantification be possible in which the proletarianized teacher, as a new “automaton corrector”, loses once and for all any autonomy and decision-making power. Nevertheless, back again, who examines the examiner?

Direct democracy, again and again

What should have been done when making decisions about education in the midst of the crisis? Let us start with the obvious: no decision could have been made without extensive consultation within the main agents directly responsible for the production and reproduction of teaching acts, namely, the professorship around the world, of all levels, areas and modalities of public education. Only the commitment of teachers can make Decree-Laws or Specific Ordinances to be *de facto* done and not converted into dead letters. For the sake of democracy, therefore, only educators could have backed the decisions that involved not only their respective psychological and physical integrity but, above all, their scientific professionalism. This was not – however – what really happened. But what happened instead? For the maintenance of the national final exams in accordance with the preliminary timetable and the perspective of, even with the due adaptations and flexibilities stated, equivalent to the classroom teaching schedule, prior to the emergency “non-classroom” regime of instruction, was added, in Portugal, the statement by the honourable Minister of Education, in an interview with the newspaper Público and radio Renascença, that “we must prepare ourselves to have some combination of distance and in-person teaching” in the next school year. “We must prepare ourselves to achieve by September — or maybe not September, but if possible by October, or November — what the British named “*b-learning*”, a conjugation between a combination of distance learning and face-to-face education,” says the Minister of Education, Mr. Tiago Brandão Rodrigues. The Minister also said that “the recovery of less consolidated learning [of the year] will have to be one of the fundamental pillars for returning to school [in 2020.2].” No ministerial approach could be worse. Not only was it established by the ministry that the non-face-to-face regime already takes on the force of law equivalent to face-to-face teaching – falling apart the legal distinction of “distance learning” – but the complementarity and reversibility of one teaching modality to the other was assumed. Has sustained knowledge or political will been lacking? Most likely both. Challenging, interesting activities that seek to cultivate and keep alive the flame of interest and enjoyment for learning could have been proposed. That could maintain a link between educators and students. That they mitigate the suffering of the students and try a point of view of the school community. But no. This followed in the pre-crisis schedule. The “opportunity” was lost, not to automate a new education in tech dystopia of digital 4.0, but of what the classics called the suspension of the judgment of everyday life towards the living genericity of the human species. The unified platforms of art and culture history constituted the largest historical-world aesthetic collection and it became possible to make visits to collections, museums and/or inventories the most

spectacular existing on the face of the globe,⁶ and only that which global computer networks gathered in the last period in terms of visual and visual arts would be enough to fill – of beauty and dignity – the months of physical confinement of millions of students.

Not only was the country placed in a kind of Aesopic fable – and make-believe – but new content was taught through the non-face-to-face regime. New Math and Language classes, for example, took place. This is absurd for students and outrageous for teachers. And what about physical education classes or artistic education in a non-classroom regime? What happened was a mockery – an impromptu improvisation – it cannot be called teaching, or even remote teaching.

What is the role of technologies in education?

We are not teachers against technical progress or scientific development. Actually, we are enthusiasts of technical reproducibility factors as socialization of *savoir-faire* and we have introduced, extensively and profoundly, several apparatus in didactic-pedagogical projects as means of support in our schools or universities *campi*. But the massive amount of *Big Data* is a systematic set of events, processes, facts, news and information without the fundamental mediation of an education oriented towards arts, science, culture and philosophy – the world wide web is navigations and the shipwrecks, meaning, once more it is proved to be fundamental, and preponderant, the function of school education. The Internet, without mediations, can make fake-news, post-truth and a series of other harms go viral. The act of teaching is nothing less than essential also to mediate this world, a true universe, in the web. That being said, we believe that activities mediated by technologies should be democratized, *i.e.*, with free internet access with social quality to every student, teachers, community. Democratized access to technological media that make possible creative interactions on the internet is a fundamental premise in the digital world that we live in. Free liberation of several spaces found in virtual school encounters, networks promoting debates about the ongoing crisis and the role of education, should structure universities, institutes, and schools since common platforms to movies and series, orientated access to museums and visual arts, scientific and technological divulgation, etc. etc. etc., open and in interaction with teaching institutions, as new synthesis towards integrating basic, technical, professional, and superior education. In addition, it is necessary to nurture and invest seriously in the development of platforms and public programs exclusive to schools, universities, and institutes.

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6 Balbi, Clara. “Acessos ao Google Arts and Culture mais que dobram durante a pandemia”, in: FSP: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2020/06/acessos-ao-google-arts-and-culture-mais-que-dobram-durante-a-pandemia.shtml> (Accessed at 03/06/2020).

Rights of students: *where to begin?*

Years of cuts – in public education institutions – bequeathed the legacy of a precarious education, where inequalities have become an enormous division factor. Those who have access to top ranked schools, to exam preparation books and explanations, those who do not have the burden of (re) productive work and those who do not have to work to study have an education that is absolutely different from most of the population that lives from their own work and that has extremely degraded living conditions. To make matters worse, with “distance learning”, these inequalities are proving to be abysmal.

The crisis, both health and economic, is not the responsibility of the students. The inalienable right to public education, of quality, free and referenced by the search for social equality is essential. Is it fair to maintain university tuition fees during this exception? Is it wise to continue the school year – from basic to higher – in already disruptive conditions? Is it honest to proceed with the national exams, which way to enter higher education? Will it be lucid to perpetuate budgetary austerity, cuts, and deterioration in this sector? We need a full education of free time for human development with an authentically omnilateral sense, for everyone, as in the representation of the *Vitruvian Man*:⁷ not to separate scientific and educational aspects, manual and cerebral work, theory and practice. Education cannot be a commodity, but an inalienable social right, a universal public mission, which humanizes us individually and collectively.

Teacher's Duties: *what is to be done?*

In Portugal, the largest national survey on working and living conditions in education is unmistakably indicating teachers professional exhaustion.⁸ Low wages, long hours, and excessive, meaningless bureaucratic work. It is also a huge deficit in the struggle for recognition, in addition to struggles for redistribution, unreasonable individual performance assessments, rankings and/or goals, inconsequential. Most of the teachers, at the end of the day, feel exhausted. There are several factors of teacher exhaustion. Psychic suffering – in the work of teachers – is today a global pandemic. How to understand or explain malaise so diffuse and widespread in the functions, structure and dynamics of an activity so vital to the social production of humanity? In addition to the new health security conditions – requiring fewer students per class and more washbasins and ventilated classrooms – there is an urgent need for

7 Davincian composition that illustrates the notes made by the author (1490), inspired by the work of Vitruvius.

8 INCTVE Inquiry 2018-2020: <https://www.cics.nova.fcsh.unl.pt/research/publications/relatorios-de-projetos-1/inquerito-nacional-sobre-condicoes-de-vida-e-trabalho-na-educacao-em-portugal> (Accessed at 03/06/2020).

an attractive career path and a substantial salary increase for this work sector, essential for the most diverse spheres of life. And an emergency recruitment program to supply the boom of cuts that occurred during the epidemic.

“There is always someone who resists”, as the bard says

The educational system in Portugal is the most important public network in the country. In 2008 there were 2.2 million people enrolled in all levels of education, about 20% of the entire resident population. Until the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, education was, among the functions of the State, the one that had the greatest weight: between 1978 and 2008 this expenditure increased from 1.4% to 4.4% of GDP. Almost a decade later, there were changes, with the weight of health and, above all, the public debt to overlap, but public education remained, in budgetary terms, as a pillar of the welfare state in Portugal. State spending on education represented 3.7% of GDP in 2017. In 2017, the number of enrolled students in the educational system remains above 2 million. However, this responsibility has not been raised to the level and type of similar commitment. In addition, which was already bad, became terrible with the automatic progression to a “school via gadgets”. But, as the musician Adriano Correia de Oliveira sang (“Trova do vento que passa”), which is part of the best protest song in Portuguese cultural history, “*há sempre alguém que resiste / há sempre alguém que diz não*” [there is always someone who resists / there is always someone who says no]. It is today urgently necessary to create a real state of emergency in education through a movement of social protest that reinvents the crisis as a critic of the present time.

The normative restrictions for the use of distance education as an alternative modality to classroom teaching and the non-compliance with class hours for the completion of the school year through remote classes hurt, from death, the sense of justice, scientific vigour and professional ethics of the teaching *corpus*. Teachers need to pull the emergency brake on the train of history and make, then, the continuum of technological dystopia, the automation of teaching and the destruction of reason be thrown away through the air, in defence of science, knowledge, the civil service and, above all, the role of education. The alpha and omega of this struggle initiative can only be the full demand for an effective democratic management of education at all levels, areas, and modalities. Only management or management committees can propose a new start with the “reset” of a stillborn model, with decisions taken by school assemblies or by other types of plenary meetings until a national congress of teachers from all over the country, from provinces and capitals, from North to South, be held. If the first evocation is inspired by Walter Benjamin's acclaimed *Theses on the Concept of History*, here the

suggestion is a direct reference to Bertolt Brecht in his *Theory of Radio*.⁹ He urges the producers not to supply the cultural industry's apparatus, with literary genres of "culinary" consumption. Is there no possibility of avoiding the power of disconnection through the "organization of disconnected ones?", asks the German playwright. Digital platforms – Colibri / Zoom, Hangouts Meets, Microsoft Classroom, StreamYard or Skype – can initially serve to connect educators from all parts of the planet for this purpose, while open access new media within non-proprietary platforms, based on the notion of the free common good, are not being developed.

In this sense, we welcome the First World Congress in Defence of Public Education & Against Educational Neoliberalism (Sept./2020), which took place remotely and with open and free registration. The organization of the World Congress has its origins in the dissatisfaction of workers' education organizations in the midst of the 2015 World Education Forum – in South Korea – when private transnational organizations in the education sector dominated the event and guided the new "distance learning" technologies, the defense of privatization of education and did not give any time or space for workers' representatives to take a stand. As it was said in May 1968: "*c'est n'est qu'un debut*". That they bring us a new omen.

The incarceration of both the technical developments and scientific advancements of computer and telecommunications knowledge in what are the structural limits of the private monopoly of the means of social production makes the tools and machinery that could serve to improve human life under the Planet, today, to be put at the service of their own ruin. The difference between the best of all Artificial Intelligence predictive algorithms and the worst of the teachers is somewhat analogous to that skilfully described – by good old Marx – between, as you may already know, the honeybee and the architect:

"But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, and

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⁹ Brecht, Bertolt. O rádio como aparato de comunicação. Est. Av., SP, v21, n60, p.227-232, Ago./2007: [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-40142007000200018&lng=en&nrm=iso\(03/06/20\)](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-40142007000200018&lng=en&nrm=iso(03/06/20)).

the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close his attention is forced to be." (Karl Marx. Das Kapital. Vol.1. Part III: The Production of Absolute Surplus-Value. Chapter Seven: The Labour-Process and the Process of Producing Surplus-Value. 1867.)

Translated by Cian Barbosa

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