Teaching solitude: Professor Foucault's "wild methods"*[1]

Christian Fernando Ribeiro Guimarães Vinci[2]
ORCID: 0000-0003-2914-3032

Abstract

This essay resumes Foucault's understanding of teaching, as well as its influence on the work methodologies adopted by the French thinker in his classes. For this purpose, we shall analyze some of his interventions in the *Collège de France courses*, especially moments in which he expressed discomfort with certain institutional rites that prevented an effective dialogue with his audience, as well as brief comments on the teaching profession in interviews given in the 1970s and 1980s, in which Foucault not only exposed his discontent with the French conception of education but also outlined what he believed to be the role of a professor. If Foucault believed the professor should disrupt of our ways of thinking and acting, reappraise these writings would enable us to apprehend how this understanding modulated his own teaching performance. A performance marked by the adoption of "wild methods," that is, small changes in the course structuring aimed at producing a qualitatively different time—a problematization time. A time turned against the present time and in favor of a future; a time whose reward is solely and exclusively solitude and silence.

Keywords

Michel Foucault – Collège de France – Teaching Profession – Problematization – Method.

* English version by Carolina Vanso (Espaço da Escrita). The author thanks Espaço da Escrita – Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisa – UNICAMP – for the language services provided. The author take full responsibility for the translation of the text, including titles of books/articles and the quotations originally published in Portuguese.

1- The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was published within the paper.

2- Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil. Contact: vinci@unicamp.br

https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634202450281677en

Once, in a 1971 interview given to the newspaper *Partisan Review*, Michel Foucault stated that he did not believe himself a good professor, being constantly plagued by "a certain uneasiness" when faced with the problem of defining a teaching method (Foucault, 2010a, p. 22). Since the mid-1950s, when Foucault began his career as a professor at Uppsala University, he had dealt with the grievances of teaching but had rarely expressed himself publicly about such unease, at most sharing it in informal conversations with some colleagues (Hammarström, 1995). At the turn of the 1970s, however, something happened and the Foucauldian silence was broken. In several interviews given during that period, Foucault (2008a, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a) began to question the teaching methodologies used in France and to problematize the professor's social role. Besides, upon entering the *Collège de France* the French thinker sought to modulate his teaching performance, constantly externalizing to his audience his unease with the typical rituals of that institution and even proposing the adoption of "wild methods" (Foucault, 2005, p. 5) to address this problem, that is, use of simple strategies to disrupt such rites: changing class hours, changing classrooms, etc. Such methods sought to shorten the symbolic distance separating the professor from his audience, a distance surrounded by solemn silences—as defined by Foucault in the inaugural lecture given at that institution (Foucault, 2006a). How to interpret this change in attitude on Foucault's part? How can we interpret that, in the first half of the 1970s, we are faced with a Foucault-the-thinker concerned with problematizing aspects of his teaching profession, as well as a Foucault-the-professor engaged in modulating his teaching performance in a subtle dialogue with these same problematizations shared in various interviews? Far from exhausting these questions, this essay focuses on this relationship, understanding that Foucault's questions about the teaching of philosophy may sound strategic for us to reflect on teaching relations as a whole. To enter this discussion, we must revive the events that marked Foucault-the-professor at the turn of the 1970s.

Firstly, between 1969 and 1970, at the head of the Philosophy Department of the newly-created University of Vincennes, Foucault promoted an unprecedented institutional renewal seeking to "experiment with a freedom [of thought] not necessarily total, but as complete as possible in a university like Vincennes" (Foucault, 2011a, p. 189); an experiment marked by the introduction of new content and the renewal of traditional teaching methods. In response, the Minister of Education at the time, Olivier Guichard, considered Vincennes' Philosophy program to be too radical and, after publicly attacking the institution, expressed his intention not to grant the degree to its graduates. Foucault (2011a) replied to the minister's accusations accusing him of wanting to preserve a conservative conception of the Philosophy professor's social role, linking its figure to public instruction and citizenship education which posed little danger to the ruling power. In Vincennes, however, the aim was to think of philosophy teaching as something inseparable from formulating new questions, from promoting other problematizations that would call into question the sharing of current knowledge-power. It was, therefore, an education interested in promoting what, Foucault would call years later *Philosophical exercises*, understood as a movement capable of "freeing thought from what it thinks silently, and allowing it to think differently" (Foucault, 1984, p. 14).

A few months after this debate, we came across a second situation that could help explain the change in the French thinker's attitude towards keeping silent about the grievances of teaching life: Foucault had replaced Jean Hyppolite in the prestigious *Collège de France*, taking up the chair of *History of Philosophical Thought*. The concerns expressed by the French thinker during the public debate with Guichard did not cease, but occupied a special place within his courses. Notably, Foucault's explicit unease with the institution dates back to his inaugural lecture. On that distant evening in 1970, the winds of May 1968 were still blowing, the *Latin Quarter* had been besieged and police cars occupied the area, making access to the auditorium difficult and giving the event a strange atmosphere (Eribon, 1990). After a few words of welcome from Étienne Wolff, the institution's president, and booing from the audience, Foucault started reading his text in a voice "tense with emotion, almost distorted by fear" (Eribon, 1990, p. 197). Foucault's unease did not derive from latent tension, but from the simple fact of having to begin his speech instead of surreptitiously insinuating himself into a word with no certain sender; a word that would precede him and allow him to disappear into some discursive flow. Doing so would probably require to break with the ritualistic character immanent to the very institution, one responsible for making "beginnings solemn," surrounding them with "a circle of attention and silence" (Foucault, 2006a, p. 7). At the end of that same lecture, Foucault did not fail to notice that his difficulty in beginning the presentation expressed his desire to be preceded by Hyppolite's words, realizing his wish for it to be the voice that preceded him—"To carry me, to invite me to speak and to inhabit my own discourse" (Foucault, 2006a, p. 79).

Hence, throughout his inaugural lecture we come across a concern to break the circle of attention and silence that certain institutional solemnities bear and, to this end, we could think of a game of listening in which the roles of sender and receiver of the professor's discourse are mixed, or perhaps intermingled, producing a noise in the authorship that would drag both those who speak and those who listen into another field of thought, in which it cannot be given nor transmitted. It seems to us that Foucault, throughout his courses in the *Collège de France*, always flirted with this perspective, always sought to produce this knock-on effect, although he was rarely satisfied with the results achieved. This ambience sought by Foucault at the *Collège de France*, an institution marked by harsh institutional rites, seemed to go hand in hand with the experience of freedom forged at Vincennes, linked to the reconfigured social role of the Philosophy professor conducted there, understanding it as someone responsible not only for promoting public instruction, but for fostering the emergence of new problematizations. Perhaps the difficulty Foucault encountered in assuming this role within an institution as rigid as the *Collège de France* explains the constant outbursts he would make at one time or another during his courses, when he would interrupt his lectures to question his audience about his class format, asking them if there were any questions or problems to be presented. Following the transcripts of his classes, we observe that Foucault would normally received only silence as payment; the same silence that seemed to lurk around him during his inaugural lecture. Not for nothing, a journalist from *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Gérard Petitjean, notice the solitude that led him to comment:

> It would be necessary to be able to discuss what I proposed. Sometimes, when the course is not good, it takes a small thing, a question, to reorder everything. But that question never comes. In France, the group effect makes any real discussion impossible. And since there's no feedback channel, the course becomes theatrical. I have an actor's or acrobat's relationship with the people there. And when I'd finished speaking, a feeling of complete solitude.... (Foucault, 2005, p. XI).

This text, replicated here and there by a series of commentators, integrates most of the printed prefaces to the courses given by Foucault at the *Collège de France* and, in our opinion, points to his concern with promoting another teaching experience, one concerned with generating problematizations rather than giving in to the public education model. Such concern, in turn, dialogued immediately with the expository methodologies adopted by the French thinker in his classes, methods that he called "wild" (Foucault, 2005, p. 5). Evidently, we ask: to what savagery does Foucault refer here? From time to time, when interrupting his line of argument, Foucault verbalized his desire for his speech to be freely appropriated, but this required his audience to ask him about one aspect or another of his exposition, that is, only by decimating the ritual silence present in that institution could Foucault establish this other desired pedagogical relationship, for only then—or so he thought—would it be possible to construct a truly powerful dialogue. In his lecture of January 7, 1976, for the first time we came across this desire formalized:

> [...] I consider them to be entirely free to do with what I say what they want. These are research clues, ideas, schemes, dots, instruments: do with them what you will. At the end of the day, I'm interested in that, and it doesn't concern me. It doesn't concern me insofar as I don't have to lay down laws for how one uses them. And it interests me insofar as, in one way or another, it relates to what I do, it's linked to what I do (Foucault, 2005, p. 4)[3].

This class, part of the course *Society Must Be Defended*, marks a shift in how Foucault conducted his courses. As Michel Senellart (2014) argues, the 1976 course promoted an expository renewal on Foucault's part, aimed at breaking the bonds of silence in which he saw himself entangled and, we believe, bringing him closer to the concept of professor that inspired him when he oversaw the Philosophy Department at Vincennes. It was an attempt to challenge certain formalities, the ritualistic nature of the expository mode adopted by that institution, often compared to a circus or something similar. For Foucault-the-professor, it was not important to transmit content that had been prepared beforehand, but rather to share concerns that could trigger and liberate thought, allowing other questions to emerge. Foucault, then, seemed to be engaged in the construction of another dialogical time, a time in which the discourse sender and its receiver no longer

3- This Foucauldian appeal for an interested use of his theoretical reference appeared at various moments in his thinking, finding a more clearly delineated form in the 1980s, in an interview in which the thinker linked this desire to the critical craft. There, we read: "I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply, not judgments, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes—all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms" (Foucault, 2008a, p. 302).

occupy certain roles that had been configured the day before and become entangled in the same web of problems, breaking the silence that restricts certain institutional relations and enabling the emergence of an incessant game of questioning about our present time. A qualitatively different time from that which inspired the traditional teaching model, marked by the transmission of knowledge pure and simple. A time of problematization. A time marked by a change in the teaching experience, an experience that is increasingly distant from the old concept of public instruction and closer to the Foucauldian ideal of a professor, understood as someone responsible for challenging certain ways of acting and thinking so that new questions and problems can emerge. One major question: would it be possible to build this time in one class? Far from wishing to exhaust this issue, this simple essay will only meddle in a somewhat persistent discussion about the relationship between this solitude experienced by Foucault in his classes and the search for a problematization of the present which has always inspired his work and, above all, his conception of the role of the professors. Are solitude and problematization inseparable?

Júlio Groppa Aquino (2016) pointed to an inevitable delay within pedagogical relations, namely the existence of an impossible dialogue between those who lead this movement to problematize the present time and those to whom we address our considerations. Dialogue would prove difficult, if not impossible, in the instantaneity of the present, leaving teachers with only silence. Foucault, given the countless times he expressed his unease with the rituals of the institution he was in, seemed to believe in the viability of establishing this other temporality, that of problematization, which is why he constantly returned to the debate on the expository methods adopted, instigating his students to address questions to him and even seeking to break with the typical ritual of the *Collège de France* by proposing to create restricted study groups—something prohibited by the institution in the 1980s and for which he was eventually reprimanded[4]. We will try to return to these moments of Foucault-the-professor, resuming the interventions by the French thinker in his classes, as well as sparse comments on the teaching profession in his interviews given in the 1970s onwards. Rediscovering this Foucaultian legacy, we argue, can help us access another facet of his oeuvre, seeking not only to probe how much his courses functioned as a powerful laboratory for forging his major works (Noguera-Ramirez, 2009; Gros, 2014), but analyzing how in his courses we also come across a different conception of teaching that updates those exposed in his interviews. As such, we will try to retrieve some moments of Foucault-the-teacher focusing on his courses at *Collège de France*, especially those in which the French thinker proposed to adopt some "wild method" to break with the instantaneity of the present time, marked by the ritualization of certain relations—such as the professor-student one—, and to provide access

4- On the course lecture *The Courage of Truth*, the last one Foucault taught at that institution, the professor comments: "About the seminar, once again we have an institutional and legal problem. In principle, we don't have the right to hold closed seminars. And when it occurred to me to hold a closed seminar—the one we held on Pierre Riviere, for example, perhaps some of you remember—there were complaints. And in fact, legally, we don't have the right to hold a closed seminar. But, for certain types of work, asking professors [on the one hand] to make a public presentation of their research, while preventing them [on the other hand] from having a closed seminar where they can conduct research with students, I believe is a contradiction. In other words, we can ask a professor to present his research in public teaching, and nothing more, if he does research that he can conduct alone" (Foucault, 2011b, p. 30, footnote).

to a qualitatively different time, the time of problematizations. An insidious method, the payoff of which, more often than not, seems to be solitude and silence alone.

Rare are the moments in which Foucault expressed his conception of the teaching profession, but since 1970 these rare manifestations have always referenced Foucault's concern with thinking about teaching, especially Philosophy teaching, as something inseparable from the problematization of current ways of thinking and acting. In a 1980 interview, for example, published anonymously under the suggestive name *The Masked Philosopher*, the French thinker stated that the main function of education, in his view, should be to enable "the individual to change at will" rather than simply to determine "his place in society" (Foucault, 2008a, p. 304). Philosophy, for its part, would have an important task in this project, since only it would allow "the displacement and transformation of frameworks of thinking, the changing of received values and all the work that has been done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other than what one is" (Foucault, 2008a, p. 304). Now, although he discusses the role of teaching, especially that of philosophy, the Foucauldian conception presented in this interview differs little from that expressed during the debate with Guichard.

While still in charge of Vincennes, amidst of the controversy surrounding the Philosophy Department, Foucault (2011a) expressed his concern that French education had always been geared towards an insidious civic education, thus granting a restricted margin for freedom of thought. The professor's role, in general terms, was no different from that of the conscience guide, interested in delimiting what can be thought and said, as well as the appropriate places for doing so. A guide concerned with pointing out right and wrong, what is allowed and what is forbidden. The aim was to provide an eminently police-like education focused solely on obedience. Philosophy, however, has always threatened such a structure, as it allowed for reflection that questioned both the foundations of knowledge and its limits and applications. For Foucault (2011a), this incitement of philosophy to a certain rebelliousness has always placed it on the side of the state enemies. Hence, in an attempt to tame this radical mode of reflection, philosophy ended up being held hostage by what has come to be called public instruction. From now on, it could question everything as long as it maintained a commitment to citizenship, the rights and duties that fall on each and every citizen (Foucault, 2011a, p. 189).

However, for Foucault, philosophy was something quite different. Before any approach that could give unity to this form of questioning, we always deal with individuals, the so-called philosophers, characterized by a certain "sharing that isolates them" (Foucault, 2011a, p. 188). What would therefore characterize a philosopher would be the untimely nature of their problematizations, always directed against the present time and in favor of a future one, and the incessant questioning of what we are, a questioning capable of changing our horizon of thought and action; leading such individuals to be considered social outcasts, bringing them closer to poets and madmen (Foucault, 2011a, p. 188). Philosophy, whether understood in its critical unity or as public instruction, does not exist, but rather the problematizations shared by one or another individual. For Foucault, one needed to revive this other way of conceiving philosophy, rejecting any label or

purpose that could give it unity and seeking to think of it under the aegis of an incessant problematization of our present time.

May-June 1968 provided an interesting environment for the resurgence of this untimely conception of philosophy, as the ruling power flirted with the possibility of granting greater freedom to universities and, above all, to philosophers. The University of Vincennes, with its open and innovative program, emerged in this context (Soulié, 2012). In France, between 1945 and 1960, the total number of university students grew by 10 percent a year, from 123,000 in 1945 to 214,000 in 1960. This significant increase indicates not only the growth of a university class, most of which young, but also the entry of a diverse population into higher education. Charles Soulié (2012), discussing the creation of Vincennes, argues that the influx of youths from different social backgrounds inevitably leads to a questioning of curricular knowledge. Why continue to focus on the study of classics that seem to have nothing to do with social reality? Unsurprisingly, the May-June '68 revolts were mainly student revolts carried out by an increasingly educated youth from different classes who couldn't see themselves represented in the authorities. According to Soulié (2012), the events of '68 cannot be understood without considering this significant change in French society and, above all, without comprehending that it was also a revolt against the universities and their rites. Vincennes emerged as a response to their demands, a new institution freed from the old rites, open to new knowledge that dialogued with the immediate reality of this student class. An institution conducive to seeing the rebirth of that other conception of philosophy defended by Foucault. It wasn't long, however, before his project came under severe attack, as we have seen.

Foucault, taking stock of this moment, notes that 1968 marked the eruption of a crisis in the university which, in some way, called into question the social role of the professor, as well as the police-like model of education that had prevailed until then. This crisis, in turn, created a vacuum. No one seemed to know what to teach, or who could be taught or why. At the time of this prognosis, while working at the *Collège de France*, Foucault tried to draw a parallel between the great crisis arisen after 1968 and the institution in which he found himself:

> You know that in France, after 1968, after the great university crisis, nobody really knows who they're addressing when they teach, they don't know what they should teach, nor do they know why they teach. This is true, I think, for all teachers in France. It so happens that there is a very curious institution, the *Collège de France*, to which I have belonged for two or three years. [...] the Collège de France, which is a very old institution, somehow foresaw, institutionalized today's malaise. Professors at ordinary universities simply do this in the form of a malaise and a temporary crisis. We, at the *Collège de France*, do it in an entirely customary, entirely institutional and regular way. (Foucault,2010b, p. 54).

If the vacuum in French universities was created after the events of 1968, the *Collège de France* appeared to have been dealing with this void for some time and, not only that, it was its *raison d'être*. For no other reason, Foucault ended his prognosis with an anecdote involving Paul Valéry who, working at the *Collège de France* during the war,

always sought subterfuges to avoid teaching, since, like all the other professors at that institution, "he didn't know to whom he was speaking, he didn't know what he had to say and he didn't know why he was saying it" (Foucault, 2010b, p. 54). Valéry's wish was that no listeners would show up at his seminars. The professor waited for his turn to enter the auditorium, smoking, pacing back and forth and asking his assistant if anyone had shown up. A sigh of relief was emitted each time the assistant said there was no listener present. When someone showed up, Valéry put out his cigarette and, enraged, headed for the lounge to improvise on some subject.

Foucault was enchanted by this anecdote, since it dialogued with his own uncertainty about who his listeners would be, what he should talk about and why he was talking. Now, how can this concern not be related to his understanding about the role of the professor? His understanding that a philosophy class should not transmit long-established knowledge, knowledge that is useful in the game of public education and capable of helping the individual to assume a position in society—the model citizen, for example—but rather promote a field of problematization of what one is and thinks. If we ignore who we will speak to, we end up having trouble choosing what to talk about—after all, what are the practices and discourses that deserve to be problematized to promote a radical change in our ways of being and thinking? Without a certain proximity, even at a distance, how can we promote this pedagogical game?

Not knowing his audience, Foucault found himself unable to work together with his students, which is why the question of the expository method emerged as one major issue. How to shorten the distance? How to build a qualitatively different time in order to allow the joint construction of problematizations? The rites of the *Collège de France* seemed to prevent this work, the only one capable of being labeled philosophical in Foucault's conception. For this reason, Foucault sought to operate "wild methods." What methods would these be? These were varied methods, all of them involving simple changes, such as in the class schedule or creating restricted study groups in the after-hours, but which seemed to imply a constant attempt to shorten the distance between the thinker and his audience. These simple changes, however, did not fail to accompany changes in his expository methodologies which were interested in dismantling the conception that it was up to the professor to transmit ready-made knowledge and set a different pace for his thinking (Senellart, 2014).

In the emblematic year of 1976, Foucault decided to change the scheduled time of his seminar:

> [...] I found myself in front of an auditorium full of people with whom I had, strictly speaking, no contact, since part, if not half of the it, had to stay in another room and listen to what I was saying through a microphone. It wasn't even a show anymore—since we couldn't see each other. But I was stuck for a reason. For me—between you and me—the fact that I had to put on this kind of circus every Wednesday afternoon was a real, how should I put it... ordeal is an exaggeration, boredom is a little weak. Anyway, it was a bit in between. So I ended up actually preparing these courses, with a lot of care and attention, and devoted less time, let's say, to the research itself, to the things that were both interesting and a bit incoherent that I could have said. [...] So, how to proceed? Legally, I can't set formal conditions for access to this room. I have therefore adopted

> the wild method of scheduling the course for half past nine in the morning thinking, as my correspondent said yesterday, that the students no longer know how to wake up at half past nine. You'll say that it's still an unfair selection criterion: those who wake up and those who don't. It's one or the other. (Foucault, 2005, p. 4-5, emphasis added).

This small change proved to be insufficient. Foucault was unable to shorten the distance and, for this reason, a few meetings later he suggested holding private seminars to discuss course topics (Foucault, 2005, p. 99). Dissatisfaction continued and, the following year, a small working group was set up, holding specialized seminars with a small number of students. In addition to the fact that *Collège de France* forbade these private meetings, the author of *Discipline and Punish* was still unable to reach a satisfactory number of participants; there were always many interested and, in the course *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault spoke with certain rudeness to send a message:

> Oh yes, wait, I had one more thing to inform you, sorry. The seminar is due to start on Monday the 26th. You know, I mean, those of you who usually come know that this seminar always raises problems. A seminar is something you can work on with 10, 20 or 30 people. It changes its nature and therefore its object and form when there are 80 or 100 of us. So I'd like to give a little advice to those who don't feel truly involved: please..., well (Foucault, 2008b, p. 205, footnote).

Unfortunately, these seminars didn't last as the *Collège de France* itself banned them. At the turn of the 1980s, unenthusiastic about the model of public accountability, which prevented him from promoting problematizations in closer dialogue with his students, Foucault began to execrate the ritualistic form of the institution more constantly[5]. We can think that within this model, which the thinker constantly refers to as being something akin to a circus, the lecturer's job was to transmit ready-made knowledge to be assimilated or apprehended by his listeners. In this game, there is little room for debate and for posing questions, for building problematizations, but Foucault continued to try to find ways to bridge this gap, to get closer to his students, whether through individual advising, by asking for questions to be sent to him in writing, by changing his class time, etc. All of these changes were accompanied by significant modifications to his own course, particularly in his methods of addressing sources, as well as attempts to modify the expository model he adopted. "Wild methods" used to decimate the conception of teaching as something inseparable from public instruction and concerned with allowing a different philosophy to emerge. Assuming this role of philosopher, however, implies taking a risk. If the philosopher is defined by a sharing that isolates them, as Foucault (2011) insisted, building a closeness with their listeners proves to be impossible, since only

5- In the course *Subjectivity and Truth*, Foucault expresses his dissatisfaction in more detail, but he also suggests a new wild method, that of advising individual work: "You know that this is the only public establishment, in the strict sense, that exists in France, since everyone can come, with no formalities of registration, no criteria of level or whatever. We speak to everyone. Speaking to the whole world isn't easy, it presents a lot of problems, it involves a lot of work to adjust uncertainly to an audience with imprecise boundaries, so it happens that we summarize a relatively detailed piece of work that has been done too quickly. It also happens to me, and this is what I'm going to do again this time, to give a kind of eventual program for a possible work, assuming that in the end some of you are in the mood to receive incitements for an eventual work" (Foucault, 2016, p. 36, footnote).

in distance does problematization seem feasible. Isolated, there is nothing left to do but deal with the impossibility of hearing any possible answer to the shared questions. This did not stop him from continuing to seek to reformulate this sharing space by certain methodological modifications, as if only in this process would it be possible to promote his problematizations.

In the year in which he opted to adopt some "wild methods" to challenge the character of public instruction that dominated the *Collège de France* and promote a different sharing of his problematizations, Foucault began his course by hollering:

> I'd like to make it a little clear what's going on here, in these courses. You all know that the institution where you are, and where I am, is not exactly an educational institution. Whatever meaning they wanted to give it when it was created a long time ago, today the *Collège de France* functions essentially as a kind of research organization: you get paid to do research. And I think that teaching, in the end, would be meaningless if we didn't give it, or if we didn't assign it, in any case, the meaning that it has here, or at least that I suggest: since you're paid to do research, what can control the research you do? How can you keep track of those who might be interested in it and those who have some reason to be connected to it? How can it be done, if not finally by teaching, that is, by public exposition, public and relatively regular accountability of the work that is being done? So I don't regard these Wednesday meetings as teaching activities, but rather as a kind of public accountability for work that, on the other hand, they allow me to do almost as I please. (Foucault, 2005, p. 3-4).

This public accountability work, important insofar as it gave him a certain freedom of thought, was then presented as something inseparable from a certain form of control over the circulation of knowledge arising from his research. On the one hand, this control enabled this knowledge to reach as many students as possible, some of whom were really interested in the philosophical exercises proposed by Foucault; on the other, this control gave the public expositions a certain ritualistic character, that circle of attention and silence punctuated by the thinker in his inaugural lecture (Foucault, 2006a), which prevented an interested appropriation of the analyses and conceptual tools forged by Foucault. Dissatisfied with this sharing, the author of *Discipline and Punish* began, from 1976 onwards, not only to question the typical rituals of that institution, but also to try to make subtle changes that would allow his problematizations to circulate differently. The first and most significant change, accompanying his choice to modify his class schedule, was the abandonment of the seminar methodology he had adopted when joining the *Collège de France*.

In that interview in which Foucault admitted not seeing himself as a good professor, the thinker insisted on the predominance of two expository models that dominated the debate about the most appropriate teaching method in both France and the United States: the seminar and the lecture. In general terms, Foucault pondered, there was a certain understanding that while lectures would prevent any possibility of dialogue, focusing solely and exclusively on the lecturer, seminars, in theory, would enable an exchange

between lecturer and student. Taking issue with this reading, Foucault asked his interviewer a series of questions:

> But don't you think that a professor who takes responsibility for students at the beginning of the year, who makes them work in small groups, invites them to enter into their own work, shares with them his questions and his methods, don't you think that, in such a formula, the students are even more deformed at the end of the seminar than if they had followed a series of lectures? Won't they take for granted, natural, self-evident and absolutely true what, after all, is nothing but the code, the framework of their professor? Don't they run the risk of the professor imposing his ideas on them in a much more insidious manner? (Foucault, 2010a, p. 22).

Within the seminar method, we would come across a game in which, in theory, the participants would seem to enjoy greater freedom of thought, since they could debate and conduct their work in a dialogical way. However, relying on the Foucauldian prognosis, this model would only conform them to an external framework of thought, making them hostages to a way of conducting themselves methodologically that would only replicate that of their professor. At the time, Foucault seemed to lean towards the lecture model above all due to the "raw honesty" (Foucault, 2010a, p. 22) it possessed. This raw honesty would give the exposition a more experimental character, bringing it closer to a certain craftsmanship:

> When I give a lecture that is a little dogmatic, I tell myself: I'm paid to bring students a certain form and content of knowledge; I have to make my lecture or course a little like one would make a shoe, no more, no less [...]. I consider myself more like a craftsman making an object and offering it for consumption than a master making his slaves work. (Foucault, 2010a, p. 23).

We can thus see Foucault's inclination towards an exposition model closer to the lecture, a model more focused on the craftsmanship of the exhibitor and which gave little or no space for dialogue. This distance from his audience seemed to Foucault to be beneficial and, in fact, we can see its influence on how the thinker designed his first courses at the *Collège de France*. Senellart (2014, p. 126), commenting on the first five courses taught by Foucault there, notes that the Foucauldian working procedure consisted of fulfilling a triple obligation: (1) the development of a liminal problem in stages; (2) the attempt, not always successful, to link this discussion to immediate political struggles; and, finally, (3) the concern to meet the expectations of an audience. Such work model implied prior preparation, a work of craftsmanship on the part of the researcher who, in front of his audience, limited himself to presenting his work ready-made, highlighting one aspect or another of his manufacturing process. In fact, the lecture model seemed more suited to this Foucauldian conception.

Foucault devoted a considerable amount of time to writing his courses, writing them almost entirely in full and, as the discussion progressed, seeking to give them other meanings in later years. Questioning this working procedure in 1976, Foucault (2005) lamented the fact that his previous research always sounded fragmentary, incapable of coming to a conclusion and, for this reason, generating a logical sequence in the order of

his problematizations. As Frederic Gros (2014) and Carlos Noguera-Ramirez (2009) insist, we know that the courses taught by Foucault at the *Collège de France* served as a workshop for experimentation, in which certain concepts and interpretations were matured before generating the author's major works. In this regard, the courses taught between 1972 and 1975—*Penal Theories and Institutions, Abnormal* and *Psychiatric Power*—served as the basis for *Discipline and Punish*. And the first course taught at that institution, in 1970-1971, entitled *Lectures on The Will to Know*, the same title given to the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, served as his inspiration. However, we cannot rely on Foucault's analysis that his courses were discontinuous or unfinished, and that his research was never completed. In fact, as Daniel Defert (2000) points out, this prognosis presented by Foucault in the course *Society Must Be Defended* does not hold up; it is merely a rhetorical effect. An effect, it must be said, used to promote an unprecedented methodological shift, in which the work should not be done in advance, but in front of one's audience.

Commenting on this change, Senellart (2014) identifies some important modifications. Firstly, the coincidence between what the commentator identifies as library time and exposition time. In abandoning the lecture model, Foucault begins his research in the archives as new problems are outlined in his exposition, class by class. For this reason, the researcher often gives other meanings to his courses, as he did in 1978 in the course *Security, Territory, Population*. In it, throughout his exposition, Foucault discovers the concept of governmentality, something derived from his analysis of the concept of government present in the archives of 17th-18th century economists. This discovery, in turn, modifies the entire organization of his course, diverting it from his initial outline.

The second methodological change involves the relation between the manuscript and the course delivered. As Senellart (2014) notes, except for the 1970-1971 course, read in its entirety by Foucault, the course manuscripts from 1976 onwards are less rich than the transcripts of the thinker's lectures. Throughout his exposition, Foucault disregards parts of his manuscript, extends discussions based on documents he hadn't considered before, and so on. Oral presentation therefore becomes more relevant than the document itself. The courses taught between 1978 and 1980, for example, show only a few schema, sometimes a single word. Only in 1982 did Foucault abandon this model, returning to the practice of writing almost all of his courses. Although Senellart doesn't try to explain the reasons for this change, when we read his speeches we can see that Foucault's deteriorating health demanded it. From 1979 onwards, we come across various situations in which the thinker cancels his classes or cuts them short, due to his degree of fatigue. We can infer that this situation, unfortunately, led Foucault to rethink his expository methods and to resume writing his lectures, but such inference cannot be proven.

Another change, noted by Senellart (2014), stems from his insistence on bringing documents to present to his audience. It was not uncommon for Foucault to spend a considerable amount of time reading, almost *pari passu*, documents he considered important. This public reading, responsible for taking the coincidence between library time and exposition time to its ultimate consequences, would return to the Foucauldian desire expressed in his inaugural lecture, that of erasing his own voice, erasing the professor's voice, at least understood as the one responsible for conducting any public instruction. All these changes, Senellart (2014) predicts, point to a greater desire, that of shortening the

distance from his audience, understanding that a different relationship with his audience is necessary for his philosophical exercises to work. In other words, while the lecture model proved to be unsuccessful in promoting other ways of thinking and acting, the seminar, although more interesting, didn't seem to work in that institution either, hence the continuous variations in expository methodology pursued by Foucault.

Another change, not noted by Senellart and to which we would like to refer, stems from the search for an extended time, a delay in the expository mode that, at a certain point, Foucault comes to identify as his inherent mode of existence.

> I owe you an apology. I imagined, a little pretentiously and chimerically, that if I gave myself two hours to say what I wanted, I wouldn't procrastinate any longer because I'd have plenty of time. But procrastinating must be a way of life for me; no matter how hard I try, I can't keep to the use of my time and the chronology I've set myself. (Foucault, 2006b, p. 185).

This mode of existence, resulting from the changes made in 1976, would become a constant in the courses given by Foucault at the *Collège de France*. Topics investigated end up being lengthened, as a new document always seems to draw the researcher's attention, and the concepts abandoned. Previously outlined ideas are put aside, new directions are taken. For this reason, some lessons are too long, others too short. This mode of existence, we believe, defines the only possible sharing, the sharing of a life dedicated to the act of researching. A life dedicated not only to research, but to questioning what we are, what we think. A life, in short, concerned not so much with transmitting ready-made knowledge, formatted beforehand, but expressed in the continuous desire to build another space of thought. This Foucauldian mode of existence responded to the silence of his students with another silence, voids left in his research for us, his reader-listeners, to fill. A carefully constructed silence that can emerge when the concern with exposing ready-made themes gives way to exposing work in progress. In other words, when Foucault's main concern is the need to share not the results of his research, but the movement that makes him give up or persist in tackling a certain theme. In the end, Foucauldian solitude offers us a space to appropriate, a methodological map to guide us. From this space, we can construct our own problematizations.

In the lecture on February 3, 1982, part of the course *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, as in several other moments, Foucault broke with the rigid institutional protocol, demonstrating his unease and questioning his listeners:

> Well, I always keep in mind that if you have any questions, it would be good if you asked them. As I use two hours at a time, the course I teach is a bit like a seminar. In short, I try to bring in a type of material or make certain references that are more difficult to find in a course. I'd like to bring this procedure a little closer to what a seminar might be like. However, in a seminar this implies that there are some answers, or questions, or question-answers. (Foucault, 2006b, p. 231).

Foucault adopted the seminar methodology towards the end of his life, but it was not a standard seminar since dialogue with his audience was rare, if not impossible. Knowing this, he sought a rapprochement through writing, awaiting questions avidly. On

rare occasions, Foucault would start a class by answering questions that had been sent to him in advance, sometimes one student or another would ask him questions orally. They were generally protocol questions, about the use of the space, class hour changes, etc. Sometimes questions about certain concepts or interpretations. If there was any other kind of questioning, it wasn't recorded.

Foucault's "wild methods," we understand, sought only to call into question the distance that prevented any dialog with his audience, an attempt to break the solemn silence of the *Collège de France*. They were simple changes capable of promoting a sensible modification of the space, suitable for promoting other types of listening, other dialogues. A change of room, an indication that questions should be sent to him in writing, and so on. Such simple gestures, but which in their banality seemed to clash with the solemnity that surrounded that institution, a solemnity responsible for imposing a distance between Foucault and his audience. Wildness, in short, is more about the outrage against these solemnities than the radical nature of the intended changes. Reinstating this Foucauldian gesture, reflecting on the simplicity of its radicalism, can perhaps help us to rethink our own teaching gesture, the distances we unthinkingly adopt here and there with our teaching performance. The Foucauldian gesture ultimately updated a teaching concept concerned with promoting *philosophical exercises* capable of problematizing what we are (Foucault, 1984), raising the question: what conception of teaching do we update in our classes? What are the institutionally constructed distances and how do we relate to them?

These subtle changes also influenced how Foucault taught his courses: the change of room coincided with a change in method, from the lecture to the seminar, and with the attempt to share with his audience the step-by-step of his research, trying to make library time coincide with exposition time. The further we get into the transcripts of his courses, the more we realize that Foucault was not interested in transmitting knowledge that had been built up beforehand, but in sharing his craftsmanship, his own way of doing. In short, his courses were not interested in discussing categorical interpretations of certain events, but rather in sharing concerns triggered by the encounter with a document, pointing out possible ways of thinking and demonstrating the aporias raised by his research into various documentary sources. As noted by Alexandre Freitas (2017), there is an erotic character to Foucault's lectures, to his quest in establishing a rapport with his audience, which led him to always display himself "passionately in his speeches, taking the risk that few professors are willing to take: demonstrating a thinking and not merely exposing knowledge" (Freitas, 2017, p. 75). Obviously, this concept of teaching carries with it a risk—the risk of isolation.

Interested in promoting *philosophical exercises*, in changing his audience's ways of thinking and acting, Foucault knew that sharing his problematizations might not resonate as much as sharing ready-made knowledge. Logically, in the way that educational institutions have historically been conceived, full of solemn silences and diverse metaphysical intentions, such as that aimed at citizen education, a knowledge transmission that places students in a passive role seems to sound more coherent and appropriate, if not something desired by the student body given its comfortable passive position in this configuration. Obviously, for Foucault-the-professor it is not a question of

adapting our knowledge and work to the demands of the present time, but of committing to a time to come. There is undoubtedly an extemporaneous nature to his conception of teaching. His "wild methods," in this sense, work against the current configuration of the pedagogical relation, especially its transmissive character, and in favor of a qualitatively different (most of the time tense) relationship.

Solitude and silence are a destination for the professor profile sought by Foucault, concerned not so much with working for public education, but with sharing problematizations capable of challenging what we are and what we think. Now, this extemporaneous sharing by professors inevitably produces our silencing, we end up separated and considered outcasts, madmen or, at best, poets of a world yet to be invented. If we could summarize the Foucauldian stance on the teaching profession, this is how we would do it. If simultaneous dialog proves impossible, because such sharing necessarily implies a delay (Aquino, 2014), this shouldn't dampen our desire to produce other, healthier modes of existence. Indeed, our efforts may sound fruitless, discouraging, but without this silent work any training will prove to be partial and mere formality, working towards the production of citizenship or some other slogan that is just as meaningless. It is our responsibility to create our own expository methods, wild ones perhaps, to cope with this solitude, with the silence so dear to the teaching profession, as Foucault and so many other professors engaged in promoting another space for problematization taught us.

References

AQUINO, Júlio Groppa. Diálogos em Delay: especulações em torno de uma temporalidade outra do encontro pedagógico. **Educação e Pesquisa**, São Paulo, v. 43, n. 2, p. 311-326, abr./jun. 2017.

DEFERT, Daniel. Dispositif de Guerre. ZANCARINI, Jean-Claude (org). **Lectures de Michel Foucault:** à propos de Il Fault Défendre la Societé. Paris: ENS, 2000.

ERIBON, Didier. **Michel Foucault:** uma biografia. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1990.

FOUCAULT, Michel. A armadilha de Vincennes. *In*: FOUCAULT, Michel. **Ditos & escritos VII**: arte, epistemologia, filosofia e história da medicina. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2011a. p. 184-191.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **A coragem da verdade**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2011b.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **A hermenêutica do sujeito**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2006b.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **A ordem do discurso**. São Paulo: Loyola, 2006a.

FOUCAULT, Michel. Conversação com Michel Foucault. *In*: FOUCAULT, Michel. **Ditos & escritos IV**: estratégia, poder-saber. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2010b. p. 13-26.

FOUCAULT, Michel. Da arqueologia à dinástica. *In*: FOUCAULT, Michel. **Ditos & escritos IV**: estratégia, poder-saber. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2010a. p. 48-60.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **Em defesa da sociedade**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2005.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **História da sexualidade**: o uso dos prazeres. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1984.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **Nascimento da biopolítica.** São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2008b.

FOUCAULT, Michel. O filósofo mascarado. *In*: FOUCAULT, Michel. **Ditos & escritos II**: arqueologia das ciências e história dos sistemas de pensamento. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2008a. p. 299-306.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **Subjetividade e verdade**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2016.

FREITAS, Alexandre Simões de. As lições perigosas do professor Foucault. **Bagoas**, Natal, v. 11, n. 16, p. 50-78, 2017.

GROS, Frédéric. Da superioridade dos cursos. *In*: ARTIÈRES, Philippe *et al.* **Michel Foucault**. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2014. p. 129-133.

HAMMARSTRÖM, Göran. Foucault in Uppsala. **Journal of the Australasian Universities Moderna Language Association**, Melborne, v. 83, p. 87-93, maio 1995.
NOGUERA-RAMIREZ, Carlos Ernesto. Foucault professor. **Revista Educación y Pedagogía**, Medellín, v. 21, n. 55, p. 131-149, 2009.

SENELLART, Michel. O cachalote e o lagostim. reflexão sobre a redação dos cursos no Collège de France. *In*: ARTIÈRES, Philippe *et al.* **Michel Foucault.** Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2014. p. 121-128.

SOULIÉ, Charles. La recomposition des facultés et disciplines dans l'université française des années soixante. *In*: SOULIÉ, Charles (org.). **Un mythe à détruire?** origines et destin du Centre Universitaire Expérimental de Vincennes. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2012. p. 31-60.

Received on December 21, 2023
Reviewed on March: 12, 2024
Approved on March 26, 2024

Editor: Prof. Dr. Fernando L. Cássio

Christian Fernando Ribeiro Guimarães Vinci is a professor at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), affiliated with the Department of Philosophy and History of Education, holding a Ph.D. in Education from the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), and a member of the CNPq research groups: PHALA - Research Group on Education, Language, and Sociocultural Practices, and OLHO - Laboratory of Audiovisual Studies at the State University of Campinas.