

The Cliché: notes for a defeat of thought. For a naïve consciousness

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ABSTRACT – The Cliché: notes for a defeat of thought. For a naïve consciousness. In which way can the cliché, the ready-made, ceaselessly-repeated phrase, the jargon – which have invaded the pedagogical vocabulary for quite some time already – represent a strategy of being reacquainted to a world turned strange, where our concepts are no longer appropriate, and have become an indication of danger to thought? From Camus' image of Sisyphus through Arendt's examination of the Eichmann's case, where the cliché is associated to a defeat of thought, the article proposes an unusual task: a return to a *naïve consciousness*, not as a gaping and disarmed relation to the world, but as a creation of a new dictionary, capable of livening up, linguistically speaking, a stand of *ad-miration* in front of things.

Keywords: Language. Defeat of Thought. Strangeness of the World. Naïve Consciousness.

RESUMO – O Clichê: notas para uma derrota do pensamento. Por uma consciência ingênua. Em que sentido o clichê, a frase feita e repisada, o jargão – que já há algum tempo invadiram o vocabulário pedagógico – podem representar uma estratégia de refamiliarização com um mundo tornado estranho, em que nossos conceitos deixaram de ser adequados, e passaram a indicar um perigo para o pensamento? Partindo de uma imagem de Camus (Sísifo) e passando pelo exame de Arendt sobre o caso Eichmann, em que o clichê é associado a uma derrota do pensamento, o artigo propõe uma tarefa insólita: um retorno a uma *consciência ingênua*, não como relação beata e desarmada diante do mundo, e sim como produção de um novo dicionário capaz de vivificar, linguisticamente, a atitude *ad-miração* diante das coisas.

Palavras-chave: Linguagem. Derrota do Pensamento. Estranhamento do Mundo. Consciência Ingênua.

Now we know that if the Verb was the beginning of everything, it can also be in the end (George Steiner).

Some Initial Words...

In the renowned myth of Sisyphus a man is condemned to ceaselessly push a boulder up a mountain and see it roll back down the slope. The homonymous book by Albert Camus (Camus, 2001) is about the nonsense of the existence, metaphorically represented in this meaningless and endless effort. The idea of *nonsense* refers to a kind of *defamiliarization*, where the world becomes a strange and unintelligible place, and the words used by us are not capable anymore to assign a meaning to our experiences: it is this advent of the ineffable that constitutes the nonsense of life. In Camus' book, however, when the boulder reaches the top of the mountain, Sisyphus sits down and observes his work being undone: this is the moment that Camus calls *conscience*, the accurate perception of the nonsense of his task and, since it is infinite, of all his life.

Perhaps we are living one of these times of *defamiliarization* with the world expressed in the recurring ideas that the values are different now, in my time it was different, times have changed..., expressions probably repeated by each generation but that, even in their triviality, certify the fact that an empty space (even though temporary) has been created between what happens in the world and our capacity to name these happenings. A Camusean time, one that essentially reaches the relation between the words and the things, has started – I remember, here, the example of Quixote searching for the things of the world that would correspond to his reading of medieval romances of cavalry –, and this happens in various domains of the reality, including the pedagogical one. It is a worrying situation and, trying to clarify it, I suggest the hypothesis that one of the strategies that we can use to support this *defamiliarization* (that strongly strikes our environment) is by means of the cliché, the ready-made phrase, the commonplace, the overstressed and worn out idea.

The paper that the reader has under his eyes now will be developed in three stages. Initially, I proceed to an examination of the consequences of the use of the cliché and its relation with a predictable *débâcle* of our capacity to think. Next, by means of the renowned work of Hannah Arendt on Eichmann (Arendt, 1997), I deepen the subject trying to show that such *débâcle* has a direct relation with the idea of banality of the evil: the absence of depth that prevents us, via cliché/ideology, to have experiences and capacity to judge what happens to us. Moving forward, after a short passage through the Allegory of the Cave, where I try to show the poisonous trap in which Plato has put us, I conclude this essay showing how the invasion of the cliché in the domain of Popular Education has subtracted from this field its original critical energy, and

I propose – I admit that this is made in a controversial and heterodox form – a kind of a naivety, not as a vowed and disarmed relation in face of reality, but as a strategy of *ad-miration* and strangeness to avoid the automatism of the thinking, one that the cliché forcibly incarnates.

A short time ago a book (of Flaubertian inspiration, but with an anarchic tendency!) entitled *Dicionário de Ideias Feitas em Educação*, by Sandra Maria Corazza and Júlio Groppa Aquino (Aquino; Corazza, 2011), was published, a title that leads us to the renowned *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues* by Gustave Flaubert, and that approaches a subject that strikes education in particular: the very abuse that our writers of educational texts (in the form of papers, books, conferences, reports, different interventions) make of the jargon and the banal and empty phrasal construction. Due to an excusable oversight of the authors, the Dictionary mentioned above, in spite of its long and amusing introduction, does not approach the main issue: why a language and its dictionary, that is, the lexical set of a certain field of knowledge, from which we can connote and denote the objects that appear in the horizon of our linguistic interactions, suffers such a process of semantic banalization expressed in the thoughtless repetition? Why do we need this communicative resource and which is the intention of those who appeal to such a resource?

I am sure that all of us, educators and systematic readers of written documents in our domain, usually find expressions like critical conscience, education for citizenship, social quality of education, education socially referred, problematization of the reality, epistemological perspective, conscience transitivity, emancipatory field perspective, neoliberal view, recovering the utopia, and so many other ones that are part of the immense – and not seldomly empty – conceptual repertoire of our territory. There is something deeply disquieting in all of this because it is not only about the repetitive use of typical expressions from a professional universe (a *linguistic policy of identity and belonging*), but instead a mechanism that is similar to what the Latin people knew as *captatio benevolentiae*. In its modern version, it is a resource of rhetoric, acquired through known discursive techniques that, right at the beginning of the locution, establishes an empathic relation between rhetor and listener. This resource is not intended to make the understanding easy, but to establish a pact of complicity where, by the use of ideologically familiar vocabulary and phrases of easy and predictable reception, a relation (indeed, not very critical!) of identity is established between those who produce and those who consume sentences and ideas of quick digestion (the cliché).

I have used the verb *to consume* on purpose because it leads me back to the passage of Hannah Arendt (Arendt, 1997) regarding how modernity transformed the products of *Work* – which, in her conception, are those products of the culture that we produce to assure a prop-

erly human picture of life – *our home* – and that must remain as a physical and perennial legacy of our passage through a common world and that guarantee its durability –, in products of immediate consumption (characteristic of the *Labor*), which have the function of assuring our simple survival (as food) and are bound to disappear almost immediately after being produced. This consumption, that to a certain extent reminds us of the Frankfortian concepts of cultural and entertainment industry (Adorno; Horkheimer, 1987), points to the lack of endurance of the world and its meanings, as if the *concepts* (transformed into jargons, clichés, commonplaces) were not anymore elaborated to help to provide a meaning for our possible experiences, but to disappear (to be consumed) as soon as they are uttered: the jargon facilitates a quick conceptual metabolism (due to its *familiarity*) and offers to us the impression of being in a common ground, in a semantic and valorative horizon with which we identify *in limine*. And the one who utters it attracts us to his field and immediately establishes in which ground the game of meanings is going to be played. In summary: it installs us in a semantic field proposed by the enunciator himself.

This means that the form (the language that is used) has such a decisive influence on the content (even the one that we intend as *critical* in education), that this criticism is emptied as the cliché represents, exactly, what spares us from thinking, that hinders us from dislocating ourselves from our habits of thought and that could foster a kind of *Verfremdungs Effekt*, an effect of critical distancing. Thus, the jargon is one of the several forms that can be assumed by the *defeat of the thought*. If language is understood not as a *medium* or a channel through which we express thoughts and ideas, but as what allows us precisely the possibility to think – and without which the very act of thinking becomes impossible –, we can conclude that the deterioration of the language is the most *visible/audible* expression of the decline of the capacity to think and to reflect (that is, the thought that leans over itself and thinks itself)¹.

The language that we use in a certain field of knowledge does not constitute a neutral lexicon and syntax that could, without any problems, be used in any other domain. We always work with what Umberto Eco (Eco, 2004) called a *dictionary*. This dictionary is the set of *entries* that allows us to express ideas in a certain way and that can be understood by people who also know such lexicon. What we call *teacher's education* (to restrict myself to our field) is nothing else but the exercises of lexical familiarization that allow us to elaborate and to visualize conceptual objects of education. It is one of the multiple strategies of selective distribution of words in the social environment and of control over those who use them, how they are used, and in which linguistic interaction: without this lexicon the concepts of our field would not make sense, and outside of the environment where they are uttered they are unintelligible. When the words constitute concepts, these only acquire

intelligibility in their relation with other concepts and the interior of an articulated set of concepts, that we could call a thought system. For example: the word work, that we can usually use referring to our professional activity, within the work-value Marxist theory is something completely different. We can say that in one case we make a *conceptual* use of a word and in the other an *ordinary* use of a lexicon that we use in our daily interactions.

The jargon, the cliché, the ready-made phrase produces something that, when trying to compensate the vacuum of the Sisyphean-like experience, sends us back to an *excess of familiarity*: its use makes us believe that the world that we are naming corresponds, in fact, to its designation, in which significant and signifier are not under tension and that, thus, is about a known and familiar universe, when, in fact, the only familiar thing here is the lexicon itself. The cliché, thus, would allow us to accomplish an operation of utmost importance in our relationship with the world (*world* is understood here as the set of our experiences only possible in the interior of the language): to prevent the fracture, the *schizophrenia* between the said or represented things in the interior of language and the objects to which they refer to. Since each *ideological corpus* has its lexicon, when reading words as *awareness*, *problematization*, *transitivity*, *transformation* or *dialogicity*, in any text or paper (and above all, I think here on the field of Popular Education), we can immediately identify the theoretical inspiration of its author and – if it is the case – establish an empathy of entrance with him, a preliminary adhesion, as a password that we would need to pronounce or hear to produce identification.

Let's suppose, however, that these words do not correspond anymore to the things of the world (which only exist, as in the old Macondo of García Márquez, struck by forgetfulness, if we stick *words* to the *things*); that, for example, we understand that the word *awareness* corresponds to a time when we used to suppose the existence of a self-centered citizen, endowed with a conscience that would be autonomous and capable of giving itself its own norm, according to universal criteria and that, today, *we discovered* that this *subject* never existed and that we would need to redescribe him in another way. It is as if we opened up here an abyss between the thing and its name... Since nobody is obliged to accept the post-modern hypothesis about the subject and the conscience, and can continue insisting on the idea of a conscience that can liberate or be freed by an educational action of emancipatory nature, there would be no problem: the lexicon that one uses corresponds (in one's head) to things that still *exist* and only the post-structuralists, the Nietzscheans, the Foucaultians, the Deleuzians think that they do not, with whom we are not obliged to agree. And it is here where the cliché accomplishes its highly important function: it allows its reader *to see* something in the reality independently of its, let's say, *objective* existence. It's more than that: the cliché leads us to a safe, known, and stable world, where the

ideas make sense, corresponding to certain practices, belonging to an articulated system of thought (a narrative with beginning, middle, and end) and supplying us with the warmth of pertaining to a *community of meaning*. The cliché is the linguistic form of *uterine nostalgia* at a time of uncertainties, inconsistencies, and identitarian instabilities.

From the Defeat of Thought to the Banality of Evil

The problem is not in the banal and repetitive use of sentences, ideas or words, taking from them their power of meaning and moving them away from the experience. The seriousness of the fact is in an instance of much deeper metrics: when breaking away with experience, one breaks away with the other and with the world, when the existence of the other begins to be something-in-significant, to be exact (meaningless in the interior of language and, therefore, as an empty set). To exemplify in a more incisive way what I have just said, I provide, next, an examination of the Eichmann case, described and commented by Hannah Arendt in her renowned book. In 1961, Adolf Eichmann, after having been kidnapped by an Israeli commando squad in a suburb of Buenos Aires and taken to Jerusalem, was judged by crimes against humanity perpetrated under Nazism. Eichmann initially worked in Vienna and after that in Berlin and Prague, in the *Reich* sector that dealt with the regrouping and deportation of Jews, a subject in which, in his evil vanity, he considered himself an *expert*.

In that same year, Hannah Arendt asked *The New Yorker* for funding to follow the trial in exchange for a set of articles to be published by the magazine. Later, in 1963, she published *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*², the book that granted her world-wide notoriety for the second time (the first being after the publication of *Origins of the Totalitarianism*), but this time accompanied by a violent controversy, countless misunderstandings, the enraged reaction of the international Jewish community, and personal attacks and defamation. The terms of the controversy – and the personal position of Arendt – can be followed through the book by Young-Brühel (Young-Brühel, 1997), the preface to the French edition written by Michelle-Ère Brudny de Launay, the correspondence with Jaspers and with Mary MacCarthy, and the postscript to the book itself.

In my opinion, the main point of this book is that where people look for a monster, Arendt sees a normal, uninteresting person, without any great heartrending psychological affectation that could explain a supposed inhumanity of the character. More than a normal person, Arendt sees in Eichmann a mediocre one: a man who only speaks through *clichés*, incapable of an original sentence, who only knows the administrative language. And it is this normality that causes disconcert! If Nazism is the work of normal men and not of monsters perfectly deformed in their humanity, all of us, supposedly normal people, can at one mo-

ment or another be tempted to repeat it or reinvent it. To demonize its actors is to claim that we are far from the seduction to practice it, that we are immune to its temptation.

The seminal point of that book is the relation established by the author between absence of thought – expressed in the cliché – and the practice of evil. Several commentators of her book (Roviello, Collin, Brühel etc. – see references) highlight this relation; however, the passages suggesting such relation are extremely brief in the book. In the French edition we find the following passage regarding Eichmann:

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of someone else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied, but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such (Arendt, 1994, p. 85-86).

It is in the *postscript* to the book, written at the moment when the controversy and the personal accusations reach their utmost point, that the thesis – even though in a very tight way – emerges: “Eichmann was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period” (Arendt, 1994, p. 460). And in the next page a simple line where the author indicates (this) “[...] strange link between the absence of thinking and the practice of the evil”.

We see that Eichmann is not somebody who suffers from a cognitive deficiency or simple dullness: it is his inability to distinguish the good from the evil, linked to the impotence of thinking that it is in the base of the problem. Having broken up with all alterity, of the other ones, of himself and of the world, he does not feel guilty, he does not experience any remorse, no regrets, because the plurality of the world is simply inconceivable in him and his impotence for the thought is correlative to his incapacity to live experiences. Elimination of the Other that inhabits me; rupture with the world of the experience and the reality, extermination of the *external* other; annulment of the distinctions between the good and the evil are the symptoms of the same and only pathology: the *débâcle* of the thought, expressed in the linguistic use of the cliché, which function is made more clear now: to produce, at the same time, *distancing* of the world, as a way of identitarian self-preservation, and *excess* of familiarity. Both injunctions aim at one single direction: to avoid the practice of thinking.

The cliché, thus, constitutes itself in a way to withdraw people from the critical examination and to solidly tie them to the behavioral rules of a given society. If deciding between the good and the evil is an attribute of those who keep intact the ability to think, it is in the

concrete situations that we have to judge, choose, and decide between what we can and what we cannot do. All critical examination must pass through a phase of denial, at least hypothetical, of the current values and opinions, analyzing its tacit certainties and its implications and, in this case, a risk that nihilism always brings to thinking (in a non-Nietzschean sense): nihilism as deliberate refusal to see critique an act of power and, in this refusal, leaving the thought, let's say, *to its own...*

What seems clear to me, though, in this complex relation is that no thought is able to exempt itself of the prejudices (that the cliché represents so well), limits, and wishful thinking, perhaps insurmountable, of all illuminist education once and for all. If thinking is subtracted from the apparent world to exert and to place the prejudices under tension, turning to the phenomenic world is to open itself again to the influence of the prejudice, where we recognize apparently solid references to act in society; without this, we would have to remain in an unbearable state of permanent alertness and question, on a daily basis, all our experiences. This means that probably no education will ever be able to produce the whole immunization of the individuals to the prejudice, to the inherited thought, to the *idées reçues*. But also, if the activity of the thought is possible, the prejudice never can be established once and for all. It is this tension that makes that, at the same time when we find ourselves in a structured and given world (generator of the pre-judgement), we are saved from having to face new experiences at every moment and, at each time, this same world is interrogated (thought). The ideologies, in the interior of this tension, fulfill exactly the function of hindering the experience, offering the answers in advance to the questions that are posed (*It does not matter the question that you will make. The answer is the class conflict!*). If the function of the prejudice is to defend the judging man so that he does not openly expose himself to each reality found, and thus having to confront it by thinking, then the ideologies fulfill this task so well that they protect against all experience, since supposedly all the real is foreseen in them in some way. And by hindering the experience it hinders, therefore, the thought³.

Therefore, it is not an accident that the ideological doctrines and *corpus* impervious to the critical erosion (as in the totalitarian regimes) make such a constant appeal to the clichés and jargons; because, deep down, they offer to their adepts the analytical tools that hinder them to see the reality through eyeglasses that are not those supplied by the *system* itself. Thus, it seems that such regimes exert an immense effort to guarantee the control of the words, adulterating its semantics, watching the social use of its uttering, reducing the universe of words of the speakers, and, at the edge, limiting the ability to formulate concepts. It was nothing else that George Steiner wanted to say in his essay on the relation between language and Nazism (Steiner, 2001), when he claimed that Nazism was not only a question of politics and repression. It was also a question of language. In this sense, it would not be totally absurd

to admit that, even though living in a formally democratic order, the deterioration of our language – including the educational one – seems to indicate that we are entering into an age of fascist life.

The Cliché in Popular Education

I see that education, and especially the field of Popular Education, perhaps due to a few reasons that are quite specific (and that I will try to examine next), is one of the fields most afflicted by the deteriorated language represented by the cliché, and I am afraid that the problem perhaps is not specific to any field of knowledge.

The so-called Popular Education was deeply marked, since the 1950's/1960's, by a phenomenology-based language of, with its existentialist and personalist variants, a language that denoted a deep belief in an intentional conscience that leaned over the world to offer it meanings and, by doing so, allowed the men passage from a being-in-the-world *among others* to a being-in-the-world *with the others*. An attractive conception of authenticity of the human existence in contrast with the damaged (or alienated) life has gained special projection in the vocabulary (at the same time simple, with a literary profile, of a conceptual geometry that is variable and appropriate to a time of resistance to the insidious forms of colonization of the conscience) of one author: the inescapable Paulo Freire!

It is, first and foremost, evident that an author is not entirely responsible for the social reception of his writings and, over all, for the inadequate use of it. However, perhaps the best indication to understand the fact that an originally sophisticated work as Freire's (with its Hegelian, personalist, Fanonian inspirations...) has been appropriated by the common sense and common place, can be given by no one else than – do you remember him? – ... Gramsci! Gramsci asked himself, in several occasions (from an indication of Marx in the *German Ideology*), how *ideas could become a material force*, and had in mind the ideological power exerted by the Church in the Italian Mezzogiorno (south). How is it that a complex theology, involving notions of transcendence, resurrection, omniscience, predestination, free will, grace, omnipresence etc., had established itself among the subordinate, unschooled, and illiterate layers of the Italian southern rural environment? This was his major political and theoretical problem: to transform philosophy (in the case of *Praxis*) into good sense and common sense, producing a new political ethics. This process happened, basically, through the so-called *intermediate intellectuals*, producing their vulgates, manuals, catechisms, summaries, workbooks...

I think that the case of Freire is similar: a philosophy of education with liberating claims, with its specific lexicon and that had been elaborated since the 1950's, that is, at a crucial moment of the debate

on the national *authenticity*, has been transformed into a pedagogical commonplace with its deteriorated vocabulary – the cliché – and the operational means that allowed this emergence is located in several readings of Freire, in the adaptations, in the interpretations, in the simplifications, in the transpositions... that countless intermediaries made of his work. The problem, as Mühlmann said, regarding the revolutionary messianisms of the Third World, is that “[...] when an idea is institutionalized (in a party, a church, or even on a Pedagogy), it has already lost the original subversive force from where, nevertheless, it used to take all its legitimacy” (Mühlmann, 1967, p. 12). In this sense, the pedagogical cliché represents the loss of the original impulse from where the words, in its *morning* enunciation, once took their semantic energy. The inexhaustible amount of readings and re-readings of Freire (a work that ended up serving to provide a *theoretical* ballast to all and any field!), allied to a disastrous simplification of his political and pedagogical thought, ended up being received by audiences who, for reasons that do not interest here, identify themselves as *oppressed* (all of us!) or as a social, economic, political or cultural victim of injustice... The initial impulse for its banalization was given, with the inevitable transformation of the concept in *slogan* and with the guarantee of a secured audience, of an assured ideological empathy, of forged identitarian construction, of self-assignment of symbolic power, and, last but not least, of fiduciary benefits offered by the immense easiness of fund raising of public resources for the *popular* education!

Presently, we live the practical and theoretical exhaustion of the subversive source provided by the critical conscience pedagogies. This happened because such pedagogies did not examine a) in what extent the criticism itself could serve to the desiderata of power, that is, from where the critic took the symbolic power of his critique and exerted it on the criticized ones, remembering that the criticized ones are not only the dominant ones, but the dominated ones who do not see within themselves the presence of the dominant and, b) the illuminist belief that there would be a passage from one conscience to the other one (the problem was in getting the password that would allow such crossing, reserved to some). This exhaustion, by the way, can be in part evaluated by the overwhelming emergence of a new vocabulary that comes to occupy the place previously reserved to that critical dictionary that the work of Paulo Freire so much inspired: it is a *left-wing* recently converted to *managerialism* (one of the forms that the technocratic ideology can assume) that makes words such as *results*, *evaluation*, *goals*, *monitoring*, *scientific governance*, *shared management*... the linguistic central issue of a (not so much) new and insidious attack to what remains to us of republican traces.

Depleted the source, again, we need to retake the morning-like *naïve conscience*. Thus, I propose an inversion of the Freirean transitivity: the passage from the critical conscience to the naïve conscience.

The proposal may seem as an unacceptable heterodoxy and, at its heart, ... naïve! I am not suggesting here a kind of Rousseauian rebellion against the deformed language, nor the childish disarming of the spirits; I propose, in an inspiration that I declare to have been given by Pierre Hadot (Hadot, 2001), a way to turn the world strange again, *admirable*, a rehabilitation of the Nietzschean figure of the “child” in *Zarathustra*. Hadot comments on the ability of Marcel Proust in “making the world strange”, presenting things in a way not yet contaminated by the causal explanation. By contenting ourselves with the usual approach of the world, linguistically expressed by the cliché, we are under the risk of not noticing that this world does not correspond anymore to what we think and say about it. For Hadot, the philosophy would have this function: to defamiliarize ourselves from the world, making it strange and giving it back a certain potential of revitalization. It is something that Montaigne called as *naïveté originelle* (original naivety): to understand less, to become more perplexed... these are reasons that can lead us *to see more!*

Perhaps it is here, in this suggestion of *naivety*, that something relatively unusual for our conception of popular education lies. And to move a little further in this debate, we would have that to retake, exactly, that key concept of this field, of the *critique* and its counterpart, of *the critical conscience*, concepts that, within a given pedagogic tradition that is very dearest to the popular education, represent the desirable and decisive counterpoint to a supposed *naivety*.

I am aware of the fact that criticizing the concept or the use that we make of the idea of critic/critical conscience is, at its heart, a tautological operation where, in order to do it, we need to be placed in the interior of the concept that we intend, however, to demolish, what would finish by delegitimizing all *critical* pretension (only the *critic* is able to deconstruct the *critic*)! This is not what I intend to do here, but to show how in the origin of all pedagogical speech – and notably in those of libertarian or liberating inspiration – lies something unsolvable, an original tragic dilemma (in the agonistic sense of the word) that establishes and defines the pedagogical itself, and I want to take from this examination its natural corollary: the exercise of the critical conscience, as we usually conceive and practice in our Popular Education and, over all, in its frank contrast with a conscience that is said to be *naïve* (or, to say the same, unsatisfactory to equip the subjects in their relation with the reality) installs, in the heart of the pedagogical, a not clear and diffuse power relation of which we cannot liberate ourselves without, at the same time, to decree the very end of the pedagogical.

The fundamental text that will guide us is the classic Allegory of the cave (Platon, 1993), a text that is, in my opinion, the founder of the philosophy itself and that will show us how a simple metaphor of the alienation of men in their relation with the reality acquired such a decisive *effect of truth* that it practically defined the pedagogy itself. Thus, it

is about one of those discursive grounds that provided a deep and lasting secular legitimacy to education. There is no need here to retake the details of the widely known platonic allegory and I will underline in it only a few details that always seemed curiously inexplicable to me. In this argumentative strategy, in which I make use of that platonic passage, I will try to show – hoping, of course, to be successful! – that, a) waiting to fight the cliché with a supposed critical reason contained in emancipatory pedagogies may be a task headed towards failure, as the critical pedagogies (which the Popular Education always intended to incarnate) had already been, themselves, contaminated by the cliché; b) the resource to Plato's allegory will show us that the possibility of saving us by the unveiling critique of the real presents a fundamental flaw: it insidiously reproduces the hierarchic injunctions of power and knowledge that that critique, however, intends to fight; and, finally, c) the critical counterpoint to the use and abuse of the cliché passes not only through the language (syntax, semantics, lexicon, conceptual dictionary), but essentially through a restructuring of thinking (that the language fosters, articulates, and expresses) which, in my argument, I call as a renewed *naïve conscience*.

Let's examine, then, the renowned Allegory. First, it is not clear in the text of Plato *who* chained the men that way in the interior of the cave; second, there isn't anything that clarifies to us *how* one of those chained men – and for which reason – decides to free himself and, instead of immediately freeing the other partners of, let's say, misfortune (even though this is not certain either), he prefers to stroll through – let's be brief –... the Sky of Ideas. The major issue is not in the exit of the freed one (the philosopher in fact) to the exterior light, but in his return to the cave when he tries to convince his friends to follow him towards the light and... disappointment!, they prefer the condition where they already were in: here lied the mote that would inspire Etienne de La Boétie in his Speech of the Voluntary Servitude, even though in this author it is the identification with the *Uno* that guarantees the servitude relation. Here is, to me, the inaugural *metaphor* – to use a Nietzschean resource – that, once forgotten and abandoned as a metaphor, will enclose the truth of the western pedagogy in which origin inhabits a double fracture: one in the reality itself and another one among the men themselves, without which all *libido educandi* becomes rigorously impossible.

The first fracture is related to the fact that a belief is established since the return of our *freed one* to the cave: the belief that the reality is divided in *essence* (the incontinent and only intelligible ideas by means of the philosophical contemplation) and *appearance* (kingdom of the shadows, the wishful thinking, and the errors provided by the senses). The consequences of this are deep and extensive! Over all because one of these instances will be considered as first and superior to the second one, and the access to it will be allowed only to those who had the courage to experience the pain of the passage from the darkness to the light

and who now can return to the conviviality with the men as qualified conductors, since they are the owners of a knowledge (*episteme*) that will differentiate them from the other men. Why, we could ask, not to consider the shadow or the appearance as being part of a reality as *essential* as that one represented by the lights of the World of Ideas? After all, dear Plato, isn't there anything that we can learn from the darkness, from the night, from the wishful thinking? It was not investigating the *interior night* of the men, underground *cave* of their desires that Freud ended up conceiving a theory and a therapeutic, trying to save the men from the same wishful thinking about themselves?

The second fracture is the consequence of the first one and it is it that introduces the kingdom of *sophocracy*, the government of those who know. The origin of all of this is, as we know (but is worthwhile remembering) in the death of Socrates. In front of the Assembly, the philosopher, after quietly demonstrating the groundlessness of the accusations (introducing new gods in the city and corrupting the youth), is not able to convince his judges about his arguments, what will end up in his conviction (*Apology of Socrates*). Plato never accepted the fact that the philosopher, man of the Reason and the Word, was defeated by the representatives of the democracy, henceforth more than the government of the people, government of the *doxa* (*doxocracy*), domain of the simpleton and baseless opinion. Here is the meaning of the second fracture: the division of the men between those who know and the ignorant, the divide between *doxa* and *episteme*. The man who was freed of the cave is the man of the *episteme* who returns to save his peers, is not understood and leaves the city, accusing the democracy (in a very wide sense much better represented by the Sophists, who introduced in the public debate not the dissolving relativism, but instead the culturally situated point-of-view) of condemning the *Logos* to death. Pedagogy is inaugurated, properly speaking, not as a theory that reflects on a social practice – the education – or guides it, but as a discourse that: a) defines the existence of an *essential* reality that needs to be reached on behalf of a presumable realization of the human condition (and it does not matter if this condition is located in the inner meeting with God – Saint Augustin – or in the liberation from the oppression – Paulo Freire); b) establishes that the access to this reality (of knowledge, of liberation, of improvement), opposing certain and understandable difficulties, cannot be carried through without the aid of someone who, through a gesture over himself (devotion to the studies, reflection, sacrifice of the liberation) had access to it already and can, now, be introduced as a detainer of a quality that is absent in the others; c) defines and characterizes the absence of the Other; d) transforms the Other into *pedagogizable object*; e) promises to make the crossing, the conduction (*gogein*) that will lead from the shadow to the light.

If we take the *boutade* of Whitehead seriously – “All the western philosophy is nothing but side notes of Plato's text!” (Russ, 2001, p. 201),

we will observe that the dualist horizon inaugurated by the author of the *Republic* (over all the *fracture* related to the division between the men above mentioned) reproduced itself along the time under various languages, though semantically similar: conscience of class X alienation (Marx); class itself X class for oneself (Lukács); being itself X being for oneself (Sartre); common sense X philosophical conscience (Gramsci); first culture X elaborated culture (Georges Snyders); restricted code X elaborated code (Bernstein); naïve conscience X critical conscience (Paulo Freire)..., without which, I insist again, all pedagogical wording loses great part of its legitimacy, understanding that the pedagogical is exactly what will be located *between* one and another term of each one of the marked dualisms.

Who is this *Other* that all education needs to institute as a *pedagogizable object*, without whom it sees itself as lacking all discursive foundation? The core question of this institution of the Other by the pedagogical lies on defining and qualifying its lack, collating it with a certain ideal (human, social, spiritual, intellectual, moral, civilizational) to be reached, without which our human condition will be insufficient and precarious. The people, the child, the woman, the colonized one, the unfaithful, the barbarian, the indigenous, and, finally, all the men. Here we are practically leading to the understanding that the pedagogical discourse is the one that, when configuring a human *ideal* to be reached (even though as *regulating idea*), it defines, in the same movement, the lack of the Other, it enthrones in an institutional way those who possess the competence to lead the transition from one point to another, around which a complex educational system of assignment of qualification and social certification is constructed. I understand *education* as the social practices, institutionalized or not, involving agents with relatively well defined roles that will allow, well or not, the realization of the pedagogical discourse: the transitivity from the lack to the ideal, with the use of didactic, architectural, bibliographical, material, and human resources for its achievement. The pedagogical *founds* and *legitimizes* what the educational *makes* in the interior of a specific inter-subjective relation: the relation between educator and the learner.

If we take the metaphor of the cave (indeed, of the life not reflected or alienated) as the original moment of a pedagogy, of a conduction of the men towards the light, we will understand that the position of the Critic (located between the *melancholy* – by his lack of satisfaction with the world – and the *utopia*, by his will to create a new world) cannot ever be separated from hierarchic injunctions, what makes that, in the unacknowledged underground of all critique, we find a multiple face: the one turned towards the analysis of all reality and its conviction by the reordering Reason; the conviction of the men unable to see it; a *libido dominandi*: imposing to reality and the common men its melancholy and its utopia.

When it is the reality itself that does not respond anymore to its conceptual framing – proposed by the intellectuals – and we need a linguistic aid to name experiences and to refamiliarize ourselves with a world made strange, the cliché comes into play, something that, among other things, ends up assuring that the old order did not change, that the world still is perfectly understandable and visible by the old lenses and that, finally, we still have legitimacy to propose new worlds...

Some Final Words...

That inaugural condition of the pedagogical, above drafted, marks decisively our Popular Education and, with it, a form of relation that hides the hierarchic nature of the critique/critical conscience. The lexicon that we use to name these experiences is definitively marked by this relation. Perhaps here lies the immense task that waits us as educators: the construction of a new vocabulary, a new dictionary capable of placing us again in front of the Sisyphus-like nonsense that all reality hosts. The downfall of the thinking that the use of the cliché represents in educational matters puts us in front of the real possibility of moving away from the world, of hindering us from the experience and its possible (re)conceptualization, to enclose us in a tranquilizing and warming universe of words and, this way, to stop us from seeing the world with strangeness eyes, with *naïve* eyeglasses. But it is exactly this that all the tyrants had always desired!

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Notes

1 I owe to Alain Finkielkraut the idea of *defeat of the thought*, which was extracted from one of his books (Finkielkraut, 1987). However, in that book, the French philosopher analyzes, from an idea by Julien Benda, a kind of *new treason of the intellectuals* who had adhered, unthinkingly, to the multicultural fashion, to the dissolving cultural relativism, and had abandoned the universalist perspectives that allowed us to go beyond the parochialism of *my* culture.

2 I'm based on the French edition of 1994.

3 I use, here, the concept of *ideology* in a distinct meaning of the one that was supplied to us by the Marxism (that is, as *false conscience*, as *inversion* of the reality, as *interpellation of the individuals in subjects* or as ideas and values imposed by the dominant ruling class in a given historical and social situation). I use the idea in a meaning close to Arendt's, for whom *ideology* leads to the automatisms of thinking, expressed under the form of clichés, hindering the thought from) a) turning to itself (re-flexion), and b) collating it with the action and making of the *lived life* (being) a *reflected life* (experience) (Arendt, 1996).

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