

## **School Noise between Fences and Walls: what is free in school?**

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**ABSTRACT – School Noise between Fences and Walls: what is free in school?** Analysing the experience of an image and sound project developed in a public school in the north zone of Rio de Janeiro, this study features reflections on the processes of signification of freedom in school. During the project, students were invited to produce images and sounds related to the theme *being free in school*. The material produced afforded relevant elements for an analysis of the contribution of youngsters to significations that go beyond a view of school composed merely of students and *masters explicators*, a term used by Jacques Rancière to analyse the role of teachers. Based on the images made by those students, the study proposes interpretations of schools as *spacetimes* of conversations.

Keywords: **School. Image. Sound. Freedom. Everyday Life.**

**RESUMO – Barulho de Escola entre Grades e Muros: o que é livre na escola?** Analisando a experiência de um laboratório de imagens e sons, desenvolvido em uma escola pública da Zona Norte do Rio de Janeiro, este texto apresenta reflexões sobre os processos de significação da liberdade na escola. Durante a realização do projeto, os estudantes foram convidados a produzirem imagens e sons sobre o tema *ser livre na escola*. Este material produzido traz elementos relevantes para uma análise da contribuição juvenil para significações que escapam de uma visão da escola composta simplesmente por alunos e *mestres explicadores*, termo usado por Jacques Rancière para analisar o papel do professor. A partir destas imagens estudantis, o texto propõe compreensões da escola como *espaçotempos* de conversações.

Palavras-chave: **Escola. Imagem. Som. Liberdade. Cotidiano.**

## School Noise between Fences and Walls

Jacques Rancière tells us the story of the schoolteacher Joseph Jacotot, an artilleryman in the Republic's army during the French Revolution who became secretary to the war minister and director of the Polytechnic School of Paris. Exiled with the return of the Bourbons, he received shelter and a teaching position in Louvain thanks to the admiration of the King of Netherlands for his teaching methods (Rancière, 2013 p. 17). Jacotot advocated the notion of *equality of intelligence*, affirming that anyone could learn about any subject as long as they were emancipated. For Jacotot, to emancipate someone meant to make others understand their capacity and the equality of all kinds of intelligence. Analyzing the proposal of Jacotot's Universal Teaching, Rancière explains that "[emancipation] is the consciousness of that equality, of that reciprocity which is the only one to allow intelligence to be realized by verification. What stultifies the common people is not the lack of instruction, but the belief in the inferiority of their intelligence" (Rancière, 2013, p. 65).

Regarding Jacotot's story, Rancière (2013) invites us to reflect on the processes of *learningteaching*<sup>1</sup>, starting out from the realization that there is no hierarchy of intelligence and rationalities ranging from an illiterate person to a postdoctoral researcher. For the author, on the contrary, what exists is an initial equality which, when manipulated, creates the fallacy of the existence of people who are more intelligent than others.

Whoever establishes equality as an 'objective' to be attained from the situation of inequality, in fact puts it off unto infinity. Equality never comes afterwards, as a result to be achieved. It should always be placed before. Social inequality itself already presumes it: whoever obeys an order must first understand the given order and then understand that they must obey it. They must, therefore, already be equal to their master in order to submit to him. There is no ignorant who does not know a multitude of things, and it is about this knowledge, about this capacity in action that all teaching must be founded on (Rancière, 2013, p. 11)<sup>2</sup>.

Setting his discussion amidst the French quarrel between the sociological thesis and the Republican thesis<sup>3</sup> that debated, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, how French public education should reduce inequalities – adapting the *grand legitimate culture* for children of the less favored classes or guaranteeing *equal distribution* of knowledge, disregarding class differences – Rancière proposes that

[...] both are, above all, caught in the circle of pedagogicized society. They attribute to school the phantasmatic power to achieve social equality or, at least, to reduce the 'social fracture'. But this very phantasm relies on a view of society in which inequality is compared to the situation of children with delay (Rancière, 2013, p. 14).

For Rancière, the master who teaches what he ignores breaks with the practice of the master explicator, traditionally known in many schools as the master who controls the process of explication, the one who exercises power over students, founded in the belief of a hierarchy of knowledge directly tied to a hierarchy of power. The master explicator, therefore, dominates by making students believe in their political inferiority founded on a supposed intellectual inferiority.

Students would only attain their emancipation because they expanded their knowledge, achieved only with the aid of the master explicator. Jacotot compares this experience of explication to the Greek myth of the titan Cronus (time) who, fearing to lose his power, devoured all his children but Zeus, who was protected by his mother, Rhea. “The explication system feeds, like time, on its own children, devouring them as it produces them; a new explication, a new refinement is born and dies immediately to make room for thousands of others” (Jacotot, 1829, p. 192)<sup>4</sup>. How many schools do we know that, by incorporating Cronus, produce controlled explications, soon considered negligible and replaced by more explications, more titles and more guarantee of success in an always distant future?

It is not our intent, in these few lines, to present Rancière’s vast thesis on Jacotot’s production, but we are interested in reflecting on the role school plays when faced with this radical invitation to understand that everyone is capable of *learningteaching* anything. Following this proposal, school loses its role in the public education project, with any emancipated person being able to emancipate others, in what Carlos Skliar called a (*fortunately*) *pessimistic pedagogy* (Skliar, 2003).

Transferring Jacotot’s debate from nineteenth-century France to twentieth-century Brazil, and using Rancière’s thesis not as a limit, but as a provocation, we ask ourselves what the role of school is today. Or roles, rather, since we know that there are many different schools, and, therefore, many different roles and meanings. Between schools focused on getting students into university and schools conforming to the Althusserian concept of ideological state apparatus, we have several schools produced by teachers, students, administrators, cafeteria staff, family members, among many others. Within these different meanings, we have those who do not agree with Rancière’s thesis and defend the practice of the master explicator, implementing the hierarchy of knowledge. There are also meanings that break with this hierarchy, even when it is hegemonic. Those are the meanings that we intend to address in this study. We are referring to the processes of signification of schools, produced by students when they teach us what they understand by school, what their desires, concerns and demands are as the main protagonists of this process. Significations that build other paths towards a school that is not explicatory, but finds its importance by establishing itself in a *spacetime* of expansion of networks of knowledge and significations of all who attend it, whether male, female, teachers, students or any other.

In search of those other significations, this study presents the observations of a research that proposes to reflect on school routine by

dialoguing with students of a public school in the north zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro. This school has approximately 600 students from preschool to ninth grade, divided into two periods. Of that number, three classes totaling 60 students took part in the research based on school daily life<sup>5</sup>. The classes were chosen by the school administration from groups that, according to frequent statements by teachers in staff meetings, showed no interest in the school experience.

The youngsters were invited to produce digital sounds and images about how they understood freedom in school, in weekly meetings carried out over approximately six months for each class<sup>6</sup>. Using a photo camera, a tablet and a sound recorder, the group of students went around the school wondering what it would be like to be free in that space. Two hundred images and sounds were produced in total, twenty of which were selected by the participating students themselves to produce an exhibition at the school entrance. In a conversation circle, students chose the most expressive photos of freedom in school. Five of the selected images (Image 1; Image 2; Image 3; Image 4; Image 5) feature in this study for being those that, in this conversation circle, were most intensely debated by teachers and students of the school. As it will be seen later, the choice of images is linked to the conversations they raised.

Following each round of image production, the research team – composed of Nivea Andrade (coordinator), Marianna Burlamarqui and Jéssica Teixeira<sup>7</sup> – viewed and discussed with the students what had been produced. The conversation aimed to be an exchange that subverted the researcher/research object relation, with the dialogic experience becoming a *spacetime* for reflection on daily school practices and their political dimension, thus upholding Jacotot's proposal of equality of intelligence (1829).

It is important to emphasize that, unlike fixed and delimited concepts, we were concerned in this research with understanding the processes of signification, since we acknowledge that, in signifying freedom, teachers, students and the whole school community dispute and share the political and social demands through which the process of signification becomes a permanent reinvention of school itself. Moreover, we were not interested in identifying the intention of the photographer. On the contrary, we sought instead to converse with the images as if they were conceptual characters, as proposed by Nilda Alves in her re-signification of Deleuze's concept.

For Alves, using images as conceptual characters allows us to understand them as “[...] those elements without which it would not be possible to think, and whose presence in research in/of/with everyday life is thus necessary to create arguments and reach the necessary understanding of what is thought” (Alves, 2010, p. 188). The image for us, therefore, is an instigator of conversations, narratives and, consequently, of knowledge.

In this sense, we intend to find in the images a theme for conversations about schools, seeking to follow Roland Barthes's proposal of

emphasizing two movements that shape a relationship between the *spectator* (the one who observes), the *operator* (the one who photographs) and the photograph<sup>8</sup>. The first movement is the field of observation that perceives photography from the networks of knowledge of the one who observes and the one who photographs. This movement, therefore, comprises the set of ideological and sociological filters such as knowledge and their cultural experiences. For Barthes (1984, p. 45), “[...] thousands of photographs consist of this field, and in these photographs, I can, evidently, take a kind of general interest, sometimes even emotional, but whose emotion requires the rational intermediary of a moral and political culture”. To this movement, which applies knowledge to a photograph, Barthes called *studium*. The author explains:

[...] to recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer’s intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which the *studium* derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers. The *studium* is a kind of education (knowledge and politeness) which allows me to discover the *Operator*, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them in reverse so to speak, according to my will as a *Spectator* (Barthes, 2012, p. 48).

The second movement of observation, in turn, to which Barthes devoted much of his analysis, is an opposite movement. He states: *This time it is not I who will seek him out (as I invest with my sovereign consciousness the field of the Studium), it is he who leaves the scene like an arrow and comes to pierce me.*

It is the movement of observation that starts from a detail of the photo, catching the *Spectator’s* attention, and over and above that, captivating the observer. For this field, Barthes chose the Latin word *Punctum*, for designating a wound made with a pointed instrument, evoking also to the idea of the points that, together, form the photograph.

[...] this second element which will disturb the *Studium* I will call *Punctum*; for *Punctum* is also sting, small hole, small speck, small cut – and a cast of the dice. A photograph’s *Punctum* is that accident which pricks me, but also bruises me, is poignant to me (Barthes, 1984, p. 46).

Relating more closely to this second element of Barthes in search of possible significations for schools in the images produced by the students, we asked ourselves which elements prick us (teachers, students and researchers) and allow us to reflect on school experiences. Within this logic, the images are accompanied by the conversations and narratives of those who produce them as they construct significations of a school that goes far beyond the explicatory sense, finding in everyday practices a constant search for emancipation through tactics<sup>9</sup> that are

not necessarily intended to be subversive or revolutionary. They seek, however, to produce freedom.

Sometimes we encountered in the students' images a kind of invitation to reflect on a bourgeois, individualistic freedom in schools, fueled by desires for consumption and ownership. At others, the images of the young student photographers allowed us to think of freedom in school as emancipation, as an ongoing project, a utopia, permanently linked to a collective project within individual action. These freedom projects interacted and produced many other significations, always within a process and never fixed or predetermined.

### Being Free in School in Images

**Image 1 – Title: Classroom Empty of People**



Source: History Teaching Laboratory Collection/UFF.

On the first day of image production at the school, after introducing the project we asked the students what they thought of the proposal. Immediately, the boy told us that he found it rather *dull*. We insisted he try and gave him the tablet to take photos. When he turned it on, the camera lens was facing the person taking the picture. The boy saw his own image, smiled, took a selfie<sup>10</sup> and decided to participate in the project. He got up to photograph the school, taking up the challenge of photographing what it meant to be free in that *spacetime*.

Gonçalves and Head (2009) argue that we are currently experiencing an *imagistic transformation*, a moment in which images take on meanings of self-representation, when there is no more separation between those who photograph and those who are photographed. There is, therefore, a disruption of the hierarchy between those who represent and those who are represented. We are experiencing a moment in which those who are represented want to represent themselves, taking control of the device and their process of signification.

The young student took control of the device, producing an image of himself, assuming a leading role in the process of signification of the school. The second image he produced was of an empty classroom (Image 1). He brought the pictures to his classmates who, in the conversation circle, complained: *Where is freedom in that?* The youth quickly replied: *The classroom is free of people, free of students.*

The signification of freedom at stake here can be understood as signification of absence. To be free is to be without. Class with no student, student with no class. Could one exist without the other? Would not this image be a paradox? Is it possible to have a class with no students? According to Rancière's proposal, that would be the challenge. The school proposed by the young photographer does not need the concept of student as a being that needs to be nourished<sup>11</sup>. And the classroom of desks and chairs arranged in double rows is free of people, for although the classroom is hegemonically recognized as the school's locus *par excellence*, these people inhabit other *spacetimes*, building other meanings for schools.

**Image 2 – Title: Expanding the Spaces**



Source: History Teaching Laboratory Collection/UFF.

Although they organize desks and chairs symmetrically, our young students always teach us that such organization often seeks to discipline, oppress and homogenize the lives of those who seek to live their differences. Therefore, they always allow us to interact with a desk that insists on not following the order, lying aslant in the classroom, disrupting the established order.

These students occupy many other spaces beyond the classroom, spaces sometimes unimaginable for most teachers. Interdictions that

are permanently and playfully visited. And when asked about the reason for these aerial routes, the youngsters answer: *we play tag in the tree*.

**Image 3 – Title: Playing Tag**



Source: History Teaching Laboratory Collection/UFF.

It is not about sneaking out of school. They know how to get out and would use a thousand ways if they wanted. They are, however, expanding the *spacetimes* of schools, teaching us that a classroom empty of people does not mean a school empty of life. They challenge the limits of what many call out of bounds, they show us that despite their many walls and fences, justified by a desire to protect and control, schools experience what researchers of everyday life call *insideoutside*, since cultural, economic and political conditions supposedly foreign to or outside schools permanently breach those walls.

And what kind of *learningteaching* happens in these challenging *spacetimes*? First, that these *spacetimes* do not admit full control of the body. The teacher is not standing before or towering above the student, who watches him from a seated position, as would normally happen in many classrooms. In this image (Image 3), the student observes the world from another perspective, from above the school, and sometimes upside down. The conversations developed in this position would be conversations marked by the breakup of the *traditional* geography of the classroom. As masters explicators, could we converse in this *spacetime* so common for the youngsters of this school? Are we able to develop conversations without being at the center of the process, as explicators or mediators?

A further *learningteaching* aspect of this practice of climbing walls is understanding that walls can and must be breached. What would the



population of Berlin in 1989 say about knocking down walls? What do Mexicans, Palestinians or the slum dwellers that live near gated communities in affluent areas of the city of Rio de Janeiro think today about the walls that segregate them? Our young school photographers encourage us to think about the tactics that subvert the significations of these walls and invite us to breach them. Are we prepared for such? Or do we think of the walls as our protection?

In a third movement of this project (the first was the production of images, the second, the conversation circle), the young photographers toured the school with the photographs of their colleagues hung up on the walls and fences, inviting other students and teachers to comment on them, to express their analysis, in an exercise of conversation about the school, using the image as theme. In this experiment, a common reaction of the teachers who analyzed these pictures at school was to express fear that the students might fall. A reaction of protection, of fear that the other will be hurt, hit. A fear that produces the desire to separate the inside and outside of the school to control its internal spaces, anticipating all the youngsters' steps. A fear of loss of control.

About our fears so common in schools, Silvio Gallo quotes Night Shyamalan's movie *The Village* (2004)<sup>12</sup> to ask us

[...] to what extent are we not turning our schools, our classrooms into enclosed spaces, like Shyamalan's village, trying to prevent children and youngsters from experiencing the world for fear of terror and violence? To what extent is it not our own fear that is transformed into the everyone's fear, guaranteeing cohesion in our life in common, over and above any possibility of taking risks, of going beyond, of surpassing ourselves and facing what is new? (Gallo, 2009, p. 20).

Later in his text, the author further demands: "To what extent do we not desire repression, do we not repress the desire for what is new, the curiosity for what is different, in the name of love and protection?" (Gallo, 2009, p. 27). Observing the images of our young photographers – and observing here means to look at them several times, asking ourselves what pricks us – allows us to respond to the provocations of Silvio Gallo with other questions: To what extent is this fear that protects, while also oppressing, not challenged every day? How many times do our young students find different ways to circumvent interdictions? How often do youngsters make us reflect that what we seek to keep away from schools (the so-called violence, sexuality, ideological and religious discourse, among others) is always present?

If there is fear and/or oppression, the life that drives and characterizes the school routines produces tactics that do not totally submit to power. Tactics that become the main interest of studies of everyday life (Certeau, 1994).

Fear erects walls and fences in schools. Fences at the entrance, fences in classrooms, fences surrounding equipment, justified by the fear of theft, invasion by strangers or escape.

**Image 4 – Untitled**



Source: History Teaching Laboratory Collection/UFF.

Fences feature in several images produced by the students who participated in the project. A photograph of the lock, a student climbing the fences, two others opening door fences. Regarding image 5, the young photographer explained: *Freedom here is of whoever is taking the photograph.*

The school that produces the creative freedom of the photographer is the same one that curbs the freedom of the student behind fences. On the other hand, we know that fences are considered by many to be one of the few ways of protection against robbery, theft and unauthorized entry. How to overcome, therefore, this contradiction of the wall that segregates, curbs freedom and protects?

The image of the boy behind the fences distressed many teachers, students and other school staff. It was particularly distressing because the fences had always been there, but were considered by many to be an almost naturalized, necessary element, while for others it represented violence. On this subject, we would like to share a story about the fences of that school, and we chose to write it in the first person singular, as although the research is a collective project, the story we will narrate happened to one of the authors of this study when still a schoolteacher.

It was my first day and I was surprised to see so many fences in the school, separating corridors, protecting one floor from another, on the doors of every classroom. A group of students who were also new complained to me: *we are not animals to live in cages!*

I promptly agreed and unlocked the padlock for our first class. As I turned to write my name on the board, two students disappeared. I found it strange. I may have miscounted the students. I continued talking and turned to write some more words. And a few more students disappeared as if by magic. Each time I turned my back, they ran out. I realized that it was not enough to open padlocks or dismantle fences. It was necessary to produce new relations, more emancipatory, less oppressive, with greater protagonism and less protection in order to effectively bring down the fences.

And now, as a researcher at the same school, I once again faced the fences in the images of the students. How to break with them? For a while, we members of that research project discussed the importance of a project that would effectively be a university extension project in the school, overcoming the hierarchy between knowledge produced by the university, which deems itself superior, and teacher knowledge in the school, which, in turn, deems itself superior to student knowledge. The fences forced us to such questioning, while the young students motivated us to action (Andrade, 2012).

They continued taking the photographs for other teachers and students to analyze. These images ended up causing discomfort, motivating the research team to organize an exhibition with the images to transform the fences into a small art gallery.

What matters to us at this stage is to understand that the transformations produced in schools are the result of conversations among teachers, students and the whole school community through a relationship that seeks horizontality, as opposed to top-down proposals (*top* meaning either the municipal education department or the university). In resignifying itself, rethinking its fences through the students' images, this school went beyond an explicatory pedagogy, finding in the images and conversations about them spaces of political dispute and democratic production. The fences disturbed us, while our young photographers invited us to think of other landscapes that intended to protect, separate and control spaces, always accompanied by daily methods of evasion, tactics that breached the pre-established order.

In one of the images produced by the students, a girl was dancing in the hallway. In her right hand, the cell phone was possibly playing a song. Besides that one, other images featured cell phones, always accompanied by headphones, which refers us to Law 4734/2008 (Rio de Janeiro, 2008) that prohibits the use of cell phones in schools in Rio de Janeiro. The rationale underlying the law is that the phones would compete with teachers for students' attention. By listening to music, surfing the web or inventing other uses for this device, students would have their *attention diverted* to themes other than the lesson being taught.

In the conversation circle, we examined the presence of headphones. One of the students, observing the frequent presence of the device in the photographs, explained that the headphones brought music to the images: *And music makes people think, wonder*. Complementing her classmate's statement, another student explained: *Music helps thoughts to flow*.

Here, the process of signification of freedom was linked to an understanding of thought as free, which motivated us to further problematize the conversations. We asked the students in that group: *Does the school allow you to have free thoughts?* The students were divided. Some said yes and others said no, but all talking at the same time. To be heard, a girl spoke louder: *Yes, it does!*, while another classmate explained: *The school makes you think about your studies, and the studies make you get a job, to be someone in the future*.

The boy's statement cut off the flow of our conversation, traversing the din in the classroom, silencing our analyses: think about studies to be someone in the future... On that same day, when talking about school, another classroom followed an opposite line of reasoning, using the same arguments. They said that nobody is free in school, but school serves to *liberate in the future* and to *develop good workers*, that is, people *who are able to fulfill tasks*.

What would being someone in the future mean then? Were those youngsters giving up present experiences to *be someone* in the future? Weren't they already someone in the present? What future awaited them? Being a good worker, obedient, fulfilling tasks, docile and servile in the face of oppression?

In opposition to this school project that sacrifices the present for a guarantee of success in the future, Aline Monteiro and Alexandre Mendonça challenge us to “[...] make the school experience a time with a value of its own, and not a future promise. A time of individual experiences within collective action, in groups, and not just group experiences for the group” (Monteiro, Mendonça, 2013, p. 80).

In the conversation circle, we continued to raise questions: *But can you be free when you are studying? You're saying your studies will set you free for the future, right? But when you are studying ...* The sentence was completed by another student who spoke louder, almost shouting, gesticulating: *When you are studying, you cannot be free! You cannot do what you want! You have to think what the teacher wants you to think!* Perhaps at that moment the young student made a connection with the thought of Marx and Engels (Yes! That is possible!) when they state that “[...] liberation is a historical and not a mental act, and is brought about by historical relations” (Marx; Engels, 1984, p. 25).

Outside, the whistle of the physical education teacher dialogued with the shouts of students playing football. And inside our classroom, the debate about freedom in school was permeated by many other sounds. Many argued that in school, freedom was not even possible in thought. You had to think what the teacher told you to think. On the other side of the room, a boy described as *very disruptive and incorrigible* by many teachers called us aside and said quietly, a smile tugging the corners of his mouth: *I am free in school. I sure am...*

Many sounds were being produced at the same time, turning the school into a soundscape of complex polyphony. Those sounds that broke up the images, bothered and pricked us, gave us clues of what would it would mean to be free in school, guiding our research to a few reflections that did not aim to reach a conclusion or answer to the issues of freedom in school, but raised clues of what we consider to be the major learning point of this project.

## What about Sound? Listening to the Final Remarks

In many schools, morning silence is anxious silence, a silence that counts down the minutes left for the day to begin. Suddenly, a hollow noise breaks the anguish, signaling that someone is knocking at the gate. The first staff members arrive. Some conversation, sounds traversed by the smell of coffee. And voices outside slowly multiplying. Inside the classrooms, the expectant silence persists. Only a few sounds of chairs dragged back and forth, responding to the dance of brooms. And some say that school is only teachers and students, ignoring the fact that the school begins with the sound of brooms and the smell of the initial seasoning and cooking of school lunch<sup>13</sup>.

A strident sound invades and fills all the *spacetimes* of the school. A sound very much like that of a factory or prison siren. A colleague of ours recently told us that on hearing the school's siren, a jesting student would clap his hands and shout to his classmates: *Sunbathing time over, back to your cells...*

The siren, or bell, as it is called, marks time at this and so many other schools: time for class, to switch teachers and to follow the schedule, time for recess or to leave school. In this intertwining of sound with time, we perceive capitalist time being forged in the lives of our students. The machine's imperative determines the time to wake up, to learn, to eat, to listen, to talk, to play, paying little heed to the demands of the body and collective agreements.

Murray Schafer reminds us that in English, the same word is used for mermaid. "In Greek mythology, mermaids were nymphs that destroyed those who passed by their island with their song at once penetrating and sweet as honey. Sirens thus signify mortal danger to man, and this danger is spread by their singing" (Schafer, 2011, p. 251). School sirens, in turn, despite not signaling mortal danger, seek to penetrate all spaces, occupying also the control of time.

For Schafer, the factory siren replaced the sound of church trumpets and bells, which were the sacred noises that tried to control everyday life in Europe prior to the industrial revolution. The author recalls how

[...] loud noises evoked fear and respect back to earliest times, and how they seemed to be the expression of divine power. We have also observed how this power was transferred from natural sounds (thunder, volcano, storm) to those of the church bell and pipe or organ. I called this Sacred Noise to distinguish it from the other sort of noise (with the small letter) which implies damage and requires legislation regarding its abatement. That noise has always been, basically, the turbulent human voice. During the Industrial Revolution, the Sacred Noise passed into the profane world. The industrialists then held power and were allowed to make the Noise by means of steam engines and steam jets of the furnaces, just as before the monks had been free to make the Noise with the church bell, or J.S. Bach to register his preludes in the organ (Schafer, 2011, p. 113-114).

Schafer points out that *possessing the Sacred Noise* does not simply mean *making the loudest noise*. Possessing the sacred noise is the opposite, “[...] a matter of having authority to be able to make it uncensored” (Schafer, 2011, p. 114).

Early noise abatement legislation was selective and qualitative, contrasting with that of the modern era, which has begun to fix quantitative limits in decibels for all sounds. While most of the legislation of the past was directed against the human voice (or rather the rougher voices of the lower classes), no piece of European legislation was ever directed against the far larger sound – if objectively measured – of the church bell, nor against the equally loud machine which filled the church’s inner vaults with music, sustaining the institution imperiously as the hub of community life – until its eventual displacement by the industrialized factory (Schafer, 2011, p. 104).

In many schools today we still find control of the sound of the human voice. The pursuit of silence, the attention directed towards a single sound, the voice of the master explicator interposed with the voice of the siren that tries to segment everyday life. The sound of the factory, reproduced in the form of a siren, might corroborate the understanding of the boy who explained that the school’s function was to develop good workers, although we have many other significations, such as that of a student who interpreted the siren as the sound that marks freedom in school, since it is the sound that marks the time of recess and the end of classes. It is important, however, to reflect on which sounds are allowed and forbidden in schools. And our students give us clues.

**Image 5 – Title: The Conversation**



Source: History Teaching Laboratory Collection/UFF.

There were several images featuring conversations on the staircase and hallway (such as Image 5), images of students dancing and shouting. All of them were photographed as images of freedom in school. While we often understand schools as *spacetimes* where silence must prevail so the teacher's voice can be heard, the element that most subverts this logic of power is sound. School is full of clamor, noises everywhere, dispersing attention, allowing students not to think only along the line of reasoning proposed by the teacher<sup>14</sup>. The noises of headphones, the shouts during recess, the corridor conversations allow students to produce their own pathways of thought, defying the logic of a master explicator. School sound hardly submits to control, it travels across the classrooms, echoes in the corridors, runs through the courts and yards, challenging the very teaching authority that demands the centralization of attention (thinking what the teacher wants you to think, as explained by the student in the conversation circle).

Many teachers, seeking to control the subverting sound, sacrifice their vocal folds, speaking louder and louder. Despite taking necessary precautions such as drinking water during class and eating apples (which far beyond being considered an ancient gift for teachers, it is an astringent for vocal folds)<sup>15</sup>, teachers increasingly raise their voices to levels that strain the vocal apparatus. The number of teachers suffering from WRVD, or Work-Related Voice Disorder (Biserra et al., 2014), is growing.

Faced with this situation, we find ourselves in an impasse between silence that centralizes attention, protecting teachers' health, and sound that defies the control of youthful voices, evidencing the incessant struggle for the free creation of ideas and practices. Analyzing this deadlock from the perspective of studies in everyday school life, we must break with an outlook that views one as oppressor and the other as victim, whether the oppressor is the role of the teacher or the student. Although we recognize the ongoing struggle for power, the class differences and all other socioeconomic conditions that underlie such relations, we agree with Alves (2008, p. 96) when she advocates that

[...] for school, daily life studies have suggested the need for radical criticism of the dominant organization: internally, regarding both power structure and teaching practice, as well as curriculum planning; externally, regarding power limits and relations existing in society, and the relations of education with society (the world of work, social movements etc.), in the search for identification/characterization/critical analysis/proposal of practical knowledge, in its multiple theoretical creations (rational, imaginary, artistic etc.).

In this sense, we go back to the last image produced by the students, the image of the youngsters on the school staircase (Image 5). Much more than the stairs or the two youngsters, what pricks us in this image is the act of conversing.

Sitting on the same step, the youngsters indicate that the conversation presupposes a horizontal movement. It is not necessarily a consensus, or a search for equality opposed to difference, for we know that differences enrich our conversations.

Carlos Skliar, in a text that pays homage to Rancière and Jacotot, points out that

[...] in Rancière's interpretation, it is clear that Jacotot had in mind something other than difference; it is about the lesson of equality, of joint experience, of thinking equally to become equal. However, in this searching for equality, what Jacotot found was his invention of alterity (Skliar, 2003, p. 238).

In the conversation proposed by the images by the school's young photographers, what pricks us is alterity. Alterity that comprises equality as opposed to inequality. Equality that Rancière reminds us is the starting point of the relationship. It is conversation that brings students together with each other and with their masters, the latter denying the supposed role of master explicator.

From their different networks of knowledge (built up in their academic, trade union, religious, family and cultural backgrounds, among so many others with such rich and varied experiences), they learn daily in conversation how to listen to others, the alterity of listening.

In conversation, we *learnteach* at the same time, exposing our networks, what we have studied, what we have listened to, the films we have seen, the sounds we have heard. And we allow ourselves to listen to the other in his intelligence, which is different from ours, but on the same level of equality.

Conversation presupposes sound as a *spacetime* of permanent realization of freedom<sup>16</sup>. Freedom that is understood not as a natural element, but as a permanent realization, as a process that develops insofar as we understand it as emancipation produced *in* and *by* collectivity.

The synthesis of what we learned with the young photographers participating in this research was the acknowledgment of school sound as a permanent *spacetime* in the struggle for freedom, as a *spacetime* of permanent subversion of power. And immersed in listening to the daily life of these young people, we learned the notion of conversation as a political and pedagogical exercise for the signification of a school that, breaking with the idea of an explicatory system, recognizes its major signification: the *spacetime* of encounter.

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## Notes

- 1 In this paper, we use the compound terms *learningteaching* and *insideoutside* to emphasize how much they are part of the same action, seeking to break with the dichotomy that separates the processes of learning and teaching and the internal and external dimensions of schools.
- 2 This citation was taken from the preface to the Brazilian edition (2013).
- 3 “The so-called sociological thesis was based on the works of Bourdieu and Passeron, i.e., highlighting the social inequalities that were hidden in apparently neutral forms of the social transmission of knowledge. It proposed that school be rendered more egalitarian by removing it from the fortress where it had taken up shelter from society: by changing the forms of educational society and adapting the educational content offered to those students most deprived of cultural background. The so-called republican thesis advocated the exact opposite: bringing school closer to society meant making it more homogeneous to social inequality. School could work to achieve equality only to the extent that, within the sheltering walls that separated it from society, it could devote itself to its proper task: to supply everyone equally, regardless of origins or social destination, with the universality of knowledge, using for its egalitarian aims the necessarily non-egalitarian form of relation obtained between the one who knows and the one who learns” (Rancière, 2014, p. 36-37).
- 4 Translated by the authors.
- 5 Dialoging especially with the work of Michel de Certeau, studies in/of/with daily life in Brazil seek to analyze the network of production of knowledge and processes of signification of life and the world that occur in everyday life. See Alves and Garcia (1999).
- 6 The research was authorized by the school board, the UFF Ethics Committee and the students’ representatives to publish the photos for research purposes.
- 7 Respectively, FAPERJ Scientific Initiation research fellow and UFF Education research fellow, co-authors of this project.
- 8 Although photography is understood as an art of reproducing images on a photosensitive surface (such as film), we will herein use the term photography for digitally produced images.
- 9 Michel de Certeau uses the term *tactics* to name the actions of people who do not hold power. They are actions taken to face the circumstances, without the possibility of strategic thinking, without a broad view of those circumstances and without an action space of their own, which is only allowed to those who have hegemonic power over that space. Defined as the *art of the weak*, *tactics* comprise the art of who “[...] must constantly play with events to turn them into situations” (Certeau, 1994, p. 46-47).
- 10 Current word for self-portrait.
- 11 In Portuguese, the word for student (*aluno*) comes from the Latin *alūmnus*, which, according to the Latin-Portuguese dictionary edited by Ernesto Faria (1962) has the following meanings: 1) Foster child; and in the figurative sense: 2) Pupil, disciple.
- 12 The 2004 movie *The Village* tells the story of a peaceful community supposedly living in isolation from the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

- 13 This might be the reason why two of the images produced by the students featured the school's brooms and trash cans. It should be added that such images were produced precisely on the day the cleaning staff who had worked there for more than 10 years were leaving the school due to the termination their company's contract with the education department.
- 14 Schafer also reminds us that, in English, noise means unwanted, non-musical sound, loud sound and disturbance. *Bruit* in French also has the same meaning, but may have the connotation of a pleasurable sound (Schafer, 2011, p. 251). We also add that, in Portuguese, *ruído* means both an inharmonic sound and a rumor, a piece of gossip, from the Latin word *rugĭtum*, which refers to the sound of animals like the lion. See Michaelis (2016).
- 15 On teacher voice care, see: Como..., (2010, online).
- 16 The term *spacetime* is used to designate sound, evidencing its propagation through air, water and other material spaces, characterized by time conferred by the rhythm of speech, music and so many other sounds.

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