

From The Ignorant Master to The Initiator: school form and intellectual emancipation

José Sérgio Fonseca de Carvalho¹

¹Universidade de São Paulo (USP), São Paulo/SP – Brazil

ABSTRACT – From The Ignorant Master to The Initiator: school form and intellectual emancipation. By narrating the intellectual adventure of Jacotot, Rancière *brushes the story against the grains* – resorting to the Benjaminian metaphor –, echoing a voice that seemed condemned to oblivion. This text aims at exposing the ways in which Jacotot opposes a *stultifying master* to an *emancipating* one, who verifies *in the present* the equal capacity of everyone to understand the works of human intelligence. In face of this dichotomy, I propose an intermediate image: the master as an *initiator*, for whom an educational process committed to the equality principle cries out for both the intellectual emancipation and the intergenerational transmission of a legacy of symbolic experiences that provides durability to a world of historical achievements.

Keywords: Emancipation. Equality. Joseph Jacotot. Jacques Rancière. Hannah Arendt.

RESUMO – Do Mestre Ignorante ao Iniciador: forma escolar e emancipação intelectual. Ao narrar a aventura intelectual de Joseph Jacotot, Rancière *escova a história a contrapelo* – na bela metáfora benjaminiana –, fazendo ressoar uma voz até então condenada ao esquecimento. Este artigo expõe as formas pelas quais Jacotot opõe o *mestre embrutecedor* ao *mestre emancipador*, que verifica *no presente* a igual capacidade de todos e de cada um para compreender as obras da inteligência humana. Em face dessa dicotomia proponho uma imagem intermediária: a de um *mestre iniciador*, para quem um processo educativo comprometido com o princípio da igualdade clama tanto pela emancipação intelectual quanto pela transmissão intergeracional de um legado de experiências simbólicas que confere durabilidade a um mundo comum de realizações históricas.

Palavras-chave: Emancipação. Igualdade. Joseph Jacotot. Jacques Rancière. Hannah Arendt.

Jacotot: the grain of sand in the gears of pedagogical mechanism

Jacotot's lonely voice rose up as an unprecedented dissonance at a vital moment in the constitution of the ideals, practices, and institutions that still govern our present. [...] It may still be necessary to listen to it, so that the act of teaching never completely loses the awareness of the paradoxes that provides its meaning (Jacques Rancière, 2012b, p. 9).

Jacques Rancière's encounter with Joseph Jacotot's life and work can be described as a breaking experience; as an event that represents a rupture in his thinking and a discontinuity in his existence. This is, at least, what the author of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* tells us at the ceremony in which he was awarded the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* at the University of San Martín, in Argentina (Rancière, 2012a). Although his interest on the notion of emancipation and its potential political effects may be retreated as far back as his first intellectual concerns, it was only from his first researches in nineteenth-century workers' archives on – occasion on which he learned about the work of this thinker hitherto relegated to the limbo of pedagogical ideas - that emancipation became one of the central axes of his reflections on the relationship between politics, aesthetics and education. It was, therefore, Jacotot's intellectual adventures – which became *lessons on intellectual emancipation* in Rancière's narrative version of this historical event – that led him to conceive some new theoretical categories to inquire on the possible connections between education, equality and emancipation. Published in the early eighties, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* questions both the appropriations that pedagogical discourses made of reproductive theories of education as well as the assumptions underlying the two major tendencies that fought for the hegemony of emancipatory educational discourses at that time

The first of these tendencies – whose presence in debates about popular education in Brazil has been quite strong - conceives emancipation as an educational process resulting from the action of educators who, allegedly endowed with critical consciousness derived from philosophical and scientific discourses about the world and society, would be capable of liberating the people - or the mass - from their supposed ignorance or absence of historical consciousness. For the latter, politically opposed to the first one, it was the mass - or the people and their own culture - who should educate, or re-educate, those intellectuals whose knowledge was classified as abstract and devoid of any practical value. Opposite in their diagnosis, both tendencies shared, nevertheless, a common belief: the conviction that knowledge was a private property of a social segment who knew about the ignorance of the other and who had the means of overcoming it through a long lasting educational process. A process that in many respects resembles the quest of the Platonic philosopher regarding his fellow citizens, prisoners in a cave of illusions and ignorance from which they could only be released

through a gradual orthopedics of their consciousness to be carried out under the supervision of a master whose understanding –surpassing the common sense of appearances – would penetrate into the essences of phenomena.

Formulated as a response to the challenges of post-French Revolutionary popular education, Jacotot's ideas and practices led Rancière to question some of the most relevant assumptions of those pedagogical discourses which claimed to be identified as emancipatory and egalitarian educational projects. One of the most important presuppositions he questions is the generalized belief that emancipation should be the arrival point of a long - and always uncertain - educational trajectory whose assumed departure is the conviction about the initial inequality that characterizes the two poles involved in the emancipation process: the master who emancipates and the ones he guides towards emancipation. The alleged foundation of this initial inequality may vary considerably, depending on the theoretical or political perspective adopted by its adherents. The asymmetrical character of the relationship between those who claim to have the right to conduct the emancipatory process and those who must be guided through it may evoke, for example, the opposition between the philosopher who is capable of seeing the essence and those who only grasp the appearance of phenomena, as in the persistent Platonic image; or between those who contemplate the forest and those who only see the trees, as in the Hegelian metaphor. But it can also evoke, in its contemporary versions, the distinction between a critical and a naive view of social relationships, between alienation and class consciousness or even between common sense and scientific and philosophical knowledge.

In all these cases – regardless of the adopted metaphysical or epistemological assumptions - the journey towards emancipation always presupposes a gradual and substantial change in the quality of learners' consciousness. Guided and accompanied by a master whose knowledge or critical consciousness is supposed to stand at a higher level, emancipation is identified with a progressive release from the shackles of ignorance; seen as the process of overcoming alienation or nurturing a critical consciousness capable of gradually bringing the disciple closer to the master or the students closer to the teacher. In this sense, equality and emancipation are conceived as arrival points of an intellectual process by which a student would eventually – and hopefully – reach the same cognitive condition of his or her schoolmaster. Intellectual emancipation is, thus, conceived as a destination to be reached; a promise whose fulfillment depends on a long journey established according to values and procedures preestablished by those who take themselves for conductors of an emancipatory process.

This emancipatory journey also implies that the schoolmaster shall resort to the “logic of explanation”, that is, the procedure according to which one should bring his or her students closer to the understanding of a subject matter – presumably not yet accessible to them – gradually, through a set of explicative devices . It implies, thus, the ideal

of helping them to overcome their supposed erratic efforts by leading them through a gradual and methodical way in their quest for higher knowledge and critical consciousness. This intellectual journey – previously appropriated, cultivated, and now imparted by the schoolmaster – should be aimed at the promoting the emancipation of those who shared the journey with him. A trajectory that, starting from an initial inequality - between the master and disciple or between a teacher and his or her students - promises the achievement of equality and emancipation as a reward for a long-lasting educational process.

For Jacotot, however, this journey – as generous as its promises may sound – leads rather to stultification than to personal or collective emancipation. And this so happens because the proposed journey always takes emancipation as a *goal* to be reached in a *future* and not as an axiom to be adopted in the *present*, asserts Jacotot. When conceived as an *empirical fact* characterizing present social and educational order, inequality may only produce promises of a future equality; an objective whose destiny is, paradoxically, eternally postponed as a reality to come, as a future to be built. For Jacotot, on the contrary, equality should not be taken as an *empirical fact*, but rather as an *axiom*; as a departing point or political conviction capable of leading someone to act in such a way so as to verify its potential manifestation as a *present experience*, and not as a promise for a future yet to come. Jacotot assumes the axiom of the *equality of intelligences* as an example of this act of potential verification in present circumstances. He does not conceive intelligence as a psychological substance or a fact, nor as a capacity one may measure and translate into an arbitrary hierarchy based on a mathematical scale or magnitude. Intelligence is rather seen as a manifestation of a common capacity equally shared by each and every one of us. A unique power that may take different forms of manifestation: from glove manufacturing to solving a mathematical problem; from weaving a philosophical argument to painting a picture. It is equally present in the initial words of a child and in the complex rhetoric of a political leader. Intelligence is just a name for that common capacity all human beings have to produce and understand objects and practices that attest their equal potential to appreciate the common world and add a personal contribution to it.

Hence, for Jacotot, the equality of intelligences - and intellectual capacities - is neither a fact nor an objective of educational action. It is rather the master's starting point for educational action. More than a theoretical presupposition, the equality of intelligences is a practical axiom that challenges the educator to create his own ways of verifying the equal capacity of everyone to understand, translate and produce works that attest human intelligence as an equally shared faculty. The verification of equality becomes, therefore, a self-assumed task of creating forms of exhibition, through acts always situated in the present and tangible for everyone: the capacity of thinking by oneself, without any need to resort to a master whose intelligence interposes itself – through *explanation* – between the students and the subject matter (be it a book,

a work of art or any object created by human intelligence). The schoolmaster who leads his students through *explanation* – statements, questions, or instructions designed to guide the students him through challenges, methods, and procedures previously planned by the teacher – does not emancipate but rather stultifies his pupil. And the master stultifies not necessarily because he resorts to any kind of authoritarian method, but because he acts under the assumption that without his explanation, without his knowledge of the common subject matter and the forms of its didactic transmission, the pupil to whom he addresses would be unable to understand it. In so doing, he submits his student's intelligence to his own; establishes a hierarchy whose future overcoming depends on the student's conformation to a previously conceived model or trajectory, designed by the schoolmaster himself.

Subjecting the student's intelligence to a gradual and progressive course by the schoolmaster's didactic sequences sets up what Jacotot calls the logic of the explanatory system, for which "[...] one can only truly know something if it has been *understood*. And in order to understand it, he must be given an explanation, so that the word of the master puts an end to the mutism of the subject matter being taught" (Rancière, 1987, p. 12). The thoughtless acceptance of this principle - which has historically established itself as the engine of pedagogical activity and the central characteristic of the school form - hides a paradox for Jacotot: how can a teacher explain a book, made up of a set of arguments, if not by a new set of arguments? Why, then, would the student need a new set of oral arguments whose object is precisely the one written on a book which the student may evaluate on his own? If the student can understand the teacher's arguments, why would he not be able to understand those arguments presented to him on the book? And in case he is considered incapable of understanding the book's arguments, why would he not be equally incapable of understanding the teacher's statements? Aren't they analogous? Should the teacher, then, present a second explanation capable of explaining the first, and so on *ad infinitum*?

Indeed, more than implying a paradox and a regression to infinite, the logic of the explanatory system - and its discourse of equality as a promise to be accomplished in the future - masks the distance that this system creates between student and the subject matter he or she studies. It also masks the gap the schoolmaster himself establishes between the work which is produced by someone's intelligence and the student's intelligence, which interacts with it through his personal understanding. The effect of this imposed distance is not the promised future equality to be reached at the end of the process, but rather the endless reproduction of the belief that the student is incapable of learning on his own.

The schoolmaster's secret is to be able to acknowledge the distance between the taught subject matter and the student to whom he addresses, the distance between learning and understanding. The explicator schoolmaster is the one who establishes and abolishes that distance, the

one who implants and reduces it through his word (Rancière, 1987, p. 13).

Explanation is not, therefore, a remedy to overcome the student's incapacity, but merely the operation by which the schoolmaster establishes this incapacity by foreseeing a journey and a final destination to which the student should converge. By establishing the equality of intelligences and capacities as a future goal, he abolishes equality and emancipation as possibilities embodied in the present. Targeting equality as a destiny, he frustrates it as experience to take place here and now.

That was the conclusion to which Jacotot had come to as a result of a timeliness which he faced as an intellectual adventure: the fact that his Dutch-speaking pupils learned French without any kind of teaching or instruction offered by him. These young college students taught themselves something they had previously ignored, resorting merely to their own intellectual powers. As there was no common language between these young students of the University of Leuven and Jacotot, they learned French not as the consequence of their professor's explanations, but rather as the result of a systematic analysis and an attentive attitude to a common object: the bilingual edition of the book *Le Télémaque*. Guided by this experience that sprang out from mere chance, Jacotot emancipated himself from his role as a master-explicator in favor of a new kind of relationship to be established with those who wanted to learn. He became an "emancipator master" who, by ignoring something (the Dutch language) led his students to create their own learning pathways through a careful analysis of a common object. As an emancipator master, he did not set himself out to guide them through *his* previous established way, but rather encouraged them to follow *their own paths* in an intellectual adventure. More than learning French, they learned how to verify the equality of intelligences – the equal capacity of every human being to understand the expression of someone else's intelligence – as a present possibility and not as a future destination.

For Jacotot it was not a matter of developing a new pedagogical method, whose usage could be compared to equivalent pedagogical procedures. He did not propose a didactic device, but a political belief, or opinion, capable of being verified by an act: the conviction that "[...] one can learn by oneself, without the aid of an explicator schoolmaster whenever one wants, pressed either by the tension of his own desire or by the force of circumstances" (Rancière, 1987, p. 24). In accordance with this conviction, an "emancipator schoolmaster" shall act not upon his students' intelligence, but upon his will in order to encourage them to leave the circle of powerlessness marked by the belief on the dependency of explanations derived from the inequality of intelligences. And they may reach emancipation resorting to their own cognitive powers, liberating their intelligence to act freely upon a common object, with no need of any mediation performed by the teacher's intelligence. So, rather than waiting for equality and emancipation as results of an explicative educational process, the schoolmasters accomplishes his commitment to emancipation leading his student to trust the equal capac-

ity of each and every one to produce intelligent acts, to understand and translate for themselves any manifestation of human intelligence. The mastery of the ignorant schoolmaster does not lie, therefore, in any sort of supposed intellectual superiority or illuminated consciousness, but in a political conviction that leads him to create the conditions for an *experience of equality*, capable of subverting the pre-established distribution of places and roles ordered by arbitrary conventions naturalized as inequalities. Jacotot operates, thus, a double shift. On one hand, emancipation ceases to be conceived as a goal to be reached as the result of an educational process to be considered rather as its starting point. On the other hand, the teacher is no more thought as the students' intellectual guide, but simply as someone capable of acting upon their will, so that they may emancipate themselves by tracing their own path to verify the equality of each one with everyone else.

Rancière describes this episode that stands as a rupture in Jacotot's thought as a grain of sand that, suddenly and by chance, stops the gears of pedagogical mechanisms of transmission, making its mere and thoughtless continuity unfeasible. A metaphor that could well be applied to Rancière's own book, whose reading challenges all those who, like me, had in school experience the triggering element of an intellectual, political and sociocultural emancipation and who, by virtue of that same experience, chose education as a field of struggle for equality and emancipation. It is, therefore, a matter of making an effort - not only personal, but of a whole generation - in order to try to reconcile ourselves with our past experience and with our hopes concerning the future in face of the challenges that Jacotot's thought poses to us when, for example, he argues that:

Explaining things to students is to prove that they would understand nothing if someone did not explain them. To transmit progressively the knowledge that will make the child equal to its teachers is to reproduce at every step the device that indefinitely establishes the distance [between the intelligences of the teacher and the student]. It is to transform the gap between more and less knowledge into inequality of intelligences [...]. There is no need to establish schools to instruct the people. The children must be told that they can emancipate themselves at the price of breaking up with this belief that infiltrates our deepest ways of being and thinking (Rancière, 2012a, online, our italics).

Should we, in face of Rancière's provocative arguments, surrender to the maxim that, at least at the institutional level of school relationships, the time for emancipation is over, depriving, thus, our professional practice of any potential political meaning? Or should we rather, as Rancière announced years later, state that the acceptance of this impossibility could function precisely as a kind of interdiction to emancipatory acts "[...] intended to assert that the existing order is the only possible one"? (Rancière, 2011, p. 73). The reflections here outlined, more than an unambiguous answer to this question, seek to draw at-

tention to the ambiguous and problematic character of both the notion of “transmission” and the political meaning – or supposed irrelevance – attributed to school in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. As we shall argue, in some of Rancière’s latter writings (1988; 2014), school is portrayed rather as an institution that is not in perfect continuity with the productive and social order, keeping a potential and peculiar commitment to the experiences of equality and emancipation. A commitment that does not conceive equality as a measurable product that the State apparatus offers as a promise, but as an incessant present movement of agents who, through action and speech, seek to verify and attest equality in their everyday practices.

Transmission, the Initiator Master and the Skholé

In describing Jacotot’s experience, Rancière often insists that the central role of the emancipator master is not to *transmit* knowledge but to act upon his students’ will, instilling in them the will to power of those who conceive themselves as gifted of an intelligence which is equally shared by all men. The emancipating master thus refuses to position himself as the bearer of a mediating knowledge between a common object of study (such as the book *Le Télémaque*) and the intelligence of those who set themselves in a quest to appropriate it through a movement of their own: “He did not *transmit* any science he possessed nor explained them anything related to the flexions of the French language. [...] He only commanded them to go through a forest whose exits he ignored” (Rancière, 1987, p. 19, emphasis added). In short, according to Rancière, Jacotot transmitted nothing to them, but only demanded from his students a certain kind of inquisitive attitude towards the common object (the book) and the firm conviction that they would be able to learn on their own as an effect of a free will and of their intelligence, conceived as equal and common to all men.

But to what extent does the mere fact of acknowledging that Jacotot did not offer them prior information or any sort of instruction about the syntax or grammar of the French language allow us to state that, in fact, there was no *transmission* from teacher towards students? Would it not be plausible to argue Jacotot did undoubtedly transmit them something, even if not necessarily with his words or knowledge, but through his gestures, his conceptions and even through his life story? Could we not argue that, although his students had developed their own way in learning French language, they did it because their master had *transmitted* them, by his deeds and words, the political principle he had inherited from revolutionary movements, that is, the passion for equality? It is not also plausible to argue that the peculiar way Jacotot addressed to his students helped to transmit them some of pedagogical ideals from the *Écoles Centrales*, created by the French Revolution, in which the free citizens’ education was to be accomplished not through formal lessons but by means of their engagement in workshops and intellectual experiences?

Jacotot had unambiguously *transmitted something* to his students. Even though the object of this transmission was not his knowledge of the French language, he did transmit them something they could probably not even immediately identify, nominate or appoint. This is, in fact, a recurring experience in our school life. How many of our masters and teachers have not transmitted or conveyed to us something of ineffable through the mere precision of their gestures, through the rigor of their demonstrations or the intensity of their passion for a cultural object or field of knowledge? By suggesting an equivalence between the notions of *transmission* and *teaching* - and identifying the latter one with the logic of the explanatory system - Rancière obscures the peculiarity of the semantic field of each one of them and the complex relationships they keep with each other.

In fact, while the notion of “teaching”, at least in its most current uses, refers to a deliberate and intentional effort to promote the learning of information, rules, capacities and procedures - generally in a very specific and previously established domain -, “transmission” can operate - and often does - informally, through cultural impregnation resulting from less or more intense coexistence with practices, values or principles. It is in this way, for example, that we initiate ourselves into a gastronomic culture, without necessarily resorting to any formal instruction imparted by someone whose task would be to deliberately inform us about what a particular culture considers edible or which are the rites linked to the habits of having a meal at a certain moment of the day or on a special occasion, like Christmas. The intellectual virtues, at least according to Aristotle (2004), are cultivated and transmitted to new generations in precisely the same way: imparted rather by example and daily practice than by verbal instruction or explicit teaching.

Michael Oakeshott, in his analysis of the relationship between teaching activity and the learning process of intellectual virtues, evokes an experience that, although personal and singular, elucidates some central aspects of this complex relationship that may be traced between school experience, formal education and the transmission of intellectual principles, values and practices:

[...] if you asked me the circumstances in which patience, accuracy, economy, elegance and style were revealed to me for the first time, I would say that I did not get to recognize them in literature or in the geometric demonstration until they had previously been recognized in other fields; and I owe this recognition to a gym instructor, for whom gym was an intellectual art. And I owe this to him not because of anything he said, but because he was a man of patience, precision, economy, elegance and style (Oakeshott, 1989, p. 62).

What this brief narrative reveals is the fact that, in parallel and simultaneously with formal education - or the logic of the explanatory system, in Jacotot's words -, the school experience has the potential to create the conditions for another sort of intergenerational transmis-

sion. We do not deal, in this case, with an enunciable content, such as pieces of information, set of procedures and rules that a teacher often imparts in his classes through his explanations, although – it must be pointed out – this transmission of intellectual virtues is always conveyed through the content of a school discipline or practice. We may, then, call it a sort of “by-product” of the activity of school teaching and learning which may be present in quite different intellectual and teaching activities. That is the case, for example, of the specific sort of relationship each singular teacher establishes with his subject matter or discipline or even his personal style in presenting a curricular object or practice, such as gymnastics or the book *Le Télémaque*. It may also be the sort of interpersonal relationships that emerge from this encounter between students and teachers mediated by a common object in a school context. It is very unlikely that Jacotot could instill in his students the conviction of equality of intelligences and its power through the mere announcement of a theoretical concept of equality or of intelligence, for example. It is also hardly credible that Oakeshott would have learned the intellectual virtues he describes through their simple rhetorical exposition by his gym instructor. But if they did so, if they learned them, it is reasonable to assume that they did it as a result of a *transmission* that took place within the framework of a school experience, even though such transmission – or an *initiation* process – may not have been conveyed through verbal explanations or oral expositions.

These observations do not intend to disqualify Jacotot’s criticisms of the logic of the explanatory system and its possible stultifying effects upon students. In many ways Jacotot’s reproach may be conceived as a critical response to what Bernard Lahire (2008) identified as the growing “pedagogization process of every sort of social learning”, brought about as a result of the rise of the “school form” – *la forme scolaire* – which may be characterized as a process of gradual institutionalization of the transmission of formalized knowledge, that is, knowledge objectified and codified in grammars and manuals that standardize its practical use, transforming it into an object of study and analysis, rather than of immediate usage. This codification makes it possible to fragment a cultural object into a series of abstract elements which may be imparted and taught in a pedagogical sequence of acts or stages. This is the case, for example, of learning how to read and write resorting to breaking down words into syllables or in which syntactic functions are separated from the context of use, so that a text may end up losing its quality of a cultural object to become a pedagogical tool in the service of the logic of explanatory mechanisms. The recent pedagogization of learning a sport like football through isolated exercises of kicking a ball or dribbling, dissociated from the effective practice of a game illustrates, in a striking way, this process of pedagogization of a social learning process dissociated from the actual context of effective and concrete social practice.

In this sense, the generalization of the *school form* as a device for the dissemination of literate culture - which begins in the context in

which Jacotot weaves his criticisms of the logic of the explanatory system - engenders the creation of a specialized category of professional educators, certified and recruited by the State and whose knowledge should encompass not only the contents to be taught, but also the rationalization of their acquisition and their evaluation processes. Thus, the choice in favor of a formal and abstract learning relationship becomes widespread, differing substantially from the learning relationships in and through practice, current in societies marked by oral forms of socialization or in learning processes typical of medieval corporations, for example. The uprising of this social experience brought about the consolidation of a *school form* characterized by the segmentation of knowledge, by the gradual teaching of its contents, by the hierarchization of students' performances and their comparison to pre-established final learning objectives taken as aims to which everyone should converge, although few really do.

It is, therefore, as a critical response to these social changes - which mark each student's *proper* place in the hierarchy of school performances, reaffirming inequality of intelligences as a source of legitimation for the arbitrary and unequal sharing of wealth, space and speech in society - that Jacotot proposes the abolition of those *explanatory practices* that create a gap between the human intelligence reified in any cultural object (such as a book, a pair of gloves, a mathematical algorithm) and the students' intelligence, that is, their equal capacity to analyze, understand and translate these objects' meaning and form of working resorting only to their own will and intelligence. But despite the accuracy of his critical diagnosis and the political relevance of his assumption on the equality of intelligences, his suggestion to abolish any sort of mediation to be carried on by the teacher engenders new problems.

The banishment of this mediation supposes, for example, that this complex legacy of symbolic experiences crystallized in objects of a culture presents itself to those who are being initiated into it without any kind of opacity. It also supposes that these cultural objects from a common world could unveil their possible social and political significance by their simple appearance, regardless of being the object of an intergenerational discourse. In opposition to this belief, I would like to suggest a third figure in this categorical framework proposed by Jacotot and narrated by Rancière. A figure situated at an equidistant point between Jacotot's emancipator master - who acts only upon the students' will - and the stultifying master idealized by the *school form*, whose explanation precludes the students from believing in their equal capacity to establish their own relationship of his own in relation to cultural objects and learning experiences.

This figure is the *master* as an *initiator*. A master can be an initiator because, initiated in the arts of a field of knowledge or a social practice, he exposes, through his gestures, deeds and words, the personal relationship he came to establish with certain practices and objects of a culture, reconfiguring their meaning the light of his present experience.

He becomes an *initiator* because he assumes that the equal right of each and every one to understand, enjoy, translate and produce cultural objects can only be accomplished inscribing an individual into a cultural and historical heritage with which he will develop his own and personal relationship. A master can be an initiator when he presents his students his path through a fragment of this heritage, encouraging them to find their own way among equals. But he may also be considered an initiator because he recognizes each of his students not only as individuals endowed with equal intelligence, but also as someone capable of starting *something new*, of being an *initium*, as Arendt refers to those who are the *newcomers* into a preexisting world of human achievements. Newcomers that represent, at the same time, a *beginning* and a being capable of beginning something unexpected, for, as she asserts in *The Human Condition*, although “men must die, they were not born to die but to begin something new” (2011, p. 307). This human capacity to act so as to break up with the shackles of the past and begin something unpredictable is precisely how she conceives *freedom*: an ontologically capacity, rooted in every man, to renew the world and to appear as a unique person in face of his (her) equals. This process, although singular and personal, may only be carried on through an incessant dialogue that every newcomer and each generation must engage with the vast domains of the past that are still present today.

An initiator is a master for whom the equalizing potential of school experience is not accomplished through its future - and always uncertain - socioeconomic effects on society, but rather through the initiation of every child in an unique social experience embodied in the ideal of a public and democratic school that may offer each one of them a *free time* (as expressed in the Greek concept of *scholè*) in which (s)he is not subject to the demands of capital, to the production and the satisfaction of vital needs. As Rancière himself points out, in an article written a few years after the publication of *The Ignorant Master*:

School is not a function or place defined by an external social purpose. Rather, it is a symbolic form, a norm of separation of spaces, times and social occupations. School is not fundamentally about learning, but about free time. The greek *scholè* separates two uses of time: the use of those whose obligations of labor and production prevent them from doing something else; and the use of those who have time, that is, who are exempt from the demands of work. [... The school] is, above all, the place separated from the needs of work, the place where one learns by learning, the place of equality *par excellence* (Rancière, 1988, p. 2).

Conceiving emancipation and equality as potentialities of the school experience does not imply either adhering to the liberal discourse of the meritocratic order of school performance and intellectual capacities nor to regard it as a resource aimed at the achievement of an extrinsic end: socioeconomic equality, whose political struggle contemporary societies seem to have abdicated in favor of their transformation into an educational objective.

If there may be an emancipating potential in school experience, it seems rather to reside in the specificity of its form: “[...] the democratic public school is already redistribution: it subtracts part of the wealth from the unequal world of production to dedicate it to the luxury that represents the constitution of an egalitarian space-time” (Rancière, 1988, p. 3). This egalitarian time-space peculiar to the school experience is that of the democratization of what was once a distinctive privilege of the Greek agrarian-military aristocracy and which became a common right to every citizen during the emergence of Athenian democracy: the *scholé*, conceived as a time and a space dedicated to an educational process of subjectivation (*paideia*). It is, therefore, a time of education, that is, a time for learning experiences whose virtue is not to enable someone to do something - to have a profession, for example - nor to determine their place in the unequal sharing of professions, skills or social privileges. The school form, historically linked to the *scholé* ideal, is a time-space aimed at providing each and every one with the opportunity to constitute him or herself as a singular subject living among equals. Because the time of emancipation is not a promise for the future; it is rather the possibility to live the present in dialogue with the various worlds and times of human experience. It is the time to live as equals in a world of inequality.

Received on April 12, 2019

Approved on August 05, 2019

References

- ARENDDT, Hannah. **A Condição Humana**. Rio de Janeiro: Forense, 2011.
- ARISTÓTELES. **Ética a Nicômaco**. Tradução: António Caeiro Lisboa: Quetzal, 2004.
- BRAYNER, Flávio. **Para Além da Educação Popular**. Campinas: Mercado das Letras, 2018.
- DURKHEIM, Émile. **L'Évolution Pédagogique em France**. Paris: PUF, 2014.
- LAHIRE, Bernard. **La Raison Scholaire**. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008.
- OAKESHOTT, Michael. Teaching and Learning. In: OAKESHOTT, Michael. **The Voice of Liberal Learning**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. P. 43-62.
- RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Le Maître Ignorant**: cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle. Paris: Fayard, 1987.
- RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **École, Production, Égalité**. Paris: Horlieu, 1988. Disponível em: <<http://horlieu-editions.com/textes-en-ligne/politique/ranciere-ecole-production-egalite.pdf>>. Acesso em: 15 mar. 2019.
- RANCIÈRE, Jacques. O Tempo da Emancipação já Passou? In: DIDI-HUBERMAN, Georges et al. **A República por vir**: arte, política e pensamento para o século XXI. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2011. P. 73-100.
- RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **De que se Trata la Emancipacion Intelectual?** (Discurso). San Martín: Universidade Nacional de San Martín, out. 2012a. Disponível em: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Y_KwkAnjac>. Acesso em: 15 mar. 2019.

RANCIÈRE, Jacques. Prefácio à Edição Brasileira. In: RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **O Mestre Ignorante**. Tradução: Lilian do Valle. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2012b. P. 9-16.

RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Nas Margens do Político**. Lisboa: KKYM, 2014.

José Sérgio Fonseca de Carvalho is Full Professor at the Faculty of Education in the University of São Paulo, Brazil.

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0074-0872>

E-mail: jsfcusp@usp.br

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International. Available at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>.