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Mascarenhas, Leonardo Balbino
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Biopolitics, Education and Resistance in the Contemporary World

Leonardo Balbino Mascarenhas¹

¹Universidade Federal de Alfenas (UNIFAL), Varginha/MG – Brazil

ABSTRACT – Biopolitics, Education and Resistance in the Contemporary World. The present work has two main objectives: first, to examine the ways in which the technologies of power in contemporary capitalism produce forms of subjection and lowering, in life in general and in education in particular. Next, it seeks to analyze the conditions for the production of resistance strategies to biopower. In this way, the aim is to interrogate the present time, using analytical tools that allow to stress the practices instituted in the education field, as well as to put in motion the processes of subjectivation created and experienced there. In this sense, it is important not only to diagnose a certain condition (of the school, of education, of the contemporary world), but above all to cross it with problematizations that may open new possibilities for the construction of existence.

Keywords: Education. Biopolitics. Resistance.

RESUMO – Biopolítica, Educação e Resistência na Contemporaneidade.

O presente trabalho possui dois objetivos principais: em primeiro lugar, examinar os modos pelos quais as tecnologias de poder no capitalismo contemporâneo produzem formas de assujeitamento e rebaixamento, na vida em geral e na educação em particular. Em seguida, busca-se analisar as condições para a produção de estratégias de resistência ao biopoder. Pretende-se, desta maneira, interrogar o tempo presente, valendo-se de instrumentos de análise que permitam tensionar as práticas instituídas no campo da educação, assim como colocar em movimento os processos de subjetivação ali criados e vivenciados. Nesse sentido, importa não apenas diagnosticar uma certa condição (da escola, da educação, do mundo contemporâneo), mas sobretudo atravessá-la com problematizações que possam abrir novas possibilidades de construção da existência.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Biopolítica. Resistência.

The Name of Fear

Image 1 – Pieces of the video for dissemination of *The Name of Fear*, an exhibition by the artist Rivane Neuenschwander



Source: Artist Talks (2015). Image by the author.

In 2015, the Brazilian plastic artist Rivane Neuenschwander presented in London the results of her project titled *The Name of Fear* (Image 1). The work involved children from four British schools who, during a series of art workshops, reported their fears and designed capes that could protect them against these fears. The drawings were transformed by the artist, in partnership with other professionals, into real capes to be worn.

The fears listed by the children were absolutely unique: fear of the end of the world; of the first day of class; of nightmares; of sadness; of cookie crumbs; of fire; of God; of clowns; of death; of airplanes¹. Double movement produced by the project: on one hand, to think about what bothers and terrifies; on the other, to produce some form of protection against these annoyances and fears.

The use of this invented protection, that is the result of a work of care, reflection and creation, is not an end in itself; it carries an ability to *make cease* something that presses, constrains, subjects and lowers the power, thus creating conditions of possibility for other forces to develop – forces that provide other forms of life, lighter, more joyful and safer of themselves.

It would not hurt if we could all learn to create our own protection capes.

Introduction

Education, as a domain of knowledge, has always been crossed by multiple practices and discourses, which put in motion and dispute different worldviews and political projects. As a meeting point of knowledge that came from sociology, psychology, philosophy, pedagogy, economy, among others, it is an arena in which countless power games are produced, with the action of different forces, producing multiple effects. The school – this emblematic institution that materializes and is often viewed, in a reductionist way, as the place of education *par excellence* – is perhaps the device in which tensions and relations of power have greater visibility.

The school is a modern institution, which means that, previously, it was common to educate and learn in different ways. It was only from the end of the 18th century on, with the emergence of industrial societies, that the model of school we know and practice today, on a large scale, was constituted. We created an institution in the image and likeness of factories and prisons: it strives to organize and distribute human bodies in time and space; to apply the same syllabus to all, based on discipline and domestication; to define the expected output parameters, check the quality of the *products* at the end of the process, release the appropriate ones and retain the misfits, applying the punishments and corrections that best suit them; also, it repeats the process infinitely, in order to guarantee standardization and scale (Foucault, 1995).

When the role of educating was relied to a disciplinary institution, with the shape of an industrial factory, what happened was not exactly a change of conception as to the role of education, but rather a continuity: the disciplines came to certify that the ideals of equality, freedom and fraternity, flags of the new social order, submitted themselves to social and class control, guaranteeing the maintenance of social differences and privileges, and the reproduction of the prevailing order and morality. However, along with this update of power technologies, at the turn of modern societies, many forms of resistance and projects dedicated to criticizing the school institution have also been developed, seeking to make it effectively contribute to social transformation and reduction of inequalities. A large number of education professionals and thinkers² have dedicated, especially since the 20th century, to denounce this silent permissiveness of the school, as well as managed to transform it, where it is possible to see its effects: in the daily life of the classrooms and school corridors, in the midst of attendance control diaries, physical and curricular grids, assessments and tests of all kinds, beadles and school managers, control and serialization of the times, legitimation of certain knowledge to the detriment of others, imposition of rules of conduct and forms of control of clothing and language, among others.

Currently, although they are still minority when analyzed in a broad educational spectrum, we can find a wide diversity of alternative experiences of education, such as democratic school movements³; new forms of rural education and indigenous education; *slow learning* prac-

tices⁴, home education, and *informal education*, among others. Each of these experiences has its peculiarities and singularities, but they share at least one fundamental aspect: they all criticize the modern model of education, whose aims, mechanisms of functioning and results distracts its actors from the possibility of constructing dignified, autonomous and inventive ways of life.

We could then shift education from this place of control and subjectivation, to think of it not as training, transmission and assimilation of contents, but as a constant process of transformation of what one is, of production of singularities, in multiple territories. An education that takes place in the movements of life and in the multiplicities that it implies. To think of an education that creates for itself new values, that allows for a lighter, more cheerful and powerful life.

However, the mutations of advanced capitalism, together with the intensification of the globalization processes and the neoliberal agenda, threaten even the most progressive experiences in education, as they make everything potentially registrable and attachable to its production machines. The capitalist machine acts, on the one hand, extracting from everything its maximum usefulness and productivity, and on the other, diminishing its potency and lowering life (Deleuze; Guattari, 1983). As a result, forms of resistance are often weakened. The risks are multiplying everywhere. They are perceptible, for instance, in the increasing institutionalization and bureaucratization of the educational practices that, among other effects, transform educators into school managers; in legal frameworks that affect the alternative educational practices, limiting them or even making them impossible; in the constant threat of reduction and lack of resources with which the educational experiences coexists; in technological transformations and in the labor world, which, together with the public administration, lead to casualization of the teacher's labor, pressure the schools and demand new content agendas and new ways of making; in the massification of consumption and in the *American way of life*, which devalue the singularities and knowledge of each culture and emphasize only one way of life to the detriment of all others; etc.

In light of this, this text is an invitation to analyze some of the mutations of contemporary capitalism, its current forms of control and the processes of subjectivation derived from it, as well as the strategies that can be invested against them. A double movement, therefore. However, it is not intended here to exhaust the theme, or to approach it in a totalizing or definitive way. Neither was it sought to make a repertory of resistance practices in order to facilitate their control or to shut down their potential in manuals and other forms of reproduction. The purpose of this text is to try to interrogate the present time, seeking to achieve this through analysis instruments that allow stressing the practices instituted in the field of education, as well as putting in motion the subjectivation processes created and experienced there. In this sense, it is important not only to diagnose a certain condition (of the school, of education, of the contemporary world), but above all to cross it with problematizations that may open new possibilities for the construction

of existence. And we try to do this in dialogue and inspired by the works of Foucault, Deleuze and Pelbart, among others.

Finally, it is a matter of finding – and even inventing – in the interstices of contemporary forms of biopower, their carelessness, small interruptions, gaps, in short, their fleeting openings, where the capitalist machine decides to doze, ways of believing again in the world, breaths, blows that allow us to increase our power to act and affirm life – even in procedural forms. Because, as Pelbart said (2013, p. 13), “[...] there is a biopolitical strangulation that calls for gaps, however small they may be, to reactivate our political, theoretical, affective, bodily, territorial, existential imagination”.

Biopolitics and Education

What mutations of capitalism and subjectivation processes are we talking about? What risks, possibilities and threats do they present to us? Nowadays, the terminologies are multiplying: post-Fordist society/ capitalism, information and knowledge society, advanced capitalism, cultural capitalism, cognitive capitalism, post-modern capitalism... It is not the case to define and distinguish each one here: it matters to us to investigate how some specific ways of thinking and living nowadays are becoming massified, crystallized, and at the same time are preventing other life forms from happening. In other words, it is a question of analyzing how worlds that are ready to be inhabited in certain forms, or forms ready to inhabit certain worlds, are being fabricated, at the expense of others.

Foucault used the term *biopolitics* to designate the set of practices of life control and management. This set is developed by the articulation of two distinct forms of power-knowledge: on the one hand, the disciplines, born in the 17th century, dedicated to the training of the body, to the organization and extraction of its forces and utilities; on the other hand, the control and regulation of populations, which began to emerge in the second half of the 18th century and which focus on attention to births and mortality, health length and longevity. Thus, a new form of power is being born, based on an *anatomy-politics of the body*: it is the *biopower*, mark and greater expression of biopolitics:

[...] one would have to speak of bio-power to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life. [...] There is no need either to lay further stress on the proliferation of political technologies that ensued, investing the body, health, modes of subsistence and habitation, living conditions, the whole space of existence (Foucault, 1978, p. 143-144).

Power that seeks to manage life, power to *foster life* or *let die*, unlike the old sovereign power, which was based on *take life or let live*. This biopower also differs from the disciplinary power, since it aims not only at the control of individual behaviors, but also at the normalization of

the conduct of the human species in a broad way. Biopower operates in the sense of “[...] distributing the living in the domain of value and utility” (Foucault, 1976, p. 144); it selects knowledge, organizes and applies techniques and instruments; it brings together linguistic, medical, judicial, domestic, artistic, religious and architectural discourses and institutions, among others, therefore producing the naturalization of some codes of conduct and ways of thought and eliminating others that are considered to be misfits, nonconformities, residuals, unproductive, useless, abnormal.

Biopolitics refers to the transformation of *disciplinary societies*, to an improvement of practices of subjection. It is what can correspond to what Deleuze called *societies of control*: if disciplinary societies were marked by confinement and disciplines, societies of control are rather modular, they operate through amorphous, subtle and diffuse practices, but are felt directly on the human body.

Confinements are *molds*, different moldings, while controls are a *modulation*, like a self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another. [...]. Individuals become ‘dividuals’ and masses become samples, data, markets, or ‘banks’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 178-180, author’s emphasis).

Disciplinary societies were characterized by the emphasis on ownership of the means of production; by the centrality of closed institutions (factories, hospitals, prisons, asylums, schools, the family itself), whose logic consisted in concentrating, organizing and distributing human bodies through space; also, they were characterized by the use of energy machines and an economy based on the massive production of goods.

Foucault accurately placed the student’s body beside the bodies of the madman, the prisoner, the sick and the worker. The disciplinary practices are the same: concentrating the bodies and organizing them in time and space; correct the postures and define the precise times and movements that can make the bodies. Training, modeling and correction: it is a whole machinery, of knowledge and power, that turns against the body:

A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience) (Foucault, 1995, p. 138).

At school, disciplinary practices are still quite visible today: in classroom architecture and ergonomics, whose prescriptions define

specific modes of occupying school, ways of sitting, talking, listening, and using the bodies; in the hypervaluation of abstract knowledge to the detriment of the body and life, which results in the fetishization of the concept and discourse, and in the devaluation of the knowledge that can mobilize the body differently in school, especially dance, theater, physical education and music, always relegated to less important roles in formal education. Also, in the setting of training cycles, division and serialization of contents, in the crystallization of learning times, regular assessments and continuous checks, which focus on learning and behavior, determining what, how and when to learn, all of this calling for an obedience that wants to domesticate the student's body and soul (Image 2).

In turn, the societies of control operate according to a distinct logic, of continuous modulation and connection, of floating exchanges, with an abstract and diffuse control, no longer through confinement and discipline. The factory was replaced by the company, by the possibility of distance work or without an inspector, but accompanied by the regime of productivity goals. In the economy, financialization and capital markets have become so global and important that production itself becomes expendable. In education, the school can be replaced by distance education, the training cycles never end, and there is always a need for continuing education imposed by the market. In health we witness the growth of preventive medicine, the culture of permanent health care, and the multiplication of the health insurance market, whose fundamental principle is *pay but do not use*. The energy machines of disciplinary societies have given way to computational technologies, to biotechnology and to artificial intelligence. Even money becomes gradually obsolete, more abstract, the currency being replaced by electronic financial transactions (Deleuze, 1995).

In the Brazilian case in particular, but following a global trend, it is evident several manifestations of these biopolitical practices in education: the growing intertwining of educational policies with market rules and principles; the growth of the culture of continued formation, not as a will to learn, driven by curiosity and the pleasure one can draw from knowing something new, but while searching for titles, fear of unemployment, not having the so-called *employability*, or simply fear of leaving the university behind and ending a cycle; the increase of academic demands, molded by the market, which reduce the free time experience, fundamental for the intellectual work and for a healthy life; the financial precariousness of schools and universities, the privatization waves of the public education, and the emphasis on technical and pragmatic courses that correspond to the market demands; the productivity goals in the postgraduate programs as a mechanism for control and distribution of resources, and the regulation they have initiated (such as disputes between the postgraduate programs for scarce resources; stimulation of the overvaluation of the academic résumé, of the production of papers and irrelevant academic events; progressive transformation of teachers into managers; facilitation in building abusive relationships between advisors and advisees, etc.).

It should be noted that we are currently living an overlap between these two forms of social organization: it is a time of passage from one to the other, from disciplines to controls, but also, and above all, a time of coexistence, in which these two models meet, combine and cross us, constituting subjectivation processes, that is, habitable surfaces, *ways in which we are led to live*. In all fields of social life, it is possible to perceive the exercise of a biopower, trying to conform us to be something, to live in specific ways, stiff and little open to differences.

Beyond the educational field, it is neither an exaggeration nor a novelty to affirm that we are currently experiencing a widespread torpor, a narcotization and demotion of the power to act, an extreme lack of political imagination and a heavy disbelief in the world, results of a broad and gradual process of automatization of subjectivities. On all sides we are led to establish and reproduce relationships that are little open to new connections and are not very flexible. We live in the age of compulsive consumption, associated with the search for ready worlds; from the cult to an idealized image of the body, with its most varied practices (from fitness to the commodification of good health practices, plastic surgeries, *pharmacopornography*⁵ and the medicalization of life). It is the time of information overflows, with its most varied deployments and devices (social media and mobile apps shaping behaviors and limiting coexistence with the difference, inserting everybody into virtual bubbles controlled by algorithms and artificial intelligence, and also stimulating an overexposure to images and the fugacity, uselessness and volatility of information). Also, is the time of a deepening of the transformations in the relations of production and labor (with the increasing casualization and transformation of labor in an abstract category, the demand of super productivity accompanied by the insecurity and constant threat of loss or reduction of employment, etc.); the growing sense that we live in an ever-accelerating time – marked by the excess of tasks to be accomplished, by the self-imputed pressure of having to be successful in everything – reinforced by the ideologies of success spread in the media; by the thought far from the present and always in what is yet to come, with anxiety being considered the *evil of the century*; also, by the culture of best sellers and TV series, which incessantly repeat their narrative and dramatic formulas that only appease the thought and *entertain*; by the increasing instrumentalisation of the practices of meditation, yoga and other *oriental models of existence*, sold as a remedy for the accelerated urban life.

Jorge Larrosa⁶ didactically suggested that we “never saw so many things happening, but yet the experience is increasingly rare” (Bondía, 2002, p. 21). The *experience* pointed out by Larrosa is that one capable of producing intensities, variations in the power to act on the world, affections, some degree of loss of self, decentration: “It is experience whatever ‘crosses us’, or touches us, or happens to us, and by passing us it forms and transforms us. Only the subject of experience is, therefore, open to his own transformation” (Bondía, 2002, pp. 25-26). Experience can be understood, then, as a condition for the affirmation of existence, for the singularization and production of differences and freedom.

However, this vital dimension of human life which is experience, which is to differ from itself, which is indeed the very foundation of all education, is now being reduced, becoming precarious, even eliminated, as a result of different biopolitical devices. In this sense, Jorge Larrosa analyzes the ways in which three distinct elements are arranged in the social field: excessive information, overwork and the sensation of an accelerated time (Bondía, 2002).

On the one hand, this rarity of the event, and the growing sense of emptying of the meanings of existence that accompanies it, is produced as we submit ourselves to the excesses of signs, images and other visual and sound stimuli, so present in everyday life now. We are all exposed to an absurd amount of information, often confusing quantity with quality, and we are summoned at all times to give our opinion on everything, to express ourselves... Often without sufficient elaboration, without taking the time and reflection enough for something really interesting and relevant to be said, shared, for something to happen. Deleuze had already pointed out – long before the popularization of the internet and social media, we must say – that we are in need of silence:

We sometimes go on as though people can't express themselves. In fact, they're always expressing themselves. The sorriest couples are those where the woman can't be pre-occupied or tired without the man saying 'What's wrong? Say something...', or the man, without the woman saying..., and so on. Radio and television have spread this spirit everywhere, and we're riddled with pointless talk, insane quantities of words and images. Stupidity's never blind or mute. So, it's not a problem of getting people to express themselves but of providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves. What a relief to have nothing to say, the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, and ever rarer, thing that might be worth saying (Deleuze, 1995, p. 129).

Along with the excess of information, we also suffer from overwork, resulting from a broad process of transformation of the economy and the forms of production. It is that the current capitalism, with the deepening of neoliberal technologies at the global level, whose effects multiply misery and increase the income concentration, no longer hides its agenda. The casualization of jobs is now openly advocated (under the false argument that this will solve employment crises and boost economies, a discourse that serves to conceal the maintenance of social privileges and inequalities); it is done a wide misleading propaganda of meritocracy and entrepreneurship (sold as solutions for the market deregulation and flexibilization of labor laws, and which act by blaming those who are excluded by the system); more and more, the submission to the laws of fiscal adjustment and the cut of social expenses are promoted, as a way of maintaining the capital gains and the speculation in

stratospheric levels; it is promoted the financialization of life on an enlarged scale, producing what Lazzarato called “[...] indebted man” (Lazzarato, 2014; 2012). Added to all this are the technological changes and the constant need to master new devices and ways of working, and we have as corresponding effects the increase of anxiety about the future, fear of unemployment, the naturalization of the idea that more training and information are necessary, and subjection to heavier work routines. All this also contributes to the reduction of experiences.

Finally, we can mention a certain temporality, the way we perceive and relate to time, as another factor that prevents us from having powerful experiences. It is because we feel the world is accelerating, there is always a feeling that *there is no time to lose*, or that we must *search for the lost time*.

[...] experience is increasingly rarer due to lack of time. Everything that happens goes extremely fast, and increasingly faster. And with that it is reduced to an ephemeral and instantaneous stimulus, immediately replaced by another stimulus or by another excitement equally ephemeral and instantaneous. The event happens to us in the form of a shock, of stimulation, of raw sensation, in the shape of the instantaneous, punctual, and fragmented experience. The speed with which events are given to us, and the obsession for the novelty and the new, which characterizes the modern world, hinders the meaningful connection between events. They also prevent memory, since each event is immediately replaced by another that equally excites us for a moment, but leaves no trace (Bondía, 2002, p. 23, author's translation).

In addition, our temporal experience is being colonized by the principles of the market: it is considered necessary to instrumentalize the time, to make it always useful (do not waste time, make things that will be useful in the future, that can improve your curriculum or improve your social position); even the leisure and recreation moments need to be planned, so that the maximum productivity can be extracted from them (plan the holiday trip or the weekend exhaustively, in order to *enjoy time*, look for activities that have the best cost-benefit ratio, etc.). In that sense, free time, the one that is not scanned and controlled by planning and functionality, is often viewed as boredom, waste, or even end up lived in a blameworthy way, as an *I should be doing something else*.

This relationship with time is also the result of a social technology, product of a social construction that hinders the emergence of other temporalities. Modernity decreed the hegemony of a mechanical time, linear and successive, time of quantities. Yet, one could conceive a time of qualities, whose reason is neither numerable nor successive: a time of Aion, time of duration, of intensities, of affirmation of life and event production⁷:

This dead time, which in a sense is a non-time, also baptized the 'in-time' is Aion. At this level, the event is no longer just the difference of things or states of things; it affects the human subjectivity, it inserts difference in the subject itself. If we call an event what changes the order of meaning (which made sense until the present moment became indifferent, and even opaque to us, and what we are now sensible to didn't make sense before), it must be concluded that the event has no place in chronological time, since it affects the very conditions of a chronology. On the contrary, it marks a cut, so that time is interrupted to resume on another plane (hence the expression 'between-time') (Zourabichvili, 2004, p. 11-12).

Stop Production, Empty the Body

We can then make the Nietzschean critique of the value of values, and ask: who needs these values over the human body? What types of existence imply a body thus lived? And, therefore, how can one establish new values over the body? How to produce forms of education, currently, that stimulate and enable other relationships with one's own body and new compositions with other bodies? How to restore the experience? What forms of care can boost power in the body? To bring forth new bodies, which are not subjected and mortified entities, but territories of the multiple, expressing singularities and intensive relations with the world, where experience is again possible and stimulated: that is a program of education and resistance to biopolitics.

The body without organs (BwO), Artaud's famous expression, much developed by Deleuze and Guattari, refers to a need to engender a paralyzation, to go through anti-production: "From a certain point of view, it would be much better if nothing worked, if nothing functioned [...] The full body without organs is the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable" (Deleuze; Guattari, 1983, p. 7-8). In this sense, Pelbart adds:

The whole thematization of the body-without-organs is a variation around this biopolitical theme par excellence, the life undoing itself of what imprisons it, of the organism, of the organs, of the inscription of the diverse powers on the body, or even of its reduction to bare life, dead-life, mummy-life, shell-life (Pelbart, 2013, p. 32-33).

The *body without organs*, this interruption, this cut, does not become a definitive state or place: it is a process, a form of passage. In other words, it is about blocking certain forces so that new and unique forms can be produced. To carry out continuous processes of *de-subjectivation* and *re-subjectivation*.

Perhaps it has been the madmen, the poets, and the children who best knew how to create bodies without organs for themselves, each in his own way, the madman finding in the experience of the crisis its most radical expression. It is that these three figures share a *schizo logic*, that

is, they produce incessantly singular modes of interpretation and relation with the world:

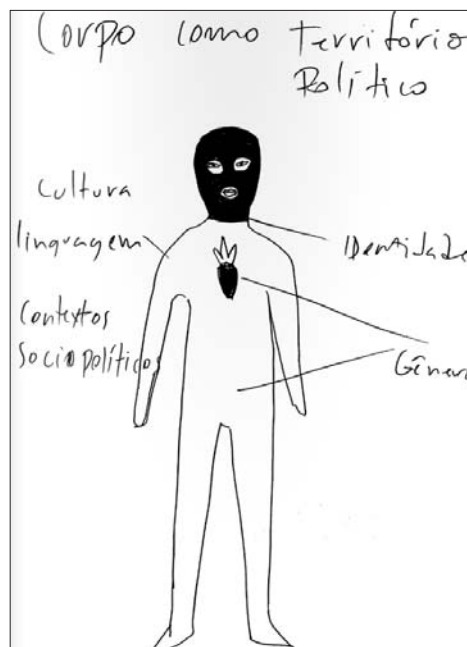
The schizo has his own system of co-ordinates for situating himself at his disposal, because, first of all, he has at his disposal his very own recording code, which does not coincide with the social code, or coincides with it only in order to parody it (Deleuze; Guattari, 1983, p. 15).

It would be necessary, then, to live a little like a madman, a child and a poet. Not bad. Still, it is not simply having the experience of madness, or writing poems in the free time or playing on the weekends, although one can do a little of all of this. It is, more profoundly, to *think with the thought of* the child, the madman or the poet; of producing himself *starting from* that, of this new way of thinking, and not *like this*, representing another life. It is about inventing a new form of life, a new set of values, that refer to an affirmation of life in its now, and in its daily events, in its details, endowing them with lightness, joy and intensity, having the experience of sadness, but also overcoming it, giving way to other affections. Put oneself in movement. It is all a critique of the modern subject conception that is at issue here: to kill what is in us of heavy, of easily disappointing, of insecure, of need for the approval of others; do not let ourselves to be stopped in sadness, to overcome jealousy and envy; to kill in us what is potentially frustrating, resentful, idealized, distant from the present.

But where to start? How to do it? How can one produce him/herself in this way? How to *educate ourselves* in this way? Now, an invention is like a pregnancy, it is something that has not been born yet. That is, invention is precisely what does not yet exist, and therefore is not determinable, its paths and forms are unknown. No invention can be prescribed, shown in formulas, placed in manuals... Because this procedure would transform it into mere reproduction.

However, we know where the invention *does not take place*, where it lacks the conditions of possibility: right there where biopower is felt in an extremely intense way, to the point of paralyzing, suffocating, exhausting; is where biopolitics drains our will to power, turns us into mere survivors.

Image 2 – Body as Political Territory



Source: Campbell (2015, p. 69).

There is, in the body without organs, a strange potency: the *power of non-doing*. As Bartleby, well-known Melville's character: the preference for not doing, the claim to occupy a suspension place, even of impotence. To construct for oneself an impossibility, of saying something, of doing something, of being something, of allowing oneself to be crossed by a certain line of biopolitical force, by a certain subjectivation process.

The exhaustion of the possible is the exhaustion of a certain possible, that one 'given beforehand', the repertoire of possible that is offered to us in the form of multiple choice every day [...]. The end of the possible corresponds precisely to the necessary creation of possible. It is no longer a question of the possible as *mere possibility*, ideal, fortuitous, gratuitous, interchangeable, but the possible created *necessarily*, even if from an *impossibility* (Pelbart, 2013, p. 297, author's emphasis).

We have to see creation as tracing a path between impossibilities [...] Creation takes place in choked passages. [...] A creator who isn't grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator. A creator's someone who create their own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities (Deleuze, 1995, p. 133).

Thus, a creative education is one that creates its own impossibilities, especially the impossibility of letting itself be traversed by the hard

lines of biopower. The non-doing of Barteby can be read as *not doing in a certain way*, which opens alternatives, inserts the possibility of inventing other ways of doing. It is not simply failing to do, but to do differently. In a way that we can follow what appears, what is invented, if we dare to affirm: if it is to produce something with no quality, being massacred by time, I prefer not to do it; if it is to reinforce places of imprisonment (of sexuality, self-esteem, generate more anxiety, etc.) and a state of emptying of power, I prefer not to do so; if it is to think and act in the world in order to restrict or diminish the possibilities, mine and/or of others, I prefer not to do it; if it is to reproduce and strengthen resentful, negative and meaningless life forms, I would rather not do so.

On the other hand, to produce oneself in other ways implies not only this negative task, of refusal to do something, but also a positive task, of creation. And every creation process involves effort, displacement, and also a certain amount of unrest; involves sustaining a tension, letting oneself be crossed by a problem, until one finds the lines of escape that transform that tension and that problem into other things, reconfiguring a certain existential territory, modifying its structures and putting new situations, new problems.

The invention is not a spontaneous activity, even if we include under this term the invention of daily life, and not only the great technological, artistic, or scientific inventions. Why is there an effort? Because we have deviated from the already open path, and therefore much easier, that previous habits have left behind [...]. In invention, things do not go by itself. There is feeling of difficulty, annoyance, obstacles. The process may involve a large number of ups and downs. Still thinking with Bergson, there is effort when there is deceleration and delay. There must be work, that is to find a solution, because the idea can be dismantled if one does not seek to concretize it in a solution. The search is active and often hard, involving tension and demanding effort. On the other hand, creation is not just an effort because it includes the encounter. The encounter is the reflux of the search, for in it we are receptive [...]. The encounter always has an unexpected edge, an element of unpredictability and surprise. We cannot be completely active in an encounter, but we must let ourselves be affected by what we encounter (Kastrup, 2007, p. 66-67, author's translation).

Final Remarks

The inexhaustible capacity of the capitalist machine to renew itself, to operate as a surface of registration, conformation and control of subversive practices, inserts all the time the risk of dissipation of resistances. It takes a constant work of mapping the biopower lines, and of its effects on bodies and on the possibilities of existence. In this sense, I believe that the construction of powerful educational practices, today, demands to rethink the ways we deal with the body, time, information

and work. The ways we can favor and allow, through our choices and renunciations, the occurrence of intense and potent experiences. The ways in which we resist to what is presented to us as the only (or better) way of doing and knowing, how we learn and bravely assume places that are also a denial of the established logics.

Certainly, there are still many others biopolitical forms that we need to identify and examine, as well as strategies to invent, in this continuous movement that is the production of existence. And in the case of education, the additional tasks of paying attention to the risk of stiffening the practices, and to the forms of subjection that they entail. Regardless if it is the teaching workforce, the technical and management staff or the students themselves of whom we are talking about, one needs to try not to end up reinforcing the negative, not to overburden other people with demands, deadlines and ways of doing that are not related to learn and create power, but to serve as a transmission engine that responds obediently to the bureaucratic machine, fulfilling the role of a good employee or good student. Learn how to *say no* to the gears of biopower, to purge of the guilt, of the will and the pressure of following successful models. Learn to reconstruct the relation with the lived time, to slow down the time, to ponder its utilities, its rationality and its linearity; replace its duration and intensity. Cultivate the useless. Slowly learning, from experience. Seek the singularity, give passage to the affections, seek answers proper to the problems that must, also, be placed within own forms.

In short, it can be said that a creative education involves a double movement: on the one hand, to create its own protective capes, its bodies without organs, vacuoles of time and space, its *I prefer not to do it*, that make it possible to suspend momentarily the biopolitical lines and create conditions for new experiences to take place and new meanings to be cultivated. On the other hand, it also involves making a passage, an exit from comfort zones, putting oneself at risk, overcoming oneself, letting one go through other ways of experiencing oneself and of relating to others.

Finally, it should be clarified that educating oneself in this way does not depend on revolutionizing, reforming or *saving* the education system as a whole (although rethinking and transforming it remain necessary and urgent guidelines). It is not a matter of claiming an action in the macro-political sphere, but instead beginning to act through the micro – knowing that there are lines of continuity, composition and tension between macro and micro, and that modifying one certainly changes the other.

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Notes

- 1 Another version of this work, developed by the artist in Rio de Janeiro and exhibited at the Rio Art Museum in 2017, revealed new curious fears: of pigeon poop; of being alone; of the brother; of squinting eyes; of knives and drunk people; among others.
- 2 Without trying to exhaust the subject, we can mention some names whose contributions strongly mark the studies in education, and that are considered “mandatory readings” in the field, such as: the works of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Paulo Freire (2005; 1996), John Holt (1972) and Ivan Illich (1971). The influence of Foucault’s thoughts on education, presented in a didactic and summarized form by Veiga-Neto (2007) and Gallo (2008), and in more details in the collection organized by Ball (1997). However, it is necessary to emphasize that there is a great diversity in the approaches, theories, critics and proposals of these authors.
- 3 This is not a univocal terminology; Singer (2010, p. 15) points out other names commonly used to designate these experiences: “romantic [...] student-centered pedagogy [...] free, progressive, alternative, democratic schools”.
- 4 *Slow learning* (or *slow education*, or *slow school*) is a movement inspired by the *slow-food* movement and proposes to rethink the ways in which the school is structured – from the rhythms of learning to the standardization of curricular structures and assessments, the role of parents in the educational process and, above all, the intertwined relationship between school (and learning) and capitalist ways of life (Holt, 2002).
- 5 This is what Beatriz Preciado suggests, when analyzing how current capitalism exerts a control of subjectivities from the most accurate management of the libido, and the drainage and “resolution” of mental states such as euphoria, excitement and relaxation, by the use of pharmacoponographic products, such as Prozac, testosterone, Viagra, insulin, alcohol, tobacco, cocaine... (Preciado, 2008).
- 6 The following quotes on Larrosa’s work was freely translated by me from the Portuguese article published in 2002. It has become a very popular work in Brazil but, unfortunately, until the publication of the present article, I could not find a stable English version of this paper.
- 7 The following quote on Zourabichvili’s work was translated by me from the Portuguese version. There is an English version of this text available, published by Edinburgh University Press (Zourabichvili, 2012).

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Leonardo Balbino Mascarenhas is a Brazilian educator, and has been involved in educational, artistic, social and economic projects since 2005. Currently is teaching at Universidade Federal de Alfenas – UNIFAL, at campus Varginha/MG and developing research and production in the realms of education, literature, theater and contemporary philosophy.

E-mail: leo.mascarenhas@gmail.com

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