

An Aesthetic challenge to Education: against a damaged subjectivity

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I see education as something widely spread in society. I see the role of aesthetic wide as well. Since my experience as professor became, I have been asked, from the restrict space of my University: what should I do inside classroom? It seems to be a very trivial question, almost naïve. However, it is caused by a perception of an incongruence between that space to be fulfilled with subject, objectives, bibliography, schedules and evaluations, and a theoretical reflection during my education process on the paranoiac aspect of knowledge and its relation to the authoritarian character that persists in our time.

Three years ago, I begun a career as lecturer at Universidade Federal do Ceará. Before then, I was trained as a researcher. During my under graduation studies in Psychology I worked on themes like prejudice, antidemocratic thought and the authoritarian personality, based on principles of the Critical Theory of Society. Books, papers, scientific meetings and by the end (or beginning), fifty prying eyes on me thirsty for knowledge, aiming a profession able of unraveling and mastering subjectivities. Since 2013 I have taught social psychology. It is from that place I am talking today. It is from that space that I seek the aesthetic challenge to education, in order to come across an educational process capable of refusing to promote damaged subjectivities.

Music, commodity and semi-erudition

I wonder: what kind of knowledge has historically been developed by humanity? What does this regard to music? What about commodity? Cleverness, pleasure seeking and struggle for survival appear in Homer's Odyssey as bourgeois' features already present in the Greek myth, as evidence of a certain Western domination ratio that places humankind as a superior being in comparison to nature, and quite apart from it (HORKHEIMER & ADORNO, 1985). In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno (1985) presented Cultural Industry as the contemporary cleverness with its enticement amplified to the mass, as a system born during late capitalism. Its advanced technological development influences not only worktime, but also leisure time with the same rhythm, climate and domination instrumental ration, promising (ephemeral) pleasure and (created) necessities fulfillment. Radio is one of the nodes of that system. It was widely analyzed by Adorno. As a microcosm, I see radio and its

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listener as allegories to comprehend the relationship between music, commodity, semi-erudition and domination. (ADORNO, 1938, apud CARONE, 2003, p. 85).

Adorno's studies on Radio Project (JENEMANN, 2007) (-have) included three important moments to the Adorno's insights on educational processes featured in late capitalism. He (-has) studied musical production – by analyzing radio industry –, its reproduction – in radio programs –, and its reception by radio listeners. In his analyzes it becomes clear that the main characteristic of such industry as business aiming profits. Furthermore, his analyzes on musical programs revealed that radiophonic reproduction affects directly music quality, fomenting cult of performance and interpretation and a fetishist admiration of the artists, neglecting music itself. This whole process leads to what Adorno denounced as regression of listening. (ADORNO, 1983).

In this sense, *On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening* (ADORNO, 1983) is an exemplar paper to understand how, to Adorno, existent mediations can influence people. Adorno points that the radio generation develops a kind of atomistic listening that disable people to comprehend music itself and its inner characteristics, in behalf of a non-reflected preference for artists biographies or listening situations. Entertainment music requires no attention to be listened – its standard and facilitated formula is promptly fixed, recognized and hummed. Such process is connected to semi erudition and its subjective developments in music consumers. As entertainment music does not require an attentive listening, it contributes to men dumbing down, to the death of language and to our inability to communicate. Deformed by fear and fatigue, we become slaves without any exigence. The silence installs itself inside us, to be fulfilled to something lacking any sense.

The radio voice, according to Adorno (2009b), is ubiquitous, authoritarian and seductive. It mix itself with listeners thoughts in his private moments. In late capitalism, entertainment music puts itself against a free and emancipated society. By means of its consumption, subjectivities are performed according to industrial patterns. Such subjectivities resonate the authoritarian model in which they are performed. Music as art has its aesthetic value, for Adorno, judged and experienced by a tension relation between form and content. Such process involves social implications, far beyond the existent. It is the opposite of what happens with radio music (no matter if popular or erudite). (ADORNO, 2009a).

A damaged subjectivity emerges in a new type of human being, that Adorno called radio generation: “it is the type of person whose being lies in the fact that he no longer

experiences anything himself, but rather lets the all-powerful, opaque social apparatus dictate all experiences to him". (ADORNO, 2009c, p. 465). This definition has in itself the idea of semi-erudition (ADORNO, 1992) as its constitutive element in late capitalism.

Besides, semi-erudition as a way of thinking and acting, are dullness of the body, of the sensory and dialogical capacity, of imagination and social overcoming. Adorno (2009c) attributed those characteristics to radio generation as well. Stereotyping is a scar left by Cultural Industry in our minds and bodies. It is a mark reproducing all the same, and dispelling all differences, by surrounding itself of preformatted ideas about men, culture and society, and that express itself on the body as well. Stereotyping is also at classroom. It appears as a constant reproduction of concepts and analyses, lecture after lecture, evaluation after evaluation, year after year. The authoritarianism of concepts and knowledge is reproduced in the form it is lectured. Knowledge as something given is ideology. Adorno (1997, p.202-203) remember us that authoritarian attitudes are consistent with division of genres in art and knowledge, with intolerance to ambiguity.

I think, like Adorno (1995b) also suggests in *Education and Emancipation*, that the main aim of education is to avoid repetition of barbarism. Then, it is not possible reproduce such relations without suffering and grief. As educator, I realize that the project of society I dream must be done by an aesthetic proposal for education.

Aesthetic and education against a damaged subjectivity

Changing classroom space and time in something different from its initial propose has required me an (aesth)ethical reflection. It is as if in trying to transform classroom, society, for a moment, could also be transformed in a ludic play. My point here is the Adorno's (1997) idea of fiction and fantasy, which present themselves as necessary modifications in empirical reality – in order to avoid contamination by the merely existent. However, by being fiction and fantasy, they express reality in an implacable way. We need to recognize people in a classroom is a political act. From such place, our performance and actions have form and limits, which acts upon the content. Classroom can be seen as a force field and, at the same time, as an unconscious schema of maintaining or change the world.

Comprehending society or human subjectivity as social construction is necessary in living experience, which is the opposite of freezing concepts and definitions which reduces its existence and significance. Such living experience can be considered aesthetic in this context,

in opposition to a distracted, atomized and facilitated learning, which restricts itself to reproduction of concepts – even those characterized as critical ones. For Adorno (1997),

That the experience of artworks is adequate only as living experience is more than a statement about the relation of the observer to the observed, more than a statement about psychological cathexis as a condition of aesthetic perception. Aesthetic experience becomes living experience only by way of its object. (ADORNO, 1997, p. 175).

I cannot avoid remembering of Lygia Clark, whose work is considered one of the foundress of Brazilian contemporary art, and her insistence on experience, on the body, on the living relation to the object capable of restructuring self and its relation to the world. Such experience needs we stop being mere spectators “in a sterile relation to the object supposedly neutral and situated in an inert exteriority, in order to live a space engendered in the act that operates between the two.” (ROLNIK, 2012, p.45). Why do not think such potentiality as educative?

For Adorno (2009d), an adequate understanding of all cultural/social subject is not in the conceptual reproduction, but in the understanding of the existent and its concepts as a semantic context through which we can reflect about its function in a spontaneous way, according to its internal logic. In this sense, I think that the nature of phenomena under concepts cannot be understood through an abstract form, but only through concrete experience. Even such internal logic has no abstract sense. All contradictory elements from reality presents themselves in the concepts, although science tries to suppress them.

Sensory experience is pre-requisite of consciousness. Consciousness is corporal before being a fact of mind. Sensory experience has to be side by side intellectual reflection – and sometimes it is not translated by reason. As Adorno (1997) puts it

Though discursive knowledge is adequate to reality, and even to its irrationalities, which originate in its laws of motion, something in reality rebuffs rational knowledge. Suffering remains foreign to knowledge, though knowledge can subordinate it conceptually and provide means for its amelioration, knowledge can scarcely express it through its own means of experience without itself becoming irrational. Suffering conceptualized remains mute and inconsequential [...] (ADORNO, 1997, p. 18).

Because of this Adorno criticizes Berthold Brecht and his didactic theater, and approaches Samuel Becket, his philosophical tradition of absurd (WEEB, 2012) and the deep estrangement that his works cause. Such estrangement is deeply provocative, and we can feel

it inside us. Adorno (1997, p. 135) goes beyond, when he proposes the idea of *Art's methexis*, which “in the tenebrous, its negativity, is implicit in its tense relation to permanent catastrophe”.

Translated from Greek, *methexis* means participation. On Greek theatre it was an artistic form in which public could participate, create and improvise action as a ritual. In platonic sense, *methexis* is a relationship between a particular and a form, I mean, between part and whole. It seems Adorno proposes *methesis* as an aesthetical form of relationship between the receptor and the object, in which the first one takes part in the movement of the second one, not rationally, but through a sensory, corporal, physiological perception of weird, which potentially liberates such negativity, the existence of something new.

It is a political position, a provocation. It is also search of sensoriality as means of communication and proposition. When Adorno (2009d) proposes another possibility of musical education through radio, one of his intentions is to make the student a composer, an author, not merely a receptor and propagator of formatted information, liberating his critical, imaginative and creative potentials. I think he proposes another form of education in classroom pass by restructuring the relationship between alumni and subject we aim to approach. Approaching must be living, visceral, not only in order to subject to make sense, but in order to awake sensibility; and something new can really arise as possibility of emancipation, radical transformation and freedom.

In the second semester of 2013, I conducted – with my college Jon Cavalcante – an activity with our students using literature as fertile ground to cultivate thought and reflection on science and society we live in. The intention was to provide a reflection on the concepts and questions of the subject “Social Psychology”, going beyond academic scenery in its usual perspective. In order to achieve it, I used the book *O Alienista*, by Machado de Assis, as a (pre)text of a great text: the presence of Science and the categories of Social Psychology in a story of madness. Inspired by the ethical and political plots of this literature and its relation between form and aim, life and knowledge, we cultivated questions through dialogue with this artwork, by asking: who is the alienist today? The intention was to promote an experience of the present through the resonances and inspirations of the past, of experimenting ways of making an educational process inside University against the usual dullness of sensibility. We were looking for an educational process guided by resistance to barbarism inside classroom,

and, at the same time, as openness to what is usually denied to us. (ANTUNES & CAVALCANTE, 2015).

Alumni expressed themselves in a variety of ways, trying to answer our quest, “daring to know”, daring to critically thinking our reality. They used music, art installation, performance, chapbooks, and so on. Presentations was permeated by many feelings, causing laughs, scares, attention, silences, conversations, comments ... something brand new, but also familiar. New because of its inventiveness, which provokes ruptures and disconcerting questions. Familiar, because of the conviction in each exhibition, of how close we are from this alienist today – and why not to say, how we are crossed by this image.

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