

Conserve, pass on, desire. Edifying teaching practices to restore the publicness of education¹

Conservar, legar, desear. Prácticas docentes edificantes para restaurar el carácter público de la educación

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Abstract

The article presents the thesis that at the basis of the crisis of identity, mission, and function currently affecting the publicness of education systems there is a deep erosion of substantive practices in the act of teaching, since the disappearance of these practices contributes decisively to eclipsing the democratizing and potentially liberating promises of school education. After introducing the main topics for exploration, a relation is established between the problems brought about by the mandate to innovate in education and its relationship with the crisis of transmission. The article goes on to explore the possibilities of bringing back the public part to education through the restoration of three core edifying teaching practices: conserving, passing on, and desiring.

Key words: teaching practices, public education, school, post-critical pedagogy.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta la tesis de que, en la base de la crisis de identidad, misión y función que afecta actualmente al carácter público de los sistemas educativos, se encuentra una profunda erosión de las prácticas fundamentales en el acto de

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la enseñanza, ya que la desaparición de estas prácticas contribuye decisivamente a eclipsar las promesas democratizadoras y potencialmente liberadoras de la educación escolar. El artículo comienza presentando los principales temas de exploración y los problemas generados por el mandato de innovar en educación y su relación con la crisis de transmisión. Continúa explorando las posibilidades de devolver a la educación su parte pública a través de la restauración de tres prácticas docentes edificantes fundamentales: conservar, legar y desear.

Palabras clave: prácticas docentes; educación pública; escuela; pedagogía poscrítica

Introduction

In this article I develop the idea that at the core of the current crisis regarding the publicness of education² is, firstly, the affirmation that teaching practices³ should be more involved in transmission and not so much in construction and, secondly, that it is up to the teachers to become the main actors in the movement to ensure the democratizing availability of knowledge. I hold that for school education to be public, it must reaffirm its conservative mission. I will attempt to show what type of conservatism I am thinking of and why I think it is such a fundamental aspect on the path toward repairing democratizing promises of school education. This will be done in a post-critical and affirmative spirit⁴, and

² The crisis regarding the publicness of education has to do with the threatening of its very conditions of possibility. This critical scenario is starring by (i) current trends in privatization and commodification, (ii) the diversification of agents involved, and (iii) the incorporation of new patterns in the public management of education. In a forthcoming collective volume, some of these threats are thoroughly explored (Thoilliez and Manso (Eds.), 2022).

³ I understand teaching practices in the sense of a craftsmanship as I discussed elsewhere (Thoilliez, 2019a).

⁴ Recent years have seen a growing interest in post-critical approaches in educational research (Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski 2017, 2018, 2020; Koopal, Vlieghe, and Baets, 2020; Oliverio, 2019, 2020; Schildermans 2020; Schildermans, Vandenabeele, and Vlieghe, 2019; Thoilliez 2019b, 2020a; Vlieghe and Zamojski 2019, 2020; Wortmann 2019, 2020). Post-critique shows a way out of the intellectually suffocating hermeneutics of suspicion by opening more affirmative reasoning paths for the study of our problems. Critical practices of pointing at what goes wrong, need to be complemented by alternative post-critical gestures of caring for what deserves to be preserved. In the Spanish context, the discussion has also been recently addressed (Ayuste and Trilla, 2020; Noguera, 2020; Mejía, 2020; Huarte, 2020; Pagès, 2020; Pallarés and Lozano, 2020).

employing conservative vocabularies as an exercise to reexamine a set of teaching practices that I find are suitable to restore the publicness of education, and, more precisely, the common goods of education. I present this as an experiment to put forward “a progressive argument for a conservative idea” (Biesta, 2017). While I am aware of the risks of this position, I think they are the type of pedagogic risks that in the present conditions must nevertheless be taken. At the end of the article, it will be discussed why this experimental move is worth the risk.

Following on the work of Higgins and Knight-Abowitz (2011), education is a public good when (i) it is funded wholly or in part with public money; (ii) it is accountable to the public administration and the general public through a democratically established control mechanism regarding its performance; and (iii) it is based on the idea (and ideal) of education as a common good, specifically as schooling for all. I will pay particular attention to the problem when, as is happening today, an education system is said to be public and meets the first two criteria above but falls short in a key aspect of the third: school stops being for everyone if it fails to redistribute the accumulated knowledge by forgetting the very teaching practices that make it possible.

We live in the time of the imperative of innovation, of change, of transformation for schools and their teachers. Yes, teachers teach to help others prepare for the future, a future that is uncertain at best and therefore pushes educational activity to be in constant movement attending to that unknown future. Systems are called to address, adapt, and prepare for the future in bigger and better ways (Fernández Liria *et al.*, 2018; Gil-Cantero, 2018; Pérez-Rueda, 2021).

This, I find, causes damage that goes beyond mere discourse, by penetrating teaching practices in the sense of altering their being anchored in the present, their attention to the past, and their indeterminate orientation to an open future. Education systems today live immersed in *innovaphilia*⁵, where school education is being over-identified, *unilateralized* in its orientation to an idea of the future in which, despite the inability to know what it (the future) will hold or demand from us, schools are forced to make the impossible to accomplish promise of “preparing for the future”. The democratizing and liberating promises of school education are changed for the metaphysical impossibility of

⁵ Neologism derived from “innovaphilic times” (Narodowski, 2018).

promising to prepare for a particular future that in fact is impossible to know. The *innovaphilic* school becomes the deceit, in which we live blind to the problems and material conditions of the present, in which we live oblivious to a past whose transmission is considered useless for the “challenges of the future”. A future that far from being an open question, has more to do with the need to update, thus, to constantly remove, erase, demolish what we have got to be replaced, substituted, switched by something else. Where nothing is preserved nor passed on, and education is presented as a coping mechanism. Where teaching happens in a survival mode to get the student out of the present alive, and it is asked to focus on change for the sake of change.

Construction versus transmission

Wherever the urge to innovate leads, transmission that comes about in the teacher-student relation succumbs more easily to an autonomous, creative pseudo-construction of knowledge. If restoring the public nature of education involves, as I maintain here, continuing to aspire to the *pansophian* democratizing promise of all knowledge for everyone, knowledge cannot only be self-constructed; it must also (and firstly) be transmitted. In fact, I believe this is what many teachers do, albeit clandestinely and peripherally: the endeavor to transmit what good and valuable they know about the world. But they do it stealthily, apologetically, even remorsefully. Here I am, of course, thinking of the simplified and flattened version of constructivism. I believe Piaget, Vygotsky or Brunner ideas are worth to be studied and pedagogically reimagined. The problem with constructivist theories in education is how they have been translated into teaching practices, and not how they were originally framed, neither the many serious attempts to materialize them⁶.

When I position transmission vis à vis construction, “transmission” here needs not to be mistaken with imposition. I simply propose transmission in the sense of handing over a message. Affirming the strong connection between teaching and transmission (whenever teaching wants something to do with making public education happen,

⁶ Popularized versions of constructivism are also at the basis of what Meirieu’s has framed as the contemporary quarrel between hiper-pedagogues and anti-pedagogues (Meirieu, 2022).

making the common goods of education available to all) does not imply pointing to any particular methodology. Transmission has more to do with the realm of the teaching motives, a materialization of the kind of love for the world that move many to the practice of teaching. One reason for teaching something to someone is having a message (idea, value, discovery, fact, artifact) and the need, the desire, the willingness, the urge even, to hand it over to him/her, to make it public by sharing it. Transmission is a fundamental move for teachers to share the world with their students. Therefore, “transmission” here is not to be mistaken with the Freirean idea of banking education, nor as negation of fundamental equality between the student and the teacher (the difference is of that of position, and there is nothing fundamental about positions, they are contextual, interchangeable, temporary by definition). This clarification about what I mean by “transmission” before even trying to do anything with it, accounts for the bad press this term has accumulated through time. However, being coherent with this article’s restorative position, old bad heroes of our recent history of education such as “transmission” may deserve an affirmative reexamination.

In their fascinating reconstruction of the causes that have led us from a school of transmission to a school of learning, Blais, Gauchet and Ottavi (2014) point out four grounds for the act of transmission. Identifying them can help us stake out the restoration I propose to start up hereafter. To begin with, transmission is rooted in our temporal and historical condition, since it “lives off the weight of those who came before us”. This condition intensifies in that in the act of learning something, we are indebted to those learned it before we did. Teachers are spokespersons for those precedents and the best teachers are those who perform this role of assimilation and restitution to the greatest extent. In their field of knowledge, they embody “a just relation with the past, a mastery of its legacy that allows them to add, invent, and break from it whenever necessary” (p. 104). The experience of knowing something, even in the most individualized process we can imagine, consists of acquiring something that others already possess. “Transmission always exists *objectively*” (idem). The second grounds of transmission can be found in the irreducibly mysterious nature of knowledge that implies the irreducibly initiative nature of its communication. Access to progressively more sophisticated items of knowledge requires prior transmission of their languages (be they literary, historical, mathematical, scientific, etc.).

In contrast, we live amidst the disqualification of “all types of knowledge that implies dependence on knowing, favoring instead whatever individuals are supposed to be able to take on themselves through their rational capacities” (p. 107). The third grounds of transmission are situated on the personal dimension of knowledge. These grounds are also “home for their difficulty as art” (p. 108). No matter how curious one is toward a field of knowledge, one must be accompanied by someone else to face the apprehension ahead on a road full of difficulties. This accompaniment is not reduced to delivering any particular information or skill; rather, it consists of “exorcizing the contrary effects and liberating those that make it move forward, beginning with the pleasure of thinking” (p. 109). It is accompanying on the road from the desire to know to the desire to study and learn. The fourth and final grounds are the symbolic dimension of knowledge acquisition itself. Teachers make this dimension palpable, whether through “the power of words, the role of donation, or the insertion of a lineage (p. 110). Learning is always receiving, no matter how autonomous it is made to be, even when we learn on our own, since we gather the fruits of knowledge that others conquered, established, or developed. Knowledge would made for the giving because it belongs to no one in the end. Instead, it is the result of a collective work destined to be pursued throughout time, one that creates a particular bond of nearness among its participants.

In a context where the prize is the future, the individual, and the professional usefulness of knowledge, it is easy to understand why school education tends to ignore the four grounds discussed above. The price of such ignorance, however, is that the autonomous learner eclipses the always necessary movement of transmission. In what follows, in contrast to the *unilateralization* of the school looking toward the future, consumed in processes of innovation and change, I propose to reclaim the democratizing and potentially liberating promises of school education, revising the following post-critically inspired teaching practices: conserving, passing on, desiring. Revisiting movements whose productivity as tools of creative resistance for bringing the “public” back to school education.

Conserve

As Hannah Arendt (1961) noted, education consists of intergenerational transmission of whatever is worth conserving in our world. From this point of view, teaching practices at schools are mainly and mostly a conservative endeavor. This is one of the key principles in *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy* (Hodgson, et al., 2017, 2018, 2020). If we can transcend, or momentarily suspend, the critical paradigm and its intellectual chains, we open paths of thinking that can restore the promises of education by taking care of its practices of conservation. Cultivation of this practice is so seldom found in schools that, paradoxically, as we shall see, it is outside the school buildings that reasons for restoring it in an edifying style are to be found.

When dealing with nature the Western world tends to relate to it conservationist (and classificationist) terms. Examples of this include sponsoring scientific explorations and creating and maintaining science museums and collections. The Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid, currently ascribed to the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), is a prime case for this. Despite its modest funding compared to other similarly themed museums in other large cities, it offers something quite extraordinary: a public justification and explanation for its own existence. The Museum's reasoning for its conservationist purposes is structured around the following general principles⁷: (i) The ethical principal: the probability of life is tiny, for the time being known only in this strange, remote corner of the universe. Likewise, the likelihood of existing is infinitely smaller than that of not existing, and each life form is the upshot of an unrepeatable sum of improbabilities which have converged over the course of hundreds of millions of years. Thus, existing is a cosmic achievement, and keeping information on every species is worthwhile just because they exist (and this achievement itself is worth saving). (ii) The aesthetic principle: it is said that 'life is beautiful'. It is true that nature is the primary source of all beauty. All living things are beautiful, and any slice of biodiversity contains beauty. Gathering information from every species is worth pursuing just because each species forms part of that beauty. (iii) The principle of complementarity:

⁷ The richness of thought offered in this declaration of seven principles has led me to use it recently elsewhere, though for other purposes (Thoilliez, 2020b, 29-30).

species are not isolated entities but rather pieces in the web of life. Without different species, there is no factory of life, because species are its basic building blocks. The synergic sum of species is what sustains the cycles of life. Each species depends on many others, as they depend on it. Conservation of each cog and each gear is the first concern of any good mechanic. (iv) The principle of precaution (or the principle of the potential usefulness of what seems useless): if the evolution of life has managed to move from a bacterial soup to rare individuals capable of questioning themselves about the usefulness of what we do, it is precisely because we possess a certain capacity to retain the superfluous, the unusable or what at the moment seems useless. We should not run the risk of mistakenly considering a species useless (as we have already done too many times). (v) The scientific principle: each species is an enigma, a unique genome modelled by millions of years of evolution. Each species contains the answers to very myriad questions, and those enigmas are worth saving. (vi) The principle of knowledge: an unknown species may be the answer to a question we may not yet have asked, or the solution to a problem we do not yet perceive. We should do whatever it takes to find out about as many species as possible simply because knowing is better than not knowing. Our ancestral instinct of acquiring knowledge has helped human civilization advance. Moreover, the ability to understand the world depends on accumulated knowledge. Many forms of knowledge may at first seem of little use or have little potential for immediate application but are in fact essential in the long run. (vii) The economic principle (for those skeptical about all previous principles): all our food, a third of medicines, and a substantial number of the materials we use come from species which are or at some time have been wild. Biodiversity (that is species) underpins all the services the ecosystems have brought to humanity. They are potential resources and possible solutions to potential problems.

It is true that museums do more than just conserve, but can we even imagine a museum not devoted, at least in part, to conserving? It is difficult, to say the least. The crux is that schools and museums share a similar public mission of conserving heritage, not only to exhibit it so it can be appreciated, but also, and uniquely, for it to be intellectually appropriated by each and every person. And yet, this is exactly what schools are doing less and less, and when they do, they no longer fulfill their “public” role. However, a practice of teaching aiming at fulfilling

the democratic promises of schooling, would involve a conservationist commitment to the cultural objects that comprise the curriculum and the daily rituals of classroom life during the school year.

Compared to a museum, schools also feature several particularities that single out the conservative dimension of teaching practices. Heeding them can help us determine some of the particularities of the conservative nature of teaching practices. Among these eloquent differences are: Unlike museums with their ties with sightseeing and tourism, school is not something to visit, but somewhere with generally compulsory attendance, at least for good many years (with the teacher being a guardian who waits and checks daily that his group of students is conserved intact); The contents of a museum are displayed to the public for purposes of dissemination, whereas school aims fundamentally at literacy (with the teacher being the one who from one year to the next conserves the keys that require his translation); The museum is also a public place, where one passes through or visits from time to time, whereas school is a temporary destination inhabited daily, for several hours, its classrooms converted into intermediate spaces midway between public and private (where the teacher is the main person responsible for keeping it in a state recognizable by all); The anonymity of the unexpected museum-goer has no equivalent in schools, where everyone is someone, and everyone is known and expected (with the teacher being the daily host to a potential celebration, with his name on a list kept safe).

Pass on

Conservation has both internal and external goods that the Science Museum's declaration can help us identify. However, as noted above, especially in the educational sense being explored here, conservation loses its meaningfulness if it is not accompanied by its possibility of being handed down, passed on to others. It becomes even more meaningless without potential renovation by new generations, and the call to responsibility it represents (Arendt, 1961). The fact that there is a new generation yet to come is what motivates the older generation, to keep what is believed to be worth of value. The reason why things get conserved is that they can be passed on to the newcomers with

all their potential for renovation⁸. The works of the French philosopher Françoise-Xavier Bellamy are particularly illuminating when considering passing on as a key teaching practice that makes the common goods of education available to all⁹.

Bellamy's reflections start off with his experience as an aspiring secondary school philosophy teacher in IUMF training, where he was informed that there was nothing to transmit, since by transmitting the teacher only helps the elite reproduce by exerting symbolic violence on students unfamiliar with the school language. His initial bewilderment was followed by a search for reasons for continuing to teach his students. Added to it is a clear awareness that the collective mistakes made in education are, due to its very nature, on a different scale than those of other collective undertakings. The realization that if what needs to be done in educational matters is not done or a mistake is made, making up for it or rectifying it may be impossible: "knowledge that was never taught, references that were never given, who will reinvent them?" (Bellamy, 2014, p. 160). Bellamy adds that cultural heritage "is only protected when it is shared" (*idem*). The possibility of a public legacy that makes school education possible makes cultural inheritance a "living inheritance open to infinite multiplication, but also makes it infinitely fragile; our heritage dies when it is no longer handed down. Our culture, and with it our own humanity, will die from our thanklessness" (*idem*). However, this warning is accompanied by a minute analysis, because, as Bellamy notes, the contemporary weakening of the social responsibility of transmission is "the result of a meditated, lasting, and explicit work" (p. 26). Spearheading this work are the intellectuals (and the reverberation of the echo of their works) Descartes, Rousseau, and Bourdieu. The original sin of the three culprits would be that of transmission, each adding a different but accumulative sphere to blame.

⁸ Vlieghe and Zamojsky phrased this idea in the following terms: "an intergenerational meeting during which the existing generation passes over the 'old' world to the newcomers – out of love for our common world, but also out of love for the new generation. This, then, grants the opportunity to bring new beginnings to this world" (2019, p. 11). Fernando Bárcena's seminal work on Arendt's natality is also in the background of my own interest in this particular Arendtian pedagogical motif (Bárcena, 2007).

⁹ Due to space limitations, I will be focusing on his awarded book "Les déshérités ou l'urgence de transmettre". However, the ideas contained in his "Demeure. Pour échapper à l'ère du mouvement perpétuel" are also of great interest (Bellamy, 2020). For una updated revision of his own positions, see Bellamy (2021).

Starting with Descartes, transmission would be a flaw in reasoning: at the age of thirty-eight, Descartes, a disillusioned student as he described himself on the first pages of his *Discours*, in all his hours of study and lessons received, has found nothing but “a hotchpotch of obscure, complicated and uncertain doctrines. None of them achieve his backing, none actually settle the confusion reigning in the order of thought” (Bellamy, 2014, p. 31). Books are promises never kept and culture a dangerous disease that deforms human nature. The only thing left is to return to the natural light of reason: “We choose our own path totally on our own. Only the ideas that our reason has produced on its own will be clear and distinct and, therefore, undoubted” (p. 35). Descartes calls modern man to follow his footsteps in the destruction inside oneself of “the sediments of tradition, and replace them with the orderly work of reason” (p. 37). Nothing should be received from the past; every inheritance should be rejected, refused. Later, Rousseau went further on the chain of transmission by romanticizing the natural human state, uncontaminated by culture, the uncultured human as a natural paradise lost, yearned for, and sought after. Accordingly, “the only ones responsible for our unhappiness are ourselves, it is our culture, and we should rid ourselves of it in order to find, finally, the meaning of nature” (p. 51). Therefore, Rousseau’s educational project entails ensuring solitude and utmost control of any influence and reflexive temptation that may loom over him. The best would be “not to teach children anything; they would keep the innocence we envy in them” (p. 53) and therefore, the preceptor should resemble a father as little as possible: “Better the purity of ignorance than the alienation of transmission” (p. 56). Rousseau also criticized the symbolic figure par excellence of transmission: books (which is why Rousseau had so little contact with them at the end of his education). Books “take us away from the direct experience of life and make us enter the abstraction of a discourse unattached to reality” (p. 62). Freedom, only possible in a natural state of ignorance, is threatened by contact with the written word. Because contact with books and the culture they convey in no way benefits the child, it begs the question of who the beneficiary of transmission really is. This is the quest of the work of our third culprit in the brief intellectual history of disdain for cultural heritage. Bourdieu maintains that culture is arbitrary and “serves wholly to learn to make distinctions” (p. 71). These distinctions are only good for differentiating and making hierarchies, for reproducing and

legitimatizing inequalities, as a type of cultural heritage reproduced at school, which makes them devices of violence. “School is eliminated, expelled, enclosed. But it is especially violent because it is not content with just condemning in addition, it demands that the condemned agree to his sentence” (p. 77). Bourdieu is also bothered by the fictitious mechanism of schools, the exercise of scholastic training the students are subjected to. This led him to call for a rational pedagogy to prepare for the job market, to stop being a student as quickly as possible. To the extent that the school erroneously makes students believe that the culture it transmits has some value in itself, it “deprives disadvantaged students of the pragmatic lucidity that would allow them to understand the specific reality of school competition and to adopt more effective strategies” (p. 80) that will prepare them “for the fight for economic capital” (p. 81). This theoretical model encloses the teacher who is trying to teach, to transmit knowledge, to earn authority, to grade her students in the hopelessness of guilt with no chance of redemption, no way out: eternal instrument of a reproduction of inequalities that has no possible end, a servant of the (school) device of violence where it fits in as just another screw. The teacher, dispossessed from his ability to passing on, is pushed to make a quick exit through the back door of the classroom.

Desire

Anyone who has inherited material goods knows there comes a very specific time when one can accept the inheritance or turn it down. Accepting the inheritance often also entails taking on debts, as the ultimate gesture of intergenerational responsibility and love¹⁰. This can only happen if there is an awakening of prior desire: the desire to hand down and the desire to receive. Inheritances are not accepted by official mandate; they are taken on as they are accepted. There are no guarantees. They must be injected with the desire for ownership. To move forward in the practice of desiring (of awakening desire), I turn to the Italian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati and his redescription of the “erotics of teaching” that he even today insists is possible.

¹⁰ Regarding the possibility that our educational invitations to share the world gets rejected, see Thoilliez (2020a), and Thoilliez and Wortmann (2021).

Through the lens of psychoanalysis, he takes on the current decline in the transmission of knowledge and analyzes the role a teacher can and must play in that miraculous encounter at class time. The main thesis of his book is that “what endures from school is the irreplaceable role of the teacher”, whose function is to “open the subject to culture” and thereby make possible “the encounter with the erotic dimension of knowledge” (Recalcati, 2016, p. 14). The logic of the marketplace in neoliberalism sets an imperative of enjoyment that demands immediacy rather than the postponed satisfaction of desire (sublimation) on which our culture has been built. And all this is done “in the name of a neoliberal pedagogy that reduces the School to a business that produces suitable efficient skills for its own system” (p. 21). As Lacan diagnosed, there has been a diminishing of the paternal function. The Law has given way to a logic of supply and demand that leaves symbols stuck at the imaginary far ends. Parents give up their role, which used to be alongside that of the teacher, and side with their children against the teachers from the anxiety of parenthood. The problem of School “is not the panoptic look of the watchman who identifies and represses, punishing subjective differences from a normative idea that demands to be reproduced. Rather, it is its dramatic evaporation, the risk of extinction in which it finds itself. This same process affects the father figure” (p. 19). And this, Recalcati argues, causes a break of the symbolic: a break in the chain of transmission between generations. Added now to the social and economic precariousness of those who are supposed to maintain this transmission is the precariousness of its symbolic situation. The teacher’s word does not gain weight and is replaced by the cacophony of multimedia, cell phones, different devices to which the students are continually connected. Recalcati calls it “weak totalitarianism, narcotic or stimulant, that reduces critical thought by taking advantage of the hypnotic function induced by the objects of enjoyment that have invaded the lives of our young” (p. 22). There is no text, no effort at disentangling it, only disjointed applicable fragments. Nowadays it is difficult to maintain the teacher’s desire based on her own word.

Similarly, for there to be a student, there must be a desire for knowledge. “Without the desire to know, there is no chance for subjective learning of knowledge; without transfer, without ecstasy, without erotization, there is no chance of a knowledge connected with life, capable of opening doors, windows, worlds” (Recalcati, 2016, p. 43). And for this desire to exist,

breaking away from the mother tongue, abandoning the family bosom that facilitates or impedes separation, is a prerequisite. This is the only way to take flight to other horizons beyond incest and self-eroticism. In the subject willing to learn, exile from the Thing has already taken place. In him, family objects have been seen to be affected by the mandate of the Law, and in this way, his life can turn to other worlds and other libidinous investments. “For teachers, it is no longer about pursuing the ideal of a teacher-master able to say the last word on the meaning of life, but teacher-testimony what knows how to open up worlds through the erotic power of the word and of knowing, which he can attest to” (p. 45). Due to its very nature, compulsory school does not kill desire, but separates the subject from the family, from the incestuous constellation of desire, to socialize him and stretch his horizon farther and farther. And that way, ridding himself from the Thing, the bereft subject finds a word, brimming with desire, that holds him up among everyone else. “Compulsory schooling marks the necessary distancing of the subject from his family and his potential encounter with other worlds: it is the obligation of exile, of transition from the mother tongue to the language of the alphabet or to other languages entirely” (p. 78).

Thus, during the hour of class, desires crisscross; the desire to teach and the desire to learn, the desire to transmit a legacy, to recreate it, and the desire to receive a foundational word that orients the desire instead of only informing or restating what is already known as nauseam. Without desire there is no transmission, only imposition. And imposition does not awaken desire in and of itself toward the imposed-upon object, only misunderstanding and a desire to flee. Thus, as Recalcati holds, for there to be a learner, there must be an eroticism of the word, a passionate desire for the object in question that serves to transmit knowledge. The hour of class is not a warehouse or vehicle of information, but a place of encounter that turns the word into an event. Nowadays that formative word is trivialized; it loses the strength of the desire to teach. It is too reduced and isolated to untangle the teacher’s word. “Real teachers are not those who have filled our heads with a pre-constructe--and thus dead-knowledge, but ones who have drilled holes in them to kindle a new desire to know” (Recalcati, 2016, p. 122). In contrast to the Edipus-School, vanished after the blows from the riots of May 1968, and the Narcisus-School, defined by the absence of the father, we now face the possibility of rebuilding a Telemachus-School restoring the generational

difference and the teacher's function as a central figure in the process of eroticizing the world through words. "Class generates erotic bodies from the objects of knowledge, but its effects go beyond knowledge by generating books from the bodies, transforming the body of the beloved into a book" (p. 96). Indeed, teaching consists of coaxing the subject to get out of himself, to ask his own questions and set his own course from which he can take on a destination in the legacy. The teacher's gesture is that of one who knows how to "turn books into erotic bodies, to transform knowledge into an object that causes desire, broadening the horizon of the world, transporting life to other places beyond what has already been seen or known" (p. 98). This eroticism of the word, this love for teaching that opens the subject to desire, produces fortunate encounters and is the generation and opening of cultural horizons as well as the transference of a place for the most personal and intimate word.

Is the risk worth taking? Conservative vocabularies for a progressive idea of public education

The practices I have redescribed in this article are by no means to be understood as a denunciation or vindication (Thoilliez 2019a; Masschelein and Simons, 2013). Rather, I offer them in the sense of rediscovery (Biesta, 2017; Thoilliez, 2019a): resuming these practices, resituating them at the core of teaching, in a Rortyan edifying sense, understood as the effort at "studying our problems, for better comprehending our present circumstances, and creating redescrptions that may help us on the path of inquiry toward overcoming our current difficulties" (Thoilliez, 2020a). They have as well a restorative potential, in the sense of revitalizing teachers' educational work.

When comparing museums with schools to address the practice of conservation in the third section, I have been inclined to present the latter as a safer place than the former, but this does not at all imply that schools are free of dangers. For example, a museum can be a safe place to meet with someone you do not know much, but schools can be the very unsafe place where a child meets with a classmate that bullies

him daily (where the teacher can be blind to all that suffering)¹¹. Both museums and schools, share criticisms about how they came to existence, how they reproduce power relationships, or how they deal with the past and novelty. They are, in many ways, ambivalent institutions. Their questionable nature (in the sense that they are open for discussion, their nature is made up of questions) is what make them so interesting. And what is more important here, there is something valuable in the public orientation of their conservative mission. However, this does not make of them institutions less suitable or in less need for continuous renegotiations. It is quite the contrary. In the case of schools, those renegotiations take place within the next teaching practice that was addressed: pass on.

As in any recollection of arguments there is a tendency to make look simpler what it is more complicated. There is for sure some of that comfortable linearity in Bellamy's reconstruction of the triad Descartes-Rousseau-Bourdieu that I presented in the fourth section. It cannot be denied poses some problems, such as its excessive Frenchness, and the fact that Bellamy himself is an example of what Arendt insisted not to do: mixing conservative vocabularies that fit well within the need of some restoration in education and use them for political purposes. He was a philosophy teacher, but he is now a professional politician at the EU Parliament (integrated in the Group of the European People's Party). However, the intellectual and unsafe exercise of thinking with some old names for reimagining some new ways of thinking the publicness of education is what has made this experiment so much worthy. Through Bellamy's work it has been argued that constructivism (in the flattened sense I referred to in the second section), which dreams of children self-constructing knowledge from their own interests, negation as a harmful adult influence on the child, and the aspiration of a school to stop its training exercises in elitist culture and to focus instead on preparing competence-wise for the world of real production of work all have their philosophical underpinnings in, respectively, the rationalist origins of modernity, the project of enlightened citizenry, and the affirmation of the suspiciously elitist capitalization and hierarchy of culture as it is transmitted at schools. The phenomena of *innovaphilia* and the eclipse

¹¹ In a previous article, I explored the possibility of corrosive and reification practices taking place in school settings, as darker side of their democratizing nature as defended by Dewey (Thoiliez, 2019c).

of transmission threatening “the public” of school education as described in section 1, began with the allegedly progressive¹² project of modernity. Conserve and pass on could be re-suited as teaching practices with the potential to restore the “publicness” of education.

Desire has been the third vertex of my restoration experiment, addressed in the fifth section. Although I have focus on Recalcati’s account, he is not the first will certainly not be the last to discuss the complex relation between education and erotism from a psychoanalytical stand. The works of Deborah Britzman, Sharon Todd, or Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, although not examined in the present article, deserve a thorough examination if anyone wants to have a full comprehension of a post-psychoanalytic ethics in education. However, the more conservative bearing of Recalcati’s approach, made his work more appropriate for the kind of argument I have tried to elaborate in this article. On a different note, it also needs to be acknowledged that Recalcati’s insistence on awakening the student’s desire to know resembles to claims of enhancing student’s motivation to learn. That is not, however, what Recalcati is trying to do. As Biesta has recently put it, “the challenge of trying to live one’s life in a grown-up way, that is, not running behind one’s desires but continuously returning to the question whether what one encounters within oneself as a desire is what one should be desiring” (2022, p. 100). For Recalcati too, it is not just about desiring as such, but what is presented as desirable by the teacher, how the teacher embodies the word, so it is desired by the student. Recalcati warns us about the disappearance of the word, to remind us of the hope that it is not too late to take on desire. The desire for knowledge can be internalized as a personal value, as far as its being a true vital recreation of what is received.

Reclaiming conservative vocabularies to restore in an edifying mode the publicness of education is without a doubt a risky experiment: longing for an idealized school from the past (that never existed), educational traditionalism according to which any older school time by was better, romanticization of educational situations via an imaginary peaceful teacher-student-content interaction. Or even the risk of becoming a

¹² “Progressivism is a tension toward the future, and is in agreement with its own essence that does not know any point of arrival that can put an end to its movement. It will never cease seeing what is real as something to overcome, and therefore as something to be scorned. Any innovation, even the most recent, is quickly scorned for the mere fact that it is now real and no longer just a promise. The faster the pace of technical change, the faster this real rejection” (Bellamy, 2020, 81) See also Bellamy (2021).

“ghostbuster of schooling” (p. 61) as put it by Narodowski (2021) in his skeptical and vigorous attack of some current narratives about the past and future of schools. However, it is precisely because the risk of extinction for schools as we know them is so real, precisely because the publicness of education is on the brink of disappearance, that now it is the right moment to take real risks to reimagine a way for the goods of education to continue to be public via teaching and schooling. The risk the three accounted practices entail is degrading themselves through the path of a fearful nostalgic conservatism. That it is why they need to be practiced while politically avoiding positions of hiding fear for the future and rejection of the present, by faking love for the past. Conserving, passing on and desiring, are teaching practices capable of advancing creative educational conservationism, while avoiding regressive political conservatism. From the consideration of this set of practices, teachers can develop a type of educational work that is not oblivious to the problems of the present, that is far from being afraid of the future nor of what is to come. Practice teaching as an expression of true love of the past, of real care of the present, and of hopeful spirit towards future possibilities incarnated by the new generations.

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