

# LEARNING IN ORDER TO THINK; THINKING IN ORDER TO LEARN<sup>80</sup>

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Between the Worlds of the University, the School,  
and Those Outside: Making Visible Other Worlds  
Through Philosophy and Infancy

This text is a written exercise of educational and philosophical friendship dedicated to the wonderful group that constitutes The Latin American Philosophy of Education Society (LAPES), to their work, and to the way they inhabit the academic world. What follows is a written exercise of thinking inspired by what I learned at the last LAPES symposium, celebrated at the University of Miami, from March 14–15, 2016, under the title of “Decolonial Education in the Americas: Lessons on Resistance, Pedagogies of Hope”.

I’ll split this text in two sections: The first section, “Lessons,” might constitute one perspective of a common framework, paradigm, or field of the philosophy of education movement emerging within LAPES; and “Thinking,” could be considered my own very modest contribution to this movement. I am aware that it is always difficult to separate what we think from what others think, especially when dialogue intersects our thinking, as it did at the LAPES symposium. This is why in this exercise I will not specifically refer to any other participant of the symposium, even though many of the ideas contained in the first section of this text emerge from interventions offered at different sessions and conversations of the symposium, particularly those interventions by Jason Wozniak, David Backer, Aleksandra Perisic, Juliana Merçon, Cecilia Diego, Maria Pardo, Sheeva Sabati, Gerardo López Amaro, Maximiliano Durán, among other academics and non-academics present. The division of this text in two sections may seem arbitrary, but it is made as an (im)possible attempt to help others and myself reflect on what is specific about LAPES, and about our own contributions to the group.

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<sup>80</sup> I am aware that the use of the word “learning” might evoke the negative sense it has in recent works by scholars like Gert Biesta, *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and Jan Masschelein, *Defense of the School: A Public Issue* (Leuven: E-ducation, Culture and Society Publishers, 2013). Even though I am sensitive to their critiques of the contemporary neoliberal apparatus of what Biesta and others call “learnification,” I still feel there is a lot to think about before abandoning the word “learning.”

## I. LESSONS

Even though the theme of the symposium shares a resonance with the title of one of Paulo Freire's most popular books, <sup>81</sup>very few references—if any—were made to this book or even more broadly to the mythic figure from Pernambuco. This absence might help us understand one of the lines of action of LAPES. Despite the fact that rather prominent philosophers like Linda Martín Alcoff, Eduardo Mendieta, Enrique Dussel, and Julieta Paredes, the latter two who contribute to this volume of *Lápiz*, have participated in LAPES symposia and published in *Lápiz*—LAPES's annual journal—LAPES seems to privilege collective thinking, and draws on references so diverse that it makes it almost impossible to find individual references that would constitute the basis of a “prominent way of thinking” within the group. In this sense, LAPES seems to prioritize the construction of spaces that create the conditions for exercises of collective thinking, rather than focusing on specific educational, philosophical, or political platforms concerning Latin American society. Nonetheless, in a very real sense, these spaces host very philosophical and political collective thinking. LAPES has been able to open spaces to think and exercise power collectively by inviting people to philosophize and explore the political dimensions of their thinking, while simultaneously experimenting with a “new” politics of thinking.

As such, LAPES seems less interested in applying the ideas of any prominent thinker, or developing a given paradigm of thinking about the relationships between philosophy and education. Moreover, it resists putting into practice a given ideological agenda. Instead, LAPES is about co-inhabiting spaces open for collective thinking and praxis. For this reason, and this might be the first point to highlight, it could be said that LAPES is not properly a school of thought, but rather a movement that feeds itself from different schools, one of which might be Dussel's philosophy of liberation, and another, though even less prominent but still present, would be Paulo Freire's educational thought. By describing LAPES as a “movement” I mean to suggest a kind of open

<sup>81</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia da esperança. Um reencontro com a Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992).

framework where different voices and perspectives are welcome to find their place in a common philosophical, educational and political search. This framework is not fixed or static, but instead remains open and in flux, even when it turns to examining concepts with well-known traditions.

For instance, even though some words, such as “decolonization” and its derivations were prominently pronounced at the Symposium, it became abundantly clear that they were being used in such different contexts and paradigms that nothing conceptually unified or fixed could be taken from their use. Quite the contrary, it seemed that under the umbrella of decolonization, diverse conceptual frameworks or paradigms inhabited the participants of the Symposium.

### a) The Privilege of the Collective Over the Individual

The first notable LAPES symposium phenomenon is how the collective, or the common, is privileged over the individual. Let me share a short anecdote to flesh out this claim. Born in Argentina, I have lived in Brazil since 1997, when I began what seemed to be a one-year Visiting Professor stay at the University of Brasilia. I arrived just some days after the death of Paulo Freire, May 2nd, 1997. In total, I remained in Brasilia for five years, eventually moving to Rio de Janeiro in 2002, where I currently live and teach. Recently, in a meeting of the research group I coordinate, The Center for the Philosophical Investigation of Infancies (NEFI) at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), a colleague of mine, Edna Olimpia da Cunha, recounted the final words of an intervention that Paulo Freire made at the State University of Rio de Janeiro a few weeks before his death: “*Não estejam sós. Por favor, não estejam sós. Estejam sempre juntos. Não se isolem. Fiquem juntos.*” (Do not be alone. Please, do not be alone. Be always together. Don't isolate yourselves. Stay together.)

The above could be read as a testimony: always privilege the collective over the individual dimension of life. In contemporary Latin America, this idea seems more prominent in Indigenous communities

across the region. Consider for example the Tojolabal and Tzotzil Mayan cultures in the southeast of Mexico. As the German philologist Carlos Lenkersdorf has shown, Tojolabal language does not have a first-person singular pronoun: the members of that community only speak in terms of “we,” and do not have a word to say “I” or “you”.<sup>82</sup> Lenkersdorf has suggested that this linguistic characteristic does not mean that the individual is negated, but rather it marks a shared framework for the individual’s development and expansion.

The Spanish word for the first-person plural pronoun, “*nosotros*,” expresses beautifully how it is not even possible to think the self without others. “*Nos-otros*” contains a double plurality: in “we” and in “others,” because the others are already comprehended both in “we” (which means “I” and “others”) and also in “others”. Linguists might call this over characterization, supra emphasis or reinforcement, but it might also express something else, a trace of a form of collective life expressed through the very grammar of language.

This first common presupposition provokes clear tensions with prominent lines of the so-called Western tradition of philosophy which is, in its different modalities, centered on an individual ego. Two examples of this tension help flesh out the above point. In a book very familiar to LAPES members, Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, it is explicitly affirmed that emancipation is always individual, never social.<sup>83</sup> It is through a relationship between the will and the intelligence of two individuals, that of the teacher and the student, that this process occurs. In this text, Rancière confronts an entirely different tradition of Latin American pedagogy of liberation for which emancipation can only be social, never individual.<sup>84</sup> Another example of this tension between individual and social liberation might be seen in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Certainly, they confront a subjectivist and ego-centered ontology through ideas like assembly, becoming-child or becoming-animal, body without organs, war machine, etc. Moreover,

82 Carlos Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal* (México: Porrúa, 2005).

83 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

84 See for example, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia da esperança. Um reencontro com a Pedagogia do Oprimido*. (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992).

their philosophical writing, for example *A Thousand Plateaus*, is an attempt to dissolve an ego perspective: “To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I.”<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, while speaking about the task of a teacher, Deleuze affirms that the teacher’s main mission is to reconcile her students with their solitude,<sup>86</sup> quite the opposite from Freire’s appeal to collectivity. In sum, in the thinking and writing of prominent names of the so-called Western philosophical tradition, the individual continues to be the focus.<sup>87</sup>

Within this framework, LAPES’s movement seems to be closer to a Latin American perspective of the collective over the particular, the community over the individual. In fact, I would argue that the most urgent LAPES questions, as these emerged in the symposium, are: “How can we create community through our educational thinking and practice?” and “How can we do this philosophically?” In other words, it seems to me that LAPES asks, “How can our educational and philosophical thinking and practice be in the service of building communities beyond the dominant competitive, capitalist form of life in our societies?” Or still, “What is the role of philosophical and educational thought in the transformation of our societies into more desirable forms of collective life?” Importantly, LAPES embodies this questioning not only explicitly through its program and documents but mainly through the structures of their practices. For example, their symposia feature non-hierarchical and dialogical sessions, foster collective questioning, give more time for discussions than to monologue speeches, equally integrate a variety of people, academics and non-academics alike, giving little or no attention to bureaucracy, etc.

85 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. trad. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

86 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, directed by Pierre-André Boutang (1996; Paris: Montparnasse, 1997).

87 Contemporary paradigms like posthumanism are an exception in this tradition. See for example Karen Barad, “Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart,” *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (2014): 168-187.

## b) A Monistic/Immanent/ Thinking Together

LAPES follows in the tradition of conceptualizing universities and schools not as reproductivist or classist sites where bodies are disciplined,<sup>88</sup> and controlled,<sup>89</sup> nor where bodies are made as instruments of capitalistic biopower,<sup>90</sup> but rather as flexible spaces for all sorts of collective experiences of non-productive time, of *scholé*, i.e., time liberated from the determinations of capital and the market. The emphasis on time here is crucial. There exists in philosophies of education a long tradition of questioning the temporality of schooling when it is delimited by the demands of capitalism. Recent work on the Greek etymology of the word school (*scholé*) by Rancière and Masschelein and Simons demonstrates that what makes school uniquely a school is not that it is a site of learning (because we learn elsewhere and not only in schools), but that it is a distinct space of free time, that is, time liberated from the productive demands of the labor market.<sup>91</sup> In the Latin American tradition, Simón Rodríguez problematized the relation of *otium* (leisure time) and school by criticizing the colonization of school time by those who seek to reduce school to the site of a *negotium*, in Spanish *negocio*, the negation of *otium*.<sup>92</sup> Along these lines, LAPES promotes activities of “unproductive” thinking, like art and philosophy, which create the conditions for artistic and philosophical education experiences that decolonize time from capitalist temporal pressures. Educational experiences of this kind cultivate non-quantitative, non-productive experiences of time. Importantly, such experiences necessarily require sharing time with others. Or, one might argue that education practices which decolonize time produce collective experiences of free-time.

Collective experiences of non-productive time, of *scholé*, as fostered by the LAPES Symposium, tend also to overcome the classic

88 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

89 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (1992): 3-7.

90 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001)

91 Jacques Rancière, “Ecole, production, égalité” in *L'école de la démocratie*, ed. by Xavier Renou, (Paris: Edilig, Fondation Diderot, 1988); Jan Masschelein & Maarten Simons, *In Defense of the School: A Public Issue* (Leuven: KULeuven, 2013).

92 Simón Rodríguez, *Obras completas*, vol. I y II (Caracas: Presidencia de la República, 2001).

mind/body dualism and a consequent stress on immanence over the transcendent. LAPES simultaneously attempts to reinvigorate extensively neglected individual and collective bodies and to reconcile these devalued bodies with themselves in the form of new, embodied, affirmative free-time experiences of the self. The philosophical references drawn on here are multiple, from Spinoza, Nietzsche, and even Deleuze and his “body without organs” to the multiple epistemologies of the South and the voices emerging from the Indigenous, the *campesinos* (farmers), queer thinking, rural feminism, theories of infancy, and the different forms of knowledge emerging from subjects excluded by the dominant, Western epistemology. This immanent materialism draws on the voices of the earth and the different forms of resistance to the prominent rationality that threatens all life on the planet. It calls for new forms of relationships to knowledge—like the epistemologies of the South from Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who claims that resistance against capitalism, oppression and social injustice demands respect for life and plurality.<sup>93</sup> In sum, it calls for what we could denominate a new “school body”; new articulations in our educational practices, new materialities, new feelings, new sensibilities, new forms of respiration, new rhythms, new forms of relations amongst ourselves in reconstructed institutions. As briefly stated, I highlight the building of a materialistic and immanent ontology as a horizon for free time, school as *scholé*.

## c) Equality as a Principle

A third common LAPES presupposition is equality as a principle. This principle gives sense to a new way of thinking and practicing different forms of community, of collective life, and of political action. As we have just suggested, the whole philosophical and educational movement of LAPES seems at its core to be political in that it recreates the meaning of politics, both theoretically and in praxis. Central to this reconfiguration of politics are practices of power. Two dimensions of

93 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder/Londres: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

power deserve mention here. On the one hand, LAPES problematizes what it means to claim that every educational practice is political, or has political dimensions. In other words, LAPES seems to inscribe itself within the Freirean tradition that considers “an educator as a political agent,” but they do so by recreating the forms of this agency in a new way, in non-directive (non-hierarchical), non-intellectualist (not excluding the body), non prescriptive (immanent) ways, similar to those found in the Zapatista movement and other experiences of “new forms of exercising power” (opposed to traditional forms where power is exercised to take it, to govern others).

Given its attempts at cultivating a communal educational organization, one could argue that LAPES makes the case for a horizontalist, rather than hierarchical, politics of education. Horizontality seems to function as a regulative ideal within LAPES. It is always a horizontality to come, one never achieved. To be sure, the group acknowledges that power exists in its framework, but it is power that they constantly seek to destabilize, not allowing it to congeal in one person or dominate through one practice.

The coloniality of power, the way power is exercised with colonial implications both in North America and in Latin American academic institutions, has to do not only, or not mainly, with a political way of conceiving power, but with the way power is concretely exercised in the living forms of organizations such as universities, schools, and other institutions.<sup>94</sup> It could be said that the LAPES movement is mainly a political movement in that it questions all sorts of educational practices that actually exercise power in unequal forms even in the name of the most noble words like freedom, democracy or citizenship. For this reason, this way of thinking rejects the idea of *conscientization* as a goal for education because of the hierarchy affirmed between those who have the “true consciousness” and the uneducated ones. At the same time, it does not accept political neutrality in educational practice because to do so would be a way of reproducing the hierarchies already established, a form of conservation of the status quo. In this respect, LAPES seems to nurture itself from a variety of sources like Rancière,

<sup>94</sup> Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views From the South*. 1 (2000): 533-580.

Zapatista struggle and Hardt and Negri’s understanding of the politics of the multitude.<sup>95</sup>

Even though I have stressed some dimensions of LAPES and not considered others, the three assumptions presented above seem to be at the same time ethical, political, and epistemological. They share a form of revolutionary educational action that might liberate the way we act, what we know, and how we organize our common life. They may lead to effective forms of rebellion: encouraging solidarity where competition is stimulated, sharing with others instead of appropriating from them, cultivating and nurturing different forms of collective life instead of accumulating goods for our individual lives, resisting imposition instead of obeying and reproducing it. They seem to be emerging from very concrete practices in the ways LAPES organizes itself and lives as an institution.

## II. THINKING THE FIGURE OF THE TEACHER

Under the umbrella of this movement, in which I share and participate, I would like to present some elements that allow us to think about the role of a teacher within such educational practices that seek to produce a new politics of education. What is under investigation is the attempt to draw a politically, epistemologically, and ethically intriguing figure for those who, under the umbrella of the general features of the LAPES movement, wish to question who teaches or, at least, who is expected to do so in institutional or non-institutional contexts. Latin American pedagogy has seen a number of dogmas surrounding the figure of the teacher develop over the last several decades, despite the fact that numerous “new” pedagogies that reinforce learning over teaching have been popularized. Today in Latin America it is common in education circles to hear phrases like, “nobody teaches anybody,” “a teacher must learn from her students,” “a teacher should not transmit knowledge,” or “a teacher is a facilitator.” But such “learnification” educational discourse is potentially dangerous and naïve in that it: (a)

<sup>95</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Press, 2001).

makes the individual the center of the educational process through the image of an entrepreneur of herself stressing values like competition, meritocracy, and the like, and (b) reproduces inequality by separating those who know from those who don't know, the (more) capable from the (less) capable.<sup>96</sup> An enormous challenge in our countries is thus how to affirm a politically desirable educational thinking and practice that functions between the extremes of the hierarchical and authoritarian order on the one side, and the entrepreneur and individualistic, neoliberal, hegemonic state on the other. The following notes express an attempt to consider three characteristics of a teacher who might emerge out of the framework LAPES has been constructing, and which might allow us to reconsider possibilities for political, philosophical, and aesthetic education in our neoliberal era.

#### a) Ignorance

Even though during the LAPES symposium diverse traditions of local knowledge were constantly advocated for and reinforced in many different ways, I would like to suggest that it is politically and epistemologically important that the teacher poses herself or himself not in the position of the guarantor or distributor of any sacred knowledge, but rather as someone who demonstrates an open and dynamic relationship to knowledge, as someone who is open to the knowledge of others, and to other forms of knowledge. In other words, the main task of a teacher is not to transmit specific forms of knowledge, but instead she should nourish an open and dynamic relationship to knowledge. Such a disposition involves an important shift in pedagogical emphasis. What matters is not what the teacher knows; the emphasis instead falls on the position the teacher inhabits in relation to the knowledge surrounding her so that the teacher does not merely transmit knowledge, but rather shares and inspires a relationship to knowledge. This is to say that what matters most is not what the students learn, but rather that they develop a kind of relationship to learning: a non-competitive,

<sup>96</sup> Gert Biesta, *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015).

cooperative one, based on ignorance and desired relationships to knowledge. At this point, one clearly sees how philosophy emerges in pedagogical practice, not as a content to be taught but as a relationship to knowledge in pedagogical contexts. The etymological roots of the word philosophy are revealing here. The word philo-sophy etymologically means not wisdom (*sophia*) but a philo (affective, sensitive, passionate) relationship to wisdom. As Socrates shows in the *Apology* and elsewhere, a philosopher does not know anything except a relationship to ignorance. This wisdom of ignorance is her most enigmatic and powerful relationship to knowledge. In terms of content, a philosophical relationship to knowledge would mean not knowing, a suspension of what is known. This is the first form of ignorance affirmed by the philosophical teacher: ignorance as lack, or suspension, of a given knowledge presupposed as valid before the engagement in any specific pedagogical relationship.

But there are other forms of ignorance no less important for the teacher to affirm. To ignore does not only mean not to know. It can also mean a relationship between something—a matter, law, rule, whatever—we know but that we do not accept. This is the main kind of ignorance that Rancière argues in favor for in his *Ignorant Schoolmaster*. The schoolmaster, here presented in the figure of J. Jacotot, certainly ignores (does not know the content of) what a student will learn, but also ignores inequality in the sense that he does not accept the inequality of thinking and knowing that is at the basis of institutionalized education.<sup>97</sup> That is, the teacher acts as if this inequality does not exist at the base of the school. He or she simply does not accept it. The teacher instead believes and acts as if all students are equally intelligent, as if there were no qualitative difference between the knowledge of those who inhabit the school, no matter what the institution presupposes about them. This position of the teacher's affirms an interruption of the usual connection between teaching and knowing. This contrasts with the institutions we generally inhabit, in which a teacher is a teacher because she knows what she needs to teach to her students who do not know what she knows and need to learn it. In Rancière's formulation,

<sup>97</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

the teacher is a political agent, occupying this position not because of expertise but because of a political commitment to the equality of intelligence as a principle of teaching. In this way, a teacher is not a teacher because of what she knows but because she (a) ignores what her students will learn, and (b) disobeys what keeps her students from engaging in an active process of thinking and knowing by themselves.

#### b) Invention

Teaching requires a position of openness to the other. Popular Latin American education is characterized by the predominance of the sensibility and hospitality to others, especially those who are “outsiders,” who have been excluded from the dominant social system, minorities who do not have a voice in the dominant speech that crosses academic institutions. A dictum from what many believe to be an important popular educator of Latin America, Simón Rodríguez, illustrates this point: “*inventamos o erramos*” which translates to, “we invent or we err.” To err here should be read with its ancient meaning in mind: to vagabond or travel with no fixed destination. The preposition “or” is not an exclusive disjunctive; rather it is an explicative conjunction, for a teacher erring is a way of inventing. But what does “invent” mean here? An inventive teacher is a teacher sensible to what comes from the outside (in-vention comes from the Latin *in-ventus*: arrived in, coming from). She is a master of attention, hospitality, listening, and of creating the conditions so that the other can come as she is to the world of the school. Rodríguez reveals the need for a teacher to invent a new school at school, to revolutionize school, to make a school really be a school in the already mentioned sense of *schole*, a place where all equally have the opportunity to experience free time to think about what kind of world they want to live in. <sup>98</sup>Rodríguez brought this dictum to life in 1826 through the creation of the First Popular and Philosophical School in the Americas, a Model School, invented in Chuquisaca, former

<sup>98</sup> Simón Rodríguez, *Obras completas*, vol. I y II (Caracas: Presidencia de la República, 2001).

capital of Bolivia. <sup>99</sup>This school was the first truly “public” school in Latin America in at least two senses: (a) it was open to all, with no social, cultural or political preconditions; (b) citizenship was not an aim of this school but instead was assumed from the beginning—“*escuela para todos porque todos son ciudadanos*”(school for all because all are citizens).<sup>100</sup> Rodríguez’s school was completely anachronistic and revolutionary for his time. The reaction from the ruling classes was hostile and immediate: it was destroyed after some months. The ideals of the school, however, still inspire popular Latin American education today.

In another sense, invention calls for the imagination both of educational practice and theory beyond the actual constraints of neoliberalism. It is an essential element of the struggle for other worlds that can be alternatives to the hegemonic, neoliberal form of life. A world, to put it in Zapatista terms, where all other worlds are possible, a world of difference, equality, solidarity.<sup>101</sup> What is the educational dimension of this inventive project? What is the role of a teacher in it? It is clearly not the task of one individual alone. What kind of educational imagination can a teacher enact and foster in her students? Certainly not a technical or propagandistic imagination. Invention thus demands that a teacher be willing to practice errantry: a type of mobility with no predetermined destination in thinking. Teaching, then, would not entail the process of bringing or guiding others to one’s way of being, one’s knowledge, or one’s thinking but, instead, it would entail efforts to engage in a heuristically undetermined errantry with others. Again, Rodríguez is helpful here. He teaches us that teacher erring is a form of thinking inventively that opens thinking to those newly arrived. An inventive teacher is not static, nor does she seek to bring others to her position, but instead she is ready to move to the other’s position, to the other of her own position as she engages in collective journeying. She moves like an errant in that she cannot know the place where the encounter with her students will take her (first meaning of ignorance), and in that she does not

<sup>99</sup> Walter Kohan, *The Inventive Schoolmaster*, trans. by Vicki Jones and Jason Thomas Wozniak (Rotterdam: Sense, 2015).

<sup>100</sup> Simón Rodríguez, *Obras completas*, vol. I y II (Caracas: Presidencia de la República, 2001), 284.

<sup>101</sup> Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), *Crónicas intergalácticas EZLN: I Encuentro Intercontinental por la Humanidad y Contra el Neoliberalismo* (Chiapas: EZLN, 1996).

try to take her students to a place she already knows (second meaning of ignorance). The inventive, errant teacher is open and ready to receive others and travel together with them in thinking, as long as the trip does not disregard her political principles of equality, openness, and hospitality. In this sense, an inventive teacher involves herself in an open collective traveling with others. There is no space for isolated or individual invention, for a leading pedagogical practice without an egalitarian space with those who share education as an open meaning-making practice.

### c) Improvisation

Teaching is an art and not a technique. If philosophy is the highest form of music, education, too, is inspired by music and the teacher often acts like a musician.<sup>102</sup> The metaphor of the teacher as a jazz player might illustrate this point, but other forms of popular Latin American culture could provide similarly inspiring images for teaching: capoeira, tango, payadas, samba circles, all are forms of art that involve intense preparation and openness to the unexpected.<sup>103</sup> In each of these art forms there seems to be a combination of preparation for, and willing openness to share in an unknown journey. It could be argued that in some of these practices there are some specific formulaic features—like the leading role of the masculine dancer in tango, or the master in Angolan capoeira—and that these characteristics contradict the idea of shared, errant invention and its political principles that have just been presented.

But in reality, these features emphasize a dimension of “invention” and “improvisation” that are commonly misunderstood. The improvising teacher is not simply a spontaneous teacher, or a teacher who does not prepare. Rather, an inventive or improvisational teacher is a teacher who prepares herself through strenuous effort in order to be attentive

<sup>102</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 61a.

<sup>103</sup> According to Marina Santi the main features of jazz are all inspiring because of their educational strength: jazz as jazzing, fusion, free, swing, groove, soul, cool, and, finally, improvisation. Marina Santi and Eleonora Zorzi, *Education as Jazz* (Napoli: Liguori, 2016).

to the unexpected, to what emerges in the class without having been expected. The preparation of an improvising teaching is a preparation with no aim other than itself: it is a preparation to be prepared. To teach, is to improvise; there is no method, no receipt, no warranty, but only a large and intense preparation (“*P comme Professeur*”).<sup>104</sup> Thus the main focus of teaching in this way involves the preparation to be prepared...to listen, to follow, to question, to imagine, to be attentive. This is again where philosophy can be found in education: not only—or mainly—as a discipline, as a content matter, but mainly as a relationship to thinking, as a dimension of our sensitivity towards thinking.

### FINAL REMARKS

In the last Symposium, celebrated at the University of Miami, from March 14–15, 2016, under the title of “Decolonial Education in the Americas: Lessons on Resistance, Pedagogies of Hope,” LAPES proposed an open and democratic space to think and rethink the way we inhabit academic spaces. In this paper, I’ve tried to highlight some of the most particular features of this space. My aim has not been to give a phenomenological account of it, nor to make a thorough analysis of the practices shared, but instead to suggest some elements to inspire further inquiry about it. I’ve shown this space to be political as well as philosophical and educational. It is a space that offers a critique to white, male, dualistic forms of rationality, while affirming immanence, embodiment, and equality as principles of thinking. It insists on the collective dimension of life over the individual.

If one of the aims of LAPES is to reconceptualize new forms of teacher subjectivity, then the key concepts (ignorance, invention, improvisation) offered in the final section of this discussion are ways to imagine the type of teacher subjectivity that might come into being in LAPES projects. The path is under construction. Different voices and perspectives, like the ones that have emerged from feminist, post-human and decolonial philosophies, need to be heard in a shared philosophical,

<sup>104</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, directed by Pierre-André Boutang (1996; Paris: Montparnasse, 1997).



educational, and political search. One occasionally encounters in this search gatherings like those hosted by LAPES. What is special about these types of encounters is that we leave them with more questions than we had when we arrived. In this way, a LAPES encounter is like a provocative reading, like a touching class, and it embodies what it means to live an educational and philosophical life. ■