

# SUBJECTIVE TRANSFORMATIONS IN CURRENT POWER DIAGRAM AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN EDUCATION

## Las transformaciones subjetivas en el diagrama de poder actual y sus implicancias en la educación

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### Abstract

The article delves into the question of power in regard to subjective transformations in the current power diagram, and addresses its particular relationships with education. Through the work of philosophers such as Han, Foucault and Deleuze, the conditions of the current power diagram are discussed; this operates over subjects, it is claimed, by means of an imposition to perform that is entangled with a power semantics which subtly forces certain meaning horizons. Subjects are self-exploited in a paradoxical freedom that compels through surplus of power positivity, and are anchored to naturalized meanings endowed with the strength of obviousness. These strategies affect the capacity of subjects and create several subjective discomforts. The work reflects on the implications of such control practices in the particular context of education through a philosophical approach, in an attempt to trigger a quest of emancipatory practices and subjective transformations in times when revitalizing subject power is urgent. These harmful restraints can be modified by the exercise of freedom in an aesthetic of existence, which is also an ethics and a politics of existence.

### Keywords

Philosophy, education, subject, power, ethic, aesthetics.

### Resumen

El presente trabajo explicita la problemática del poder en relación con las transformaciones subjetivas en el marco del diagrama de poder actual y se formulan vinculaciones con la educación. Mediante aportes de filósofos como Han, Foucault y Deleuze se exponen condiciones constitutivas del diagrama de poder actual, que opera sobre los sujetos mediante una imposición de rendimiento entramada con una semántica del poder que impone sigilosamente horizontes de sentido. Los sujetos se auto-explotan en un trabajo sobre sí mismos en una libertad paradójica que obliga mediante un exceso de positividad del poder y a la vez se atan a significados y sentidos naturalizados por la fuerza de la obviada. Estas estrategias alteran la potencia de los sujetos ocasionando diversos malestares subjetivos. Se reflexiona en torno a las implicancias que estos mecanismos de sujeción pueden tener en el ámbito educativo mediante un enfoque filosófico. La reflexión puede operar como alerta que oriente la búsqueda de praxis emancipatorias y transformaciones subjetivas en el marco de la contingencia donde resulta urgente revitalizar la potencia de ser y actuar de los sujetos. Los modos de sujeción perjudiciales pueden ser modificados mediante el ejercicio de la libertad en una estética de la existencia que es también una ética y una política.

### Palabras clave

Filosofía, educación, sujeto, poder, ética, estética.

## Introduction

This paper reflects on the pedagogical relationship between the professor and the student, which started in 2020 in the Philosophy of Education in the degree in Educational Sciences of the Faculty of Humanities of the National University of Mar del Plata, Argentina. The sustained dialogue between the professor and the student during the course, as well as the shared interest in the relationship between philosophy and education allowed to develop a reflective, questioning and problematizing process



around the current power diagram, in order to critically present aspects that may affect educational reality.

The Philosophy of Education is both a theoretical practice and a philosophical practice whose epistemological, elucidatory and proactive ‘functions’ are complemented by a ‘function’ of resistance and liberation, as Kohan argues (1996); thus, analyses of the contributions of philosophers on the subject’s problem in relation to power contribute to the search for conditions that allow favorable transformations in education. Thinking of education as training, as López Morocho (2018) argues, states that education “can be seen as a machine that cannot be changed and therefore enters into a feeling of hopelessness” (p. 204); however, there is room for hope if fatalism is avoided and awareness-raising is advocated for educational practices that disarticulate this ‘machinery’ that, through diverse power devices, produces training in restraint.

To avoid the subjection of current power diagram, it is necessary to assume the situation of each individual involved in the educational field, who questions about his place in the world and his relation to himself and others as being corporeal and ephemeral, linked by time and space, history and contingency, nature and culture. As Mélich (2011) argues, nothing comes to us, but through the situation that affects us from the beginning, realizing our fragility, vulnerability and contingent way of being, and it is in that recognition where the hope of another possible world is present. This situation of individuals is crossed by a diagram of power that acts in a stealth but efficient way and has effects on subjectivity.

In this work it is argued that the current power diagram is constituted by conditions of the society of performance along with a semantics of power and this diagrammatic configuration affects individuals, causing subjective transformations in the ethical, esthetic and political sense that alter their power to act.

According to Han (2012) there is a ‘performance society’ in the 21st century, which requires individuals to carry out subjective transformations to submit to impositions that appear to be freely done, but what actually happens is that there is a positivity excess of power that forces subjects to the ‘extra mile’ to increase their productivity, so that they are created free by doing so. In addition to this, there is a ‘semantics of power’ (Han, 2012) that takes the subject into a network of senses and meanings that come from the outside; this way of power operates in a stealth and hidden way, preventing the generation of other senses that could well be created if the subject would identify that is on a horizon of senses,



since they are not questioned by presenting themselves as a dictatorship of obviousness.

The imposition of performance and power semantics make up a power diagram that is unstable because the relationships of forces in any diagram of any social field are unstable, this means that there are diagrammatic mutations; therefore, those mutations could, in case of resistance practices, bring about changes that would favor the situation of the subjects involved in these power relations.

The diagrammatic conditions and the effects on subjectivity presented below are also present in the educational field. It is important to think about the need to identify them, analyze them, and find ways to participate in the transformation of that power diagram.

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## Diagram of power and subjectivity

In this paper, a 'diagram' of power is understood as an emission of affections corresponding to a social field, which according to Deleuze (2014) is a collective field. In power relations, which are relations of forces, a force always affects and is affected, "a force has active and reactive affections. Their active affections express the way in which it affects other forces, their reactive affections express the way in which it is affected by other forces" (Deleuze, 2014, p. 102). This work will be focused on these 'affections' or 'affectations', in the sense of a microphysics of power in the Foucauldian sense, because it is the best way to think about the power of subjects 'affected' by the power diagram.

Since education has effects on subjectivity, the nuclei of meaning inherent in current subjective transformations are addressed to think about the possibility that education will contribute to the creation of transformations that help shape forms of struggle, both against the individual's subjection to performance as an individual subjected to social normalization that subordinates him to an extreme self-demand over himself, as well as against the subjection to the semantics of power.

The individual's 'work on himself' in this society that prioritizes productivity and requires that subjects self-produce themselves (self-demand) to avoid in this way being excluded, marginalized or invisibilized in and by this society (governed by a logic of stealth power), generates unhealthy effects on subjects. In this externally induced self-poiesis, which is a form of ethical violence with political and esthetic derivations,

because what really happens is that in this ‘work on oneself’, subjects become discouraged.

De-empowerment is understood to be a detrimental irruption in the intensity of the acting power of subjects; this would be the paradoxical effect that the excess of positivity of power inscribes in the ‘free’ subjectivities.

It is worth mentioning that this work refers to ‘power’ in a spinozist sense. This concept refers neither to essence nor to what the body is, but to what it is capable of bearing and doing. In this sense, Deleuze (2008) says that according to Spinoza ‘power’ means: “the actions and passions something is capable of” (p. 75), then there is no general essence, power is unique, and more than quality or amount of power, there is ‘intensity’. It is possible to say that it is precisely that ‘intensity’ of power that is affected by the power diagram in which we are currently involved.

To start, it is important to mention Foucault (1999a) and remember that several decades ago the philosopher warned about what he described as the university’s ‘double function’. On the one hand, the function of ‘exclusion’, which kept students in prison outside society, relegated on the campus where they were transmitted an academic and traditional knowledge away from the needs and problems of the present. They were maintained in an artificial society with mechanisms of hierarchical relationships and various rituals (evaluation, for example), in a kind of fictional society that immersed them to a state of distraction that had nothing to do with real life and built an enclosure where young people were “neutralized by and for society, turning into reliable people, powerless people, castrated, both politically and socially. This is the first function of the university: Putting students out of the world” (Foucault, 1999a, p. 29). To this exclusion function, the philosopher added the ‘integration’ function when students already turned into ‘assimilable’, which could be totally recovered or re-assimilated by the society that could then ‘consume them’.

These Foucauldian analyses offer powerful tools to stimulate thought, allow to identify the characteristics of a moment and locate power diagram, which has been modified over time, as is the case with any power diagram that is characterized by its dynamism and, in addition, it is not identical in different locations. Although these analyses of the philosopher differ with the current university reality, given the time and situational distance, especially because there does not seem to be the dividing line between real society and university life, the idea of thinking about the functions of exclusion and integration that, as explained, involves university life, allows to reflect on the effects on subjectivity that



these functions can cause, although in our temporal and spatial situation they are presented in another diagrammatic expression.

However, what provokes greater interest in the context of this work is what Foucault (1999a) added to the previous considerations:

Insidiously [the student] has received the 'values of this society, has received the desirable models of behavior, the guidelines of ambition, the elements of political behavior, so that this ritual of exclusion ends up taking the form of inclusion and recovery or absorption (p. 30).

Regarding what was expressed by the philosopher, it is possible to think that students are already 'consumed' and 'assimilated' in some way by today's society during their academic years. This 'double function' described above does not consist of two stages that happen sequentially, it is a diachronic process during which students receive everything the professor mentions: values of society, desirable ways of behavior, elements of political behavior and patterns of ambition.

It is possible to observe that the elements mentioned are being installed in the student as a paradoxical freedom which, as referred to Han (2012), would be the 'excess of positivity' that characterizes the 'form' in which power is presented in society.

Therefore, it is necessary to clarify some aspects of the perspective assumed in this paper. First, subjectivity is understood as a 'logopatic' lattice (which articulates logos and pathos) considering that the subject, especially in education, relates the affective and the cognitive in an inextricable way. Hence, the 'power to act' refers to the idea that we are emotional and rational beings, then the reason-passion, affection-intellect, or cognition-feeling dichotomies that somehow derive from mind-body dissociation are rejected. In the framework of this conception emerges the idea that 'work on themselves' articulates the cognitive and affective in an inalienable way, therefore, it can accommodate mental, emotional, sentimental suffering in the elaboration of these transformations.

It is also possible to explain that subjectivity in this work is conceived in the Foucauldian sense. Subjectivity is not a relationship from the individual to the world but a relationship from the knowledge and powers that the individual 'finds' in the world, which, as said by Diaz (2014), produce a fold, "generating zones of subjectivation" (p. 190). It is in this sense that is based the need to problematize the current relationship between the subject and education, especially in view of the fact that there are relations of power in education as the 'microphysics' of power, called by Deleuze (2014) as "molecular conception of power" (p. 58).



In addition to the above, it is necessary to mention the importance of intersubjectivity since subjects are always related in education; therefore, it is alluded to that relational sense, both of the subject in relation to others and of the subject in relation to the world. In this sense, as Deleuze (2014) says, power is also a relationship and the power relationship is a relationship of forces, it is then inferred that they are always present in educational relations.

The senses and effects of the performance imperative combined with power semantics are then deepened, and a perspective is shown on what we consider to be a possibility of transforming the conditions of de-empowerment, that would be found in another form of subjectivation based on an esthetic, which is both an ethical and political position.

## Tensions of power and possible subjective transformations as a gesture of vital resistance

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### *a. Between performance and suffering*

To clarify the diagrammatic conditions of power, Han (2012) is cited since he argues that the society of the 21st century is no longer disciplinary, but a 'performance society'. It is characterized by the possibility and ability to do something, so projects, initiatives and motivation replace the prohibition and mandate of the disciplinary society governed by 'no', whose negativity generates 'abnormality'. The performance society produces depressive and looser individuals who are no longer 'subjects of obedience' but 'subjects of performance', i.e., 'entrepreneurs of themselves'. Additionally, the performance society would be the result of an improvement in disciplinary societies, the subject of performance would have gone through the disciplinary phase.

With regard to the unhealthiness that can be identified as an effect of this type of society, Han (2012) mentions depression as a representative disease of the present society, which would be caused by the pressure that generates performance, for example, at work. The author refers to the 'occupational wear and tear' that causes exhaustion. The most significant thing is that the author claims that in reality what makes people sick is not the excess of responsibility and initiative, but the 'imperative of performance', as a new mandate of the labor society, which causes progressive social fragmentation and lack of relations.

The current subject of performance is defenseless and unprotected against the excess positivity of power, he explodes himself voluntarily without external coercion, the 'work on himself' that makes him both executioner and victim. So, according to Han (2012) depression occurs when the subject of performance notes that 'can no longer be able to', so for him nothing is possible, in a society that precisely promotes the idea that 'nothing is impossible'. Thus, the 'extra mile' leads to a destruction that can be related to an ethical dimension.

According to Díaz (2014), the subject of ethics is constituted in two parts, one is the 'determination of the ethical substance' and the other is the 'elaboration of ethical work'. The first is the way the individual 'shapes himself', taking into account his belonging to a group, and that way is linked to epic changes. The second is the transformation that the individual does on himself. Both 'parts' relate to the same meaning: The subject constitutes himself, and both the 'form' that is given and the 'ethical work' that he carries out, form agonistic relationships: with himself and with others. This is most certainly true if the subject is considered to be forced to take the 'shape' of the performance, thus shaping and transforming according to the parameters of the power diagram in which is immersed.

Undoubtedly, according to Han (2012) the subject of performance is at war with himself and thus the one who is depressive would represent the 'invalid' of an interiorized war. While it is not the responsibility of the authors of this work to discipline the meaning of the so-called 'depression' for which training in medical sciences would be needed, it is appropriate to affirm that there are moments of concern, frustration, sadness and restlessness that can be interpreted as diverse expressions of a strong sense of 'helplessness', in the face of excessive self-demand to be able to perform more and more; these are states that can be observed in education or at work, as mentioned by the South Korean philosopher. In this regard, a question arises: Does the 'ethical work' that subjects face in a 'performance society' resemble the work that subjects do within educational institutions about themselves?

A provisional affirmative answer can be found, because the aforementioned mood states are presented as "sad passions" in the sense of Spinoza ([1677]2012), affecting the power to act. This is a paradox: The subject seeks to weakly multiply his power to act while wasting, inhibiting or paralyzing it, so that he becomes the 'invalid' in that struggle with himself.

The power that the same subject deteriorates or hurts, that 'power' in a spinozist sense is not power over others, as Tatián (2014) says, but Spinoza refers to an instituting power that is transindividual and capable





of affecting others, and so it is “resistance to powers that requires the helplessness of others for their joy, the alienation of bodies and what bodies can do for their dominion” (p. 54).

Hence, if the subject experiences those ‘super passions’ as he encounters a limit in his own being, a limit that stops him in his career to continue to intensify what he has previously thought as a progressive growth in his performance potential, he becomes a subject dominated by hidden and invisible forces for him, since before being sick, he had been convinced that he was acting freely by pressuring himself to increase his capacity for productivity.

The performance subject shapes himself in a ‘forced freedom’ and elaborates his work on himself as a free obligation to maximize performance. While the subject constitutes himself actively, he does so according to power schemes that are proposed to him and imposed by his culture and society. With regard to education, in case subjects are transforming themselves into the sense of the ‘free’ obligation of performance, this problem should be deepened in order to find interspaces where resistance occurs in the sense of Foucault (2011), through practices of freedom.

Bearing in mind that violence of the new societies seems to be based on the self-exploitation of the subject, being this much more effective than exploitation by others, since it is accompanied by a feeling of freedom so that the operator is the same exploited, this form of ethical-political violence should be ignited. As Han (2012) says, “self-referentiality generates a paradoxical freedom, which, because of the obligation structures immanent to it, becomes as violence” (p. 20).

It is possible to infer that those involved in education can resist to the powers that find it difficult to hold themselves and who provoke ‘pathological’ manifestations in subjects. To do this, imposing performance instead of powering the subject ends up by overriding him by finally turning him as helplessness, as an alert signal. Another question arises in this thought-provoking intention:

In the educational field, will this situation of coincidence of freedom and compulsion expressed in the forced freedom as a free obligation to maximize performance be replicated?

This question cannot be answered in the magma of significance in which the subjects are immersed and of which we would be part as necessary gears for the operation of that subjective self-exploitation machine. However, raising it as a philosophical problem may in some way reveal whether the current educational task involves any of these harmful elements.



As expressed by Maliandi (2010) in the approaches of education, either the adaptation to the customs and prescriptions instituted is sought, or the disconformity with the instituted and the self-sufficient criterion is sought, without which there would be neither creativity nor change possible. Thus, setting a topic to the possibility that this 'performance' with its dire consequences on subjectivity has already become 'custom' or 'instituted way of life', is a possibility condition of a disagreement that provokes resistance and the search for actions capable of introducing changes in this new reality.

Following the lines proposed by Foucault (2011), since there is no society (or education) without power relations, the problem is not to try to dissolve them, but to favor practices in freedom, which have nothing to do with the 'paradoxical freedom' inherent in the imposition of performance.

In the educational field, the protagonist acts as a victim and executioner as can be interpreted, because he punishes himself by believing that he is not aware of that paradox. This is the responsibility of all the protagonists of education, so there is a question: Have professors and students ever thought thoroughly about this problem of paradoxical freedom that is inherent in this society?

### *b. Senses of semantic power*

In order to connect analyses of semantic power with education, it is necessary to explain as Taylor (1996) says, that humans are beings that interpret the world, the others and ourselves, and we do it from meanings and senses given in advance, which we interpret and modify, creating new senses, but always within the framework of our culture and society. From these assessments, the 'semantic power' set out by Han (2016) is addressed, because it is possible to think that it is also part of 'paradoxical freedom' and would be the second constituent element of the current power diagram.

According to Han (2016), something only becomes significant if it is put into a network of relationships, in this way, power can be linked with a 'sense', through its 'semantic potential' that frames it in a world of understanding. The sense arises when the members of a context are part of a 'referential continuity' that refers to each other. Therefore, power will have to create a 'horizon of sense' in order to manage the process of understanding and action efficiently. It is precisely at this point that power differs from violence, which is pure because it is stripped of meaning. As Han (2016) states: "Power is the only thing that allows things to partici-



pate in a sense. From this point of view, power is anything but a silent and absurd compulsion. Power is eloquent” (p. 35).

In this regard, that ‘eloquence’ of power fails to disable the creative power of human linguistics. As Joaqui Robles and Ortiz Granja (2019) say, language not only disqualifies ideas, destroys hopes, and erases or denies realities, but also creates different and creative realities that can cause important changes in the lives of subjects, can build worlds and provoke generative and productive dialogues. In other words, this paper analyzes that ‘semantic power’ in its negative sense, but it is essential to remember that there is a creative and generating ‘positive’ face in the context of human relations through language.

Considering Han (2016), sense is power and the sign reveals as the painful imprint of a will over another, thus the powerful ‘violates the other’, representing the language of signs of the strongest; in the semiotics of power the signs would originally be ‘wounds’.

Regarding ‘wound’, it is worth including an esthetic perspective since wounds exist and will exist, either because of the semiotic power as Han says (2016) or because of a diversity of lived experiences, and as such can be resigned, and included in what the horizon of sense imposed has tried to invisibilize and eliminate from the plane of sense to smooth and to endow negativity, when in reality a wound can be integrated into an ‘other’ subjective form, which may well be part of a ‘esthetic of existence’ embodied in life as a work of art (subject discussed below).

Han (2015) says that the present society increasingly eliminates the negativity of the wound, the natural beauty has stunted in the smooth and polished the digital beauty, without harming or offering resistance. Perception also avoids negativity, but to perceive with the senses is to be exposed to a breach, to a wound. The experience is necessarily part of the negativity of being shocked and snatched away by this experience, in which the subject has to expose himself to the danger of a possible wound.

According to the author, there is no poetry or art without a wound; also, thoughts and ideas are part of it, since it is in pain where the essential otherness of the existence is revealed. It assumes discomfort and uncertainty, but also grants a cracked space that allows regeneration and transformation. This poetic approach to wound holds a semantic potential that could be included in the reflections around education: Is the subject in education smooth and without any injury? How can favorable transformations in education be real if professors do not dare to meet subjects that are not *tabula rasa*, but carry marks and wounds and are



therefore not smooth matter for modeling or recording imposed senses and meanings?

Because of the latter, it is essential to emphasize briefly that what makes us human, in the Levinasian sense, is the questioning of the other, his face, his presence, because it is in that recognition where the narcissistic self-referential is interrupted. As Bárcena and Mèlich (2014) express in this relationship of otherness, it is the possibility of a new 'way of saying', a new and constant re-interpretation. It is an event that breaks all expectations, giving rise to a 'wound' at the very center of identity, and that, no matter how much it tries to heal, there will always be a scar.

The esthetic dimension has been referred to since the subject undergoes transformations on himself, becoming the architect of his being, his work of art. Whatever the way to understand that 'work of art', and here esthetic sensitivity is related with ethical sensitivity and can be partly constituted, in what Mèlich (2006) calls a pedagogical 'pathetic' that as such, in addition to transmitting the opening of thought and doing, provokes an opening of feeling, which for the philosopher is to feel the suffering of the other, to which one can add a crucial aspect in the context of the reflections that are exposed in the present work: an opening of feeling self-transformation with full awareness of the vital implications of that subjective transformation.

Returning to the semantics of power with its ability to cause pain, the reception of sign language as Han (2016) refers to as a "sense of suffering in the face of the recognition of a foreign power seeking the conquest of the other" (p. 33); the statements are thorns that are nailed to the other for their mastery to the understanding as a way of obedience.

This idea is highly challenging if it is moved to education, as it provokes and allows to analyze: the teaching effort to achieve understanding could be understood as a 'conquest' if one considers what the philosopher has said. However, it should be recognized that the power of the professor in the asymmetrical pedagogical relationship does not operate in the logic of the colonization of the student, because its work is based on the foundations of education, that they basically propagate to the benefit of the student who learns by understanding and then is included in the cultural aspect as a participating and active member, who upon entering the order of speech acquires the power to transform what he knows.

It is important to recall the Foucauldian sense of the functions of exclusion and integration in the university mentioned at the beginning; the student is integrated into the semantics of power from the beginning of his condition, although it should be noted that there is no 'exclusion'



in the sense expressed by Foucault (1999a), precisely because the power diagram already operates during academic training.

Continuing with Han (2016), the philosopher claims that power creates ‘significance’, it is not silent and absurd compulsion; at the same time, significance carries features of a ‘poetology’ of power. Power is ‘poetic’ because it always begets new forms and, moreover, does not seek an absolute perspective. Though this is a brief mention made of this poetic quality of power, it is a question that worth deepening by its esthetic potential.

Han (2016), when reviewing the Foucauldian work, expresses that disciplinary power penetrates the body, leaving traces and generating an ‘automatism of custom’. Thus, the language of power, rather than breach, is intended to be passed on to the subject’s corporeal materiality. The positivity and/or productivity of disciplinary power is presented as the genesis of movements, gestures and postures that seek a formalizing effect: ‘converting’ the subject into a machine by the automatism of habits.

It is possible to interpret that the techniques of the disciplinary society have not been replaced in the current power diagram but they have mutated, and still persist, then it would not be accurate what the South Korean philosopher had said when mentioning that society has ‘replaced’ the disciplinary society, especially given that, in addition to causing this automatism, the disciplinary power takes over the body by registering it in a semantic network, being essential to emphasize that the traces that both the disciplinary power and the power of performance leave in the body are always significant, because they inhabit the being and their effect is the ‘wound’, a mark that is a sign.

Using sense signs and configurations, power places subjects in a certain perspective that legitimizes the dominance of a group. Certainly, social sense always contains a dimension of power and dominance that operates symbolically, and strengthens itself by generating perspectives or ‘models of interpretation’ that legitimize and maintain an order in which society cares that the automatic reactions of the body make sense. According to Han (2012), this works as a ‘continuity of sense’ that operates, so that the actions are interpreted like this and not otherwise. Then, existence does not unfold in compulsion, but in the automatism of custom, which raises the efficiency of power that relates in the subtlety of the obviousness that functions as a dictatorship of the given sense.

In the educational context, there is always an attempt to share meaning and senses. If agreeing with the postulates of critical pedagogy, professors commit to students in an emancipatory sense. While the main critical categories that guide the teaching practices of some professors



are not developed here, it should be mentioned that critical professors seek to denature the given and fight against diverse forms of oppression. In this sense, the ‘subtlety’ of obviousness is best understood from Han’s contributions and can be considered as a form of oppression, since it functions as a dictatorship of the given sense. In problematizing semantic power in education, it should be considered that education produces subjectivity. As Rodríguez, Betancourt and Barrientos (2019) claim, the symbolic construction of subjectivity is generated in correlation with others, and in many cases it “has the ability to generate some alternative to the institutional forms of power, by building subjectivities that do not necessarily respond to hegemonic norms” (p. 94).

It is essential to point out that education may lead to an introduction in the semantic network mentioned by Han (2016), it may happen that both professors and students enter in a ‘model’ of significance that is irrelevant to certain ‘wounds’ caused by semantic power. Precisely because of the way in which this power operates, perhaps the subjects do not notice the new ways in which that power is presented by being immersed in the automatism of custom. While professors seek the well-being of students, perhaps without even suspecting, professors include students in the record of what is ‘natural’, given the level of ‘requirements’ of performance that seem harmless. Therefore, a potential ‘wound’ arises from the encounter and exchange where things are turned to each other, allowing to affect all the simultaneous living experiences. Ideally, Han (2015) states that the salvation of beauty is the salvation of the binding, which means that beauty that is intrinsic in the metaphor of narrative relations causes things and events to engage mutual dialogue, poetizing the world; likewise, the salvation of binding in education can save ‘beauty’ from the intersubjective relationships that occur in education.

Perhaps professors work and develop in the alluded ‘paradoxical freedom’, in the ‘ethical work’ about themselves which, in addition to converting them into obedient machines of the automatism of habits, turns them into stressed, exhausted and self-exploited subjects to perform more. This is especially true in circumstances of virtual classes because of the pandemic, without face-to-face classes that allow for the encounter and development of the teaching task together with others; in this context, there is a loneliness and a forced separation from the others, which have generated melancholy and sadness by difficult circumstances. This melancholy is one of the sad passions already mentioned, the relation between ethics and politics in such circumstances may be better understood by resorting to Tatian (2014), when arguing that melancholy, as a sad passion, is ‘antipoli-



tics', and generates helplessness in individuals. Melancholy, as inhibition of the ability to affect (in a spinozist sense), enters into a 'moral of suffering', blocks active life and therefore ethical expansion and political exercise; is a solitary passion for antonomasia, because the body that is affected by it is subtracted from the conformation of the public power by subtracting itself from compositions with the others.

In education, these 'compositions' have been altered by the absence of the usual face-to-face classes. Then, despite experiencing these sad passions (melancholy, feeling of loneliness) the subjects have been forced to perform as much as possible, and it is easy to identify how unhealthy the self-demand is to remain in the society of performance, when depowered bodies have showed that they cannot always 'be able'. This burden of sad passions had not previously been integrated into a 'moral sacrifice' in education, however, those involved have carried out unhealthy subjective transformations by acting 'as' machines and 'with' machines that fulfilled the function of replacing what is irreplaceable: the face-to-face pedagogical encounter with others.

The above is also valid for students, loneliness, sadness, melancholy and nostalgia have marked them in their experiences during this educational journey. Perhaps this is what motivated the conduction of this article. If that is the case, the opportunity to turn over the concerns about the relationship between subject and power in the way it has been observed would be valuable.

It is now appropriate to resign that experience and finish this section by mentioning Foucault (2012), when in an interview, refers to his personal experience with the disease, psychiatric hospitals and death and then he states:

(...) from experience, it is necessary to pave the way for a transformation, a metamorphosis, which is not only individual, but accessible to others; so, this experience must be able to be related, to some extent, to a collective practice and to a way of thinking (p. 16).

Likewise, it is possible to give meaning to the experiences lived by individuals during pandemic, as well as to deepen the meaning to the whole panorama shown in this work around the current power relations. Attempts have been made to 'pave' the way for a metamorphosis that is not only individual but collective, which relates to collective practices and a way of thinking the present that encompasses all.



*c. Toward an esthetic of existence as resistance*

In the reflections presented, it is not all about denunciation or appeal to the state of alert to the stealth forms of restraint, there are possible transformations and forms of struggle. The Foucauldian work always mentions the possibility of the subject to resist, because the relations of power consist on that (otherwise it would be domination). Resistance can be understood as a policy of the 'esthetics of the existence'.

In education, there is room for self-care and especially for others, since it is its main responsibility, as suggested by philosophers of education like Cullen and Mélich, among others. In the light of self-care, the Foucauldian approach proposes a lifestyle that opens the subject to the possibility of resisting power in the complex social sphere. Foucault (2012) considers that it is possible to invent 'other possibilities' of life, understanding that the main task of our time is to dismantle the construction mechanisms of subjectivities and to carry out a type of action that rejects the subjectivation that has imposed for centuries the Western culture and expresses:

And if I became interested in antiquity it was because of different reasons, the idea of morality as obedience to a code of norms is disappearing, it has already disappeared. To this absence of morality there must be the search for an esthetic of existence (p. 134).

There is no 'absence' of morality today, rather there is customary morality that has become sacrificial, while blending defensively with individualistic hedonistic nuances to resist the 'sacrifice' of itself. In this context, in the face of the new codes of sense, it is appropriate to search again for an esthetic of existence. One of Foucault's key questions (1999b) regarding life as 'work of art' is found in the following fragment:

What surprises me is the fact that art in our society has become something that concerns nothing more than matter, not individuals or life, that art is a specialty made only for experts, by artists. Why could not everyone make their life a work of art? Why can this lamp or house be an art object, but my life cannot? (p. 193).

The French philosopher warns as an indispensable and politically urgent task to consider resistance as the invention of new possibilities of life that contribute to ways of existence that make life an authentic work of art. Therefore, it is essential to focus attention on the subject's relationship with himself, as has been done since the beginning of this work, to make visible what the subjects are doing with what we are today during pandemic.





Today the struggles against forms of restraint persist and should be increasingly important, as they revolve around the question: Who are we? As Foucault (1991) says, the struggles “are a rejection of state, economic, and ideological violence that ignores who we are as individuals, and also a rejection of the scientific or administrative inquiry that determines who we are” (p. 60). In this regard, education must assume responsibility in this fight against current forms of subjection.

Foucault (2001) explores the forms of self-relationship by which the individual is constituted and recognized as a subject. It is a work on himself which in Greek culture consisted of asceticism in function of citizen life, for Hellenists it consisted of asceticism for personal perfection, and for Christians it consisted of a purifying asceticism to save the soul. But beyond these studies, the philosopher proposes an esthetic of existence, an ‘art of living’ that does not consist of replicating the spiritual exercises of antiquity, but allows the subject the possibility of being free, as opposed to the external powers.

The ‘art of existence’ is based on the principle of caring for oneself, Foucault (2001) expresses that this principle is the one that “bases his need, governs his development and organizes his practice” (p. 42) and as has already been said, self-care in education is related with the care of others.

Regarding the moral reflection of antiquity around pleasures, it is oriented neither to the codification of acts nor to hermeneutics of the subject, but to a ‘stylization of existence’. This stylization of existence acts in an open field that does not obey coded and systematized restrictions, according to Foucault (2012):

The idea of *bios* as material for a work of esthetic art is something that fascinates me. Also, the idea that ethics can be a very solid structure of existence, without any relation to the legal *per se*, without an authoritarian system, without a disciplinary structure. All of this is very interesting (p. 59).

The philosophical *ethos* of our present might consist in making our life a work of art, for which it is necessary to constantly criticize the type of rationality that has been imposed on us. Resistance, as an esthetic of existence, is the possibility of exercising freedom, choosing it as a way of being. It is a practice that rejects the regulations imposed in a revolutionary gesture that activates creativity in the field of *ethos*; it is a force of transformation and struggle against the powers that try to control and normalize us; it is the creation of new ways of existence through the rejection of imposed subjectivity. It is about living the creation as a permanent



practice, such as resistance that enables modes of existence that allow to make life, both ethically and esthetically, a field of unprecedented affections and perceptions, giving new ways of looking, knowing, thinking and doing. In short, as Foucault (2012) says: “Since the self is not given to us, I believe there is only one practical consequence: We have to create ourselves as a work of art” (p. 61).

## Conclusion

The main conditions that make up the current power diagram have been presented and their relation with the ethical, political and esthetic that form subjectivity.

Therefore, since education is ethical, political, esthetic and also teleological, it has been reflected on the need to be alert to the subjective transformations that educational practices generate, encourage, favor, discourage, make difficult or interrupt.

Being alert to the subjective transformations that current education causes is a challenge for those who are involved in education with emancipatory aspirations.

Considering as ‘unhealthy’ some subjective transformations in the context of the ‘performance society’, means to think that they limit, condition or impede the exercise of the power of acting of the subject.

Foucault (2012) thinks that by having mentioned the forms of repression and limitation that occurred in the past, “people are free to come to their own conclusions, to choose, on the basis of all this, their own existence” (p. 135). In the same sense, this work has attempted to highlight the forms of limitation and repression that work stealthily in the power diagram at present.

In the framework of an apparent freedom of the subject to operate transformations on himself, he can ‘work’ on himself highly influenced by the ‘imperative of performance’, i.e., today the subject ‘in’ education can feel and think that he is exercising his freedom when in reality he does not know the hidden mandates that require him to maximize his productivity, and then he imposes on himself what is actually imposed stealthily on him from the outside. It is expected that it changes, and then all subjects can freely decide their own existence.

Professors are immersed in a complex world of strong and tense human relations where power is always present; hence, it is essential to promote in education a movement that authorizes the deconstructions of



dominant powers, both inside and outside institutions, with the purpose that each subject can defend himself from social pressures by taking the path toward an esthetic of existence in the tireless task to conceive life in and outside education as a work of art.

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