

ARTICLE

Paideia in precariousness: to make sense in common

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ABSTRACT

“There is no common world,” stated Bruno Latour in a Manifesto, “there never was.” How then do we get used to imagining the existence of a consensus that, overcoming disagreements and conflicts, cemented our common existence? And if the disputes, far from being passing and superficial phenomena to be attributed to pedagogical and communication errors, as Modernity supposed, were the very life of the pluriverse we inhabit? Then, how to avoid thinking that the mere idea of an unshakable truth, only accessible by specialized knowledge, by a science above values and apart from human interests, was one of the first fake news of Modernity? The common world “is yet to be composed,” insists Latour. But, how to do it? This is what the present text intends to discuss, with the support of Isabelle Stengers’ works.

KEYWORDS

truth; fake news; modernity; science; common sense.

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FORMAÇÃO HUMANA NA PRECARIIDADE: FAZER SENTIDO EM COMUM

RESUMO

“Não há mundo comum,” afirmava Bruno Latour, “jamais houve.” Como então nos habituamos a imaginar a existência de um consenso que, por trás dos desacordos e dos conflitos, cimentava nossa existência comum? E se os diferendos, longe de se constituírem, como quis a Modernidade, em fenômenos passageiros e superficiais, atribuídos a erros pedagógicos e de comunicação, fossem a vida própria do pluriverso que habitamos? Então, como evitar pensar que a própria ideia de uma verdade inabalável, unicamente acessível pelos saberes especializados, por uma ciência acima dos valores e apartada dos interesses humanos, tenha sido uma das primeiras *fake news* da Modernidade? O mundo comum “ainda está por ser composto,” insiste Latour. Mas, como fazê-lo? Eis o que pretende interrogar o presente texto, com o apoio nas reflexões que desenvolve Isabelle Stengers.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

verdade; *fake news*; modernidade; ciência; senso comum.

FORMACIÓN HUMANA EN PRECARIEDAD: SENTIDO COMÚN

RESUMEN

“No hay mundo común,” dijo B. Latour en un manifiesto, “nunca hubo.” ¿Cómo nos acostumbramos a imaginar la existencia de un consenso que, detrás de los desacuerdos y los conflictos, habría consolidado nuestra existencia común? Y si las disputas, lejos de constituirse, como lo quería la Modernidad, en fenómenos pasivos y superficiales, atribuidos a errores pedagógicos y de comunicación, ¿eran la vida misma del pluriverso en el que habitamos? Entonces, ¿cómo evitar pensar que la idea de una verdad inquebrantable, solo accesible por conocimiento especializado, por una ciencia por encima de los valores y aparte de los intereses humanos, fue una de las primeras *fake news* de la Modernidad? El mundo común “aún está por componer,” insiste Latour. ¿Pero cómo hacerlo? Esto es lo que el presente texto pretende cuestionar, con el apoyo de las reflexiones de I. Stengers.

PALABRAS CLAVE

verdad; *fake news*; modernidad; ciencia; sentido común.

INTRODUCTION

It's about resisting, albeit desperately, the apocalyptic idea according to which from now on we would be in the post-facts, and also post-common sense era, an era that would have lost all compasses, or broken them. (Stengers, 2020)

La régulation de ces débats est un des défis du moment pour nos démocraties. Cette situation devrait conduire à inventer des moyens qui permettent de dépasser ce conflit entre des vérités qui sont produites par des systèmes de véridiction incommensurables. La solution est à rechercher dans une approche plus expérimentale de la décision publique qui n'oppose pas une vérité à une autre vérité, mais qui définit clairement les conditions d'exploration d'options alternatives et se donne les moyens d'orchestrer les processus d'apprentissage collectifs dans un contexte d'incertitude radicale. (Demor-tain and Joly, 2020)

Perhaps one day we will discover that the same logic operates in mythical thinking and in scientific thinking, and that man has always thought equally well. Progress — if the term applies — would not have had consciousness as its stage, but the world, in which a humanity endowed with constant faculties would have continually encountered, throughout its long history, new objects. (Lévi-Strauss, 2008, p. 248)

For a long time, the question of truth has not mobilized society in such a broad and forceful way, arousing all kinds of reactions, but without any initiative being able to offer it a consistent answer. As Jean-François Lyotard (1983) so well described many decades ago in *Différend*, this problem initially seems to stem from the fact that, despite our best efforts, we are no longer able to avoid the serious conflicts that surprise and frighten us: we live in an era in which indifference is impossible, and no instance seems capable of absorbing disagreements and carrying out their terrible consequences. More than ever, therefore, the question of the legitimacy of the discourse seems to be crucial (Lyotard, 1983, p. 10). Or not?

This is because the relentless and incessant production of fake news, the cynical postulation of the existence of alternative truths, force us to recognize that, concerning cultural habits in effect in our societies, the problem of the reliability of the sources that feed the relationships with reality and with the others simply no longer applies. With the extraordinary expansion of the means and channels of information and communication, which have become increasingly accessible, there has also been the habit of uncontrolled and inattentive consumption of information and analyses. Little by little, the dissensions deepened and reached almost all domains of common existence, to the point that today we have the current feeling that we live in parallel, hostile universes, in our “bubbles.” There is no longer a common world.

However, has it only one day existed? Would not the notion of the common world itself be a kind of philosophical mirage, ancient and admirable but properly illusory?

There is no common world. There never was. Pluralism is with us forever. Pluralism of cultures, yes, yes, of ideologies, opinions, feelings, religions, but also pluralism of natures, of relationships with the living, material worlds, and also with the spiritual worlds. No agreement is possible about what makes up the world, about the beings that inhabit it, that inhabited it, that must still inhabit it. Disagreements are not superficial, transient, due to simple errors in pedagogy or communication, but fundamental. [...] No, if we put aside what separates us, there will be nothing left to put in common. Pluralism works very deeply. The universe is a pluriverse (James). (Latour, 2011, p. 39)

The statement may arise indignation on the part of those who, like the author, believing in the sincere effort to reach the truth that animated human intellectual practice over the centuries, read these words as a criticism of the scientific exercise, which they certainly are not. They seek to be a diagnosis of the way of being of the human world, in its inextinguishable diversity.

“TRUTH” AS FAKE NEWS?

Throughout history, the human search, specialized or not, for the truth — or the denunciation of the falsehood of established or announced truths — divided minds, fomented disputes and rancor, fueled prejudices, unleashed wars and revolutions. But the *discourse* on truth has been seized, since the beginning of time, by the installed power, which made itself its authorized and exclusive spokesperson. Since then, confronting it implied challenging the established order, often at the price of exile, ostracism, torture, and death (in this regard, the beautiful analysis, already cited, by Jean-François Lyotard, in *Le Différend*, 1983).

This, of course, and for the good of humanity, did not silence the questioners: but neither did their sacrifice imply immediate benefits for common knowledge, for the implantation of social justice, for the practice of freedom. The victory over illusion, error and mystification was always restricted, provisional and fragile: beyond our limits, the voice of the powerful always echoed louder, bringing their procession of domination and misery.

However, there was a moment when we thought it possible to radically change the course of things and free forever the reason from disputes, injustices, and wars: it was conventionally called Modernity. The final battle against error and dogma, its heralds said, should be fought with the weapons of a new rising power: science, the beloved daughter of modern reason, capable of inaugurating a new era of certainties of understanding.

The ancient truths, they claimed, were based on the strength of tradition, which anchored faith in religious dogmas, fear of the invisible world, peaceful acceptance of the authority of blood, belief in the sovereign's reason, and trust in the

past. Therefore, the new truths should arise from the scientific activity, which was based on the demonstration of facts and not on belief. “If reality is not granted from the tip of her little finger by a princess, it must be the object of ‘demonstration,’ that is, of argumentation and presentation as [nothing more than] a case...” (Lyotard, 1983, p. 33). Thus, the dominant scientific discourse, rejecting the daydreams that populated the brightest minds of the time, breaking with ancient sources of authority, proclaimed the confidence in observation and understanding, the only possible origins for the secure knowledge, distinguishing it “from belief, opinion, and assent” (Locke, 2012). In this way, the biblical saying was changed: “[You shall establish with your human resources the truth, and] the truth shall set you free.” Therefore, offering itself as neutral and universal, scientific truth became the guarantor of the indiscriminate progress of societies and, for individuals, of the certainty of autonomy.

It so happens that social peace did not follow the heroic proclamations of the moderns, now committed to carrying out their civilizing mission in the name of truth and progress. Thus, once again, the old dichotomy that haunted human history was restored: the anthropological division between kinds of humans — those capable of producing the new indisputable realities, and those who began to owe respect and obedience to the truths thus disclosed. Moreover, the geopolitical division between two types of worlds was consolidated — the civilized world and, beyond its borders, all the “rest.”

The unlimited progress and happiness promised by the “modern world” was never carried out: thus, little by little, the fascination it had exerted faded, faith in the new geopolitical order dissolving in tides of postponement and sophistry, while science became the target of criticism from those who saw it as associated with domination that was ensured. Criticizing science implied denouncing the impossibility of neutrality: and, since the gloomy analyses of F. Nietzsche (among others, 1992, 2011), M. Heidegger (1986) and L. Wittgenstein (2005) were followed by the two Great Wars (Bouveresse, 2000), the Nazi genocide, the atomic bomb, the accelerated development of capitalism parallel to the denunciations of the horrors of colonialism and economic inequality, the context was created in which science and technology were finally affirmed as new forms of ideology (Habermas, 1968).

A whole generation of academics and activists then endeavored to denounce the limits of scientific knowledge, the insufficiency of its certainties, or, better said, the wide margin of uncertainty that its advances were unable to reduce. It was not, however, and it is not, a conjunctural issue related only to the insufficiencies of scientific progress. In many cases, this margin does not derive from the precariousness of our knowledge, but from the fact that the human world does not allow itself to be converted entirely to the rules of objectivity. Thus, this margin of *indeterminacy* constitutes the space offered to the invention of other ways of being, to human deliberation, to art, to the field of politics (Castoriadis, 1991). Only today, however, and in light of current events, can we see how dangerous it is to imagine that this space can be considered independent, as situated above the world of “objective realities” that science pursues, and that it can, thus, deny them at will... By proposing to carry out the critique of scientific objectivity, wouldn't the so-called *science studies* surreptitiously succumb to their own illusions? This is the harsh question

introduced, almost two decades ago, by one of the most systematic critics of science, Bruno Latour (2004, p. 242):

The mistake [was] to believe that we too have given a social explanation of scientific facts. No, even though it is true that at first we tried, like good critics trained in the good schools, to use the armaments handed to us by our betters and elders to crack open — one of their favorite expressions, meaning to destroy — religion, power, discourse, hegemony. But, fortunately (yes, fortunately!), one after the other, we witnessed that the black boxes of science remained closed and that it was rather the tools that lay in the dust of our workshop, disjointed and broken.

Thus, in the end, the critique of the neutrality of science has not even scratched the supremacy that, in many cases, it started to enjoy from modernity onwards. On the other hand, it did not prevent the production of arguments that, in its name, gave rise to the worst ideologies. Nevertheless, the question introduced by our present time goes far beyond that: it concerns the explosion of “denialist” discourses, which start to question the solid foundations on which some facts have settled down — in onslaughts aimed at everything from gas chambers to racism, from historic events to climate catastrophe. It is especially the rejection of the ecological question that underlies the aforementioned text, in which Bruno Latour (2004, p. 231) analyzes the deep contradictions that the problem of truth began to raise.

In this text, Latour considers how the critique of scientific knowledge now serves as a pretext and basis for the establishment, by US “republican strategists,” of their *brownlash*¹ campaign — which has as its sole aim the unlimited expansion of predatory activity of natural resources and the ecological devastation practiced by the unstoppable capitalist greed. The strategy of shielding these practices of indiscriminate and devastating use of the planet is precisely the claim of the margin of uncertainty that accompanies the construction of scientific facts.

An unsettling turnabout for a theorist who, as he claims, devoted much of his work to show the limits of scientific certainty! (Latour, 2004, p. 227).

The danger would no longer be coming from an excessive confidence in ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact — as we have learned to combat so efficiently in the past — but from an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as bad ideological biases! While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the *illusion* of prejudices? (Latour, 2004, p. 227)

1 Paul and Anne Ehrlich, two American biologists, to refer to the deliberate attempt to minimize the devastating effects of the ecological crisis, coined the term in 2005. Information available at: <https://news.stanford.edu/pr/96/961021ehrllich.html>. Accessed on: May 10, 2020.

Latour (2004) observes that the “critical impulse” that led the analyses to focus on the exhaustive study of the conditions of production of the facts also led to the belief that it was necessary to gain distance from them so as to debunk them (Latour, 2004, p. 131). This was the context that led the author to propose, to the continuous outrage of many, a “new empiricism” marked by the concern with a reality that assumes it cannot be defined solely by the objective facts — by the so-called “questions of fact” (Latour, 2004, p. 244) which, he says, do not serve to teach how to deal with things.

Matters of fact *are not all* that is given in experience. Matters of fact are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and only a subset of what could also be called *states of affairs*. It is this second empiricism, this return to the realist attitude, that I'd like to offer as the next task for the critically minded. (Latour, 2004, p. 232, our italics)

In this way, although subjecting his work to an explicit questioning, Latour remains faithful to the question that has always animated him, relating to the divide between nature and culture — between the human and the physical — which was at the base of the dominant modern thought on reality (Latour, 1993), supporting the predatory attitude with which the planet has been treated since then. Reality is not the simple result of the abstraction of every human element, the author reaffirms: but neither is it the mere consequence of the obsessive search for the human factors involved in the production of these facts, he now adds. What we experience as reality is the bringing together of a multiplicity of factors, of human and non-human “participants” that compose it: for this very reason, a critical and realistic attitude, as the author defends, would consist of “a multifarious inquiry launched with the tools of anthropology, philosophy, metaphysics, history, sociology, to detect how many participants are gathered in a thing to make it exist and to maintain its existence” (Latour, 2004, p. 246).

It is this type of investigation that Latour has been dedicating himself: to overcoming the cleavage between, on the one hand, nature and culture, between the inanimate things to be mastered and the knowledge capable of doing so; and, on the other hand, between the questions produced by the examination of objective facts (the so-called “matters of fact”) and the questions composed by the demands of the communities involved, of irreducible subjectivity since they are related to values (the “matters of interest”) (Latour, 2012).

FOR A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF *PAIDEIA*:² IGNORANCE AS A COMMON SHARE

It goes without saying how much all the questions that Latour deals with have direct implications for the dominant social practices of *paideia*, as they were

2 The original term is *formação humana* which, in Portuguese, means a kind of education that is not limited by formal environments, such as schools, and does not have an equivalent in English. Therefore, we chose to use the Greek term, which means such an idea.

instituted from, precisely, Modernity. It is known how, in revolutionary France, armed with faith in the progress of science and in the victory of the truth over prejudices and injustices, the firm intention to defeat past ignorance, prejudices and vices gave rise to the public, universal, secular, free school. Destined to make knowledge the weapon of human emancipation, the institution quickly became a model for the Western Catholic world.³ This is the victorious philosophy that animated educational practice, which has since become a common public activity, and which is itself put to the test by the harshness of denial but, equally, by the insistent and deaf appeal to the “authority” of science. How to overcome the new cleavages that emerge from within society in the classroom, triggering new and inglorious battles between obscurantism and enlightenment?

The current civilizing crisis, characterized by the rapid degeneration of political and social values, by the growing disbelief in authorities and areas of common construction, is accompanied by a radical critique of Western culture and, particularly, of the philosophy that supported it, and of its deep alliance with an action that, pretending to be enlightened, rational and progressive, had as its silent counterpart the justification of colonization, slavery and the systematic plunder of colonized peoples. Moreover, carrying out the economic and social devastation of non-European cultures, consecrated the conversion of modern states to capitalism (Mignolo, 2017). The long-announced decline of universalist doctrines carried with it the illusion that it would be possible to overcome differences (“reality, subject, community, purpose”) (Lyotard, 1983, p. 12).

Imagining that it was able to eradicate disagreement and the conflicts it provoked, control passions, eliminate errors inherent to judgments based on appearances and circumstances, Western, universalist philosophy neglected to question itself and ended up, to a large extent, making itself an accomplice of, precisely, what it intended to extirpate: injustice, dogma, domination. Moreover, the discordant voices that might have been raised were not enough to make her, abandoning her narcissistic and self-referential sleep, see what was going on around her. It is true, ponders Isabelle Stengers (2020), that “the philosopher’s task is not to transcend the civilization to which he belongs:” but, without a doubt, she adds, “it is up to him not to ratify the terms under which that civilization is thought” (Stengers, 2020).

However, under these conditions, will not continuing the educational task today necessarily involve questioning the philosophical bases on which the project of the *paideia* was and is thought, thus echoing the initiatives that, also in the field of curriculum studies, didactics, of the sociology of education, ethnic-racial studies, gender and sexuality studies, are being made to think about education in contemporaneity?

If the proposal presented by Isabelle Stengers (2020), inspired by the work of A. Whitehead (1948), seems especially appropriate for the present time, it is because, far from avoiding the serious problems posed by the question of “truth”

3 Note that the school model instituted in the Protestant world, which originated in Sunday schools aimed at teaching the Bible, also viewed knowledge as a key to human liberation. (Valle, 1997).

today, it assumes them, making room for divergence. However, as any precaution seems little in a time as troublesome as the one we are going through, it is perhaps worth underlining the obvious and saying that we will not be here in any way neglecting science and rational knowledge, or even their relativization. On the contrary, we will be affirming the need to understand how they can better serve the democratic project, composing a practice of *paideia* that does not exclude the opening to imponderable human diversity.

The starting point of Whitehead's reflection could not be more appropriate for our interests. He takes up the figure of Socrates, or the figures of Socrates called to face ignorance: the philosopher of aporia, who claims that he has no answer for anything, but who admits to being ignorant; Platon's master, capable of transcending the transcendent responses that citizens provide him with within a higher knowledge; and the dangerous instiller of the poison of doubt, condemned to death by the polis. It so happens that each one of these images always corresponded to the figure of the ignorant citizens, not of the knowledge of the time, but above all of the superior knowledge that Platon aimed at. Now, in 1925, Whitehead (2004) opposed the practice of *assemblage*⁴ to this philosophy, as he argued that philosophy, after all, "can exclude nothing" (Whitehead, 2004, p. 26):

The different answers that the philosopher gathers, however divergent and partial, will not be disqualified, nor reduced to the testimony of the ignorance of the Whiteheadian Socrates' interlocutor. They will be part of an assemblage that puts the philosopher to work, which has the character of the problematic.⁵

For this reason, in *Modes de pensée* (2004), Whitehead defended the "experimental use of analogies and the exploration of contrasting ways" of thinking about reality. Nothing more appropriate, it seems, for a philosophy of education that intends to build demands and ways of being attentive to the world, to the plurality of the world and the ways of experiencing it that, due to this increased attention, it gathers in its activity.

Thus, from Stengers' reflection emerges the project of a philosophy that finally combats its own arrogance — this attitude ironically cultivated over time by the practice that, in its origins, had proclaimed as the wisest among all the sages precisely the one who claimed to know nothing.⁶ A philosophy capable of getting rid of this eagerness to demarcate itself from the crowd, not only because "given the immensity of things, ignorance is a common lot" (Stengers, 2017, p. 13), but above all in view of the closure and the "loss of the world" (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 9) that the division between "experts" and "common people" always introduces eventually.

4 The term is kept as it appears in the original in English since it is also in current use in several languages, including Portuguese, especially in plastic arts, to mean the practice of bringing together heteroclitic pieces forming a single composition.

5 *Assemblage* is the term that designates what Latour calls collective (Latour, 2004, p. 32).

6 Platon (2011a). It is, however, curious that Socrates says, in the Symposium, 177 d, "to know nothing but the questions of Eros" (τα\ e0rwtika/) (Platon, 2011b, p. 110).

Furthermore, Stengers (2017) goes on to say, not to continue to ratify the mental schemes and the historically instituted practices of domination, philosophy should, by finally abandoning the pretense of “unmasking” the fallacies of non-specialized knowledge, “protect and care”:⁷ protect the diverse and take care of what tends to be excluded, because it is considered “disposable,” but which concerns the plurality of human and non-human modes of existence that make the planet be.

One can imagine that what is “entrusted to philosophy” is not questions that it is responsible for answering, but the care to articulate, without pacifying it, without reducing it to a common, the divergent multiplicity of the “evidences” that the common sense, activated, recalcitrant, will no longer let you be disqualified, dispatched into ignorance. (Stengers, 2017, p. 37)

The hallmark of philosophical arrogance — of the argument from authority — is the speed with which it dispenses senses, values, and knowledge that are foreign to it, which follow other logic and come from other ways of thinking and inhabiting the world. In Stenger’s vocabulary, one of the fundamental attitudes that her slow philosophy must incorporate thus refers to the act of “ruminating” — of patiently and humbly considering what is served, without getting carried away by the habit of rejecting it before even tasting it appropriately. “Ruminating” is putting oneself in a position to recognize the sometimes deaf but always stubborn resistance that common sense⁸ opposes to the excessive and often too obvious “absolute truths” of specialized knowledge...

It is clear that the insistence with which some cling to what they would like to be the reality, the stubbornness of those who need to believe in something, whatever the cost, as we have witnessed in our society these past few years, confuses us and almost forces us to a bellicose attitude! Nonetheless, how to avoid making this necessary rejection an indiscriminate habit, which ends up implying a simple *loss of confidence in the experience*, as we humans live it in our daily lives? No wonder, therefore, that philosophy so often serves as an alibi for escaping reality and for maintaining a prepotency that, in addition to being unfounded, eventually results in the privatization of something that, just because it had always been graciously offered, could be appropriated.

Thus, a new type of philosophy of education for human development is also needed today: capable of distrusting the rules of an immemorial dialogue that, starting with the demand for an abstract definition, always ends with the reaffirmation of ignorance and, even more, with the total irrationality of the interlocutor.⁹ Clearly the operation entails risks, as the fringes of established reason harbor all kinds of otherness...

7 Quote by Bruno Latour (2004, p. 232), about the thought of Donna Haraway.

8 And, for lovers of definitions, it should be clarified that the term has, in the history of philosophy, two distinct origins: in Aristotelian reflection, it refers to the solidarity of the experience of the senses; but, in the context that is ours, it is clear that we are referring to the set of opinions, ways of feeling and acting given as commonly shared within a community, the established values and rules against which the nascent science also had to oppose...

9 It may not even be necessary to quote Platon (2011c, p. 1436-1480).

Undoubtedly, given the shameless spread of fake news, these recently named alternative truths, given the determined indifference or virulent distrust of the more established facts, one might be tempted to settle the score of twenty-five years ago: “It is clear that relativism, the attack against the authority of the facts that should have brought us into an agreement, was an authorization granted for the escalation of irrationality...”. (Stengers, 2020)

However, considers Stengers (2020), to use current circumstances to invoke the “fundamental irrationality” of the public, and to sustain the need to make them return to “trust those who know” would be to neglect the originality of what is happening today, returning to the old dichotomy that harbored the omnipotence of experts!

The author is certainly aware of the unprecedented virulence that leads so many to maintain, concerning scientific discourse, “less blind credulity than a gloomy desire to refuse to understand, to get revenge on ‘those who know’” (Stengers, 2020). This is the fertile territory in which all sorts of petty manipulations are based, in which the appeal to obscurantism, fanaticism, hatred for everything that, not being similar, endangers the fragile identity that has been painfully maintained, is rife and rewarded. And it is not possible to ignore the sordid campaign carried out by the enemies of democracy, who arm themselves with all kinds of strategies to assert their domination and their nefarious policy. But it is also, without a doubt, urgent and indispensable to think about how the rancor of those seeking simple and immediate answers to their afflictions, real or imagined, takes root and flourishes. Given the current reality, it is at least reckless to reject all responsibility to the other side, to the side of ignorance: would it not be, after all, the revenge of the humiliated, who now “reject as a lie and plot everyone those who asks them to reflect?” To what extent is this refusal simply the answer offered to the long arrogance and contempt of “those who know?”

Let us dare to displease lovers of ready-made answers: what Stengers (2020) questions here is also the no less dizzying advance of technical-scientific logic, and the dismantling of what is considered mere common sense, with the consequences that derive from this false attitude of superiority that “specialized knowledge” insisted on maintaining, in its *hardcore* version, or in the critical discourse of social sciences and philosophy. Proposing, therefore, a new attitude, which seeks to effect a “welding of imagination and common sense,” Stengers (2020) warns of the importance of “becoming sensitive to the reasons of others” so that one can “make sense in common.” This is what Donna Haraway (2016) called “sympoiesis”¹⁰ and

10 “Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means ‘making-with.’ Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. In the words of the Inupiat computer ‘world game,’ earthlings are never alone. That is the radical implication of sympoiesis. Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it. [...] In 1998, a Canadian environmental studies graduate student named M. Beth Dempster suggested the term sympoiesis for ‘collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components’” (Haraway, 2016, p. 58-61).

that we have learned from the militant movements and from all the extraordinary confluence of studies carried out today in different parts of the world: the unusual chance that opens up for philosophy to be present in its world, in its own time, putting itself at the service of the here-and-now.

A PHILOSOPHY AGAINST INDIFFERENCE: RETURNING TO THE BODY

It is a fact that this here-and-now is always “irreducibly problematic,” essentially diverse, and that trying to compose it is an incessant task. Seeking to protect itself, precisely, from these risks, the tradition of thought established that the *requirement of abstraction* necessary for the production of knowledge depended on a retreat, on a distance that would allow seeing the whole “with clarity and impartiality.” However, following Whitehead, Stengers (2017, p. 28-29) argues that *abstraction is not a privilege of science*: there is no thought without abstraction, which is always selective and partial and, more often than not, guided by the needs of action. After all, observation, attention, and interpretation proper to those commonly called “higher animals” do not depend on language — which, in the literate world, became the herald of the imperative of abstraction as it conquered the right to carry meanings independently of the “immediate reality” to which it was associated. Abstraction is not, insists Stengers (2017), a privilege of thought — despite the Platonic lesson, which made the inability to define *a priori* what is, for example, courage, what is virtue, what is justice... (Platon, 2011c), full proof of the inability to reflect, to abstract thought on the part of its competitors and the general public.

There is no thought without abstraction; such is the lesson that Stengers (2017) brings from Whitehead: all thought presupposes abstraction. Nevertheless, this certainty brings its demands; for, in every period, the crucial task of philosophy is to cultivate vigilance concerning the modes of abstraction that equip thought. Let us get this straight: the duty of philosophy, far from criticizing modes of abstraction or specialized knowledge, opposed to what would be “concrete knowledge,” is to cultivate vigilance concerning these modes of abstraction, that pretend to set themselves up as universal rules, treating as insignificant and contemptible what they are obliged to omit. It is not, therefore, a case of “defending the concrete” but rather of “making it felt” that is, of “reviving or intensifying the dimensions of experience [which are] [...] omitted by a [certain] mode of abstraction” (Stengers, 2020). In other words, it would be up to philosophy to seek to “activate the dimensions of experience that our perceptual and linguistic modes of abstraction omit” (Stengers, 2020).

For nature is what allows for a variety of perceptual experiences — such as “the experience of the poet, scientist or rabbit on the lookout for prey” (Stengers, 2020). Whitehead thus seeks to overcome the dichotomy between an “objective” nature that causes our perceptions and a “subjective” or “apparent” nature that would result from our sole responsibility. *Nature is susceptible to a variety of abstraction modes*. There is no privilege in any particular way, but a “variety of modes of perception, of ways in which we pay attention, in which we attach importance to what we experience” (Stengers, 2017, p. 21).

Here is a construction that directly opposes the very definition of modern science, which, established on the basis of the famous Kantian scheme of pure concepts of understanding, affirmed the existence of spontaneous activity of organization of reality that science began to register. As observed by Cornelius Castoriadis (1975) in the *Imaginary institution of society*, this conception introduced the postulation of a receptive passivity of sensibility, that is, that sensibility could be entirely implied by the “thing in itself,” with other ways to make sense of reality therefore not being admitted in the realm of science. However, stated the philosopher, “every organization shows itself, sooner or later, partial, incomplete, fragmented, insufficient — and even [...] intrinsically deficient, problematic and finally incoherent” (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 315): for this very reason, there is a history of science — even more, consequently, there is not just a monolithic and unquestionable discourse of science, but a diversity that is not always converging in scientific discourses.

However, this does not mean, ponders Castoriadis (1975), that there is a world as “a simple multiplicity of the diverse without any organization” (Castoriadis, 1975, p. 272). These two antagonistic and alternative views — that of rigidly objective, empirical knowledge and that of purely scientific, ideal constructions — share, Stengers (2020) observes, the radical separation between the physical and the human. Newton, Hume, and Kant contributed especially to the establishment of this “bifurcation of nature.” Newton introduced the notion of objective nature, governed by universal laws accessible by observation and calculation; in a diametrically opposite direction, Hume made human constructions the only ones responsible for the intelligibility granted to nature, there is no way to establish in an “objective” way the causes and effects of nature. Finally, Kant would have combined the two, Newton and Hume, associating the ratification of the universal character of the Newtonian model of explanation with the postulation of a subject of knowledge that is itself the object of its perception.

Newton, Hume, Kant — “encamped, the three of them, in the safe soil of modernity” (Stengers, 2020), were at the base of a movement that consisted in trying to eradicate the ways of living and inhabiting the land they considered inconceivable within their definition of civilization. Thus, “not ratifying the terms in which civilization was conceived” does not only imply the *deconstruction* of ideas: in addition to breaking with the presumption of the dominant epistemology, this implicates *relearning to have a body, to make body* with the world; to be amazed — with the world, with the reasons of others, with everything that, being outside my field of interest, feeds the existence of others.

At the heart of the matter is the injunction to “reactivate common sense.” Stengers (2020) notes that Kant introduced still another bifurcation, separating everyday empirical experience from values and an empty, imperative universal moral law. Since then, the epistemological claim of science continues to be about a knowledge that owes its authority to the facts on which it is grounded, building itself *against* everything that is called an *opinion*.

For this very reason, the critical attitude of philosophy should, the author asserts, be exercised above all against the claim, by a specific mode of abstraction — that of specialized knowledge — of the *power to disqualify and silence other knowl-*

edges, or other modes of abstraction. The author qualifies this claim as “predatory,” in that it intends to legitimize the elimination of everything that does not fit in its model. The reference is to what ends up coming to the surface, such as the “questions of interest” mentioned by Bruno Latour (2004). But, how can we not think here, too, of the systematic destruction of subaltern knowledge and cultures, carried out by colonizing practice with the weapons of civilized reason (Kisukidi, 2017)?

However, more deeply, the modern way of thinking about knowledge has established *indifference* as a primordial requirement: to be understood, initially, as a denial of the difference imposed by the fact that we are incarnated beings and, therefore, necessarily subjected to different experiences of sensitive apprehension of the reality. Then, because the traditional philosopher, like the scientist, regards the body as an *accident*: they are “dead to their own body” (Kisukidi, 2017, p. 54).

Stengers (2020) considers at length the catastrophic consequences of living in “a world effectively deprived of the effectiveness of ‘making felt’”: she refers to the case of an elderly woman who can no longer signify current events and experiences, which remain for her as totally foreign (Schillmeier, 2014). The old lady’s pathology is like the metaphor of our culture: in a way, insensitivity seems to have become the proper condition of our world, so that, in front of our surroundings, like the old lady, we are dis-animated bodies, that is, we are immobilized by our habits and ways of being, and thus rendered incapable of paying attention to our surroundings, unable to apprehend our surroundings, unable to let ourselves be affected by the world. For this very reason, the philosopher’s defense of common sense, invited to be activated by the imagination, is not the “revelation” of a kind of concrete truth beyond our abstractions, but the suspension of the hegemony that prevents *us* from *feeling our abstractions as alive*, capable of engaging our thought and our action.

To recover the body is, therefore, to operate a radical transformation in the usual way that we deal with knowledge, that we practice thinking. But where to start? The answer has been given by the multiple contributions coming, precisely, from cultures considered disposable, object of the civilizing efforts of a reason scrupulously dedicated to eliminating the value of the world experience that was theirs. Incarnated, thought lets itself be affected by everything that it needed to discard before, the senses opening the way to resorting to analogies, to a new way of learning: *sympoiesis*. *Would that not be the most effective response to the after-facts epidemic?*

LEARN-WITH-OTHERS: PHILOSOPHY AND SELF-FORMATION

With Whitehead, Stengers (2020) proposes to replace the current idea that understanding is “becoming able to explain to someone, or even to argue and prove” with the notion of *aesthetic fruition*. This consists in recovering the ability to let yourself be touched, to be affected by the experience of reality, by the apprehension of a whole that precedes the analysis of details. To understand is to taste the world, and “dare to engage in the learning process that this demands” (Stengers, 2020).

It is clear that, in this sense, far from constituting a merely intellectual operation, and more than taking place as an activity in perfect rupture with everyday

life, understanding would imply a real transformation in our current, urban and western way of being: “Educated by philosophical and scientific knowledge, we have no difficulty today in renouncing our own experience or devaluing our point of view about the world to adopt that of the ‘I-think’” (Galimberti, 1998, 83).

The proposal outlined in this way is for an education that restores its importance to corporeality — which perhaps resides in the fact that, by forcing us to review continually our certainties and convictions, this sensitivity opens us to the adventure of life. However, in this sense, the body is also no longer the seat of a singular, undeniable, insurmountable, and incommunicable experience, but the proper of a disposition of care and attention to the words and perceptions of others.

Therefore, this proposal for sensitive re-education consists, in fact, in an entire re-socialization program and a broad project of permanent self-formation: because, where the world devoid of meaning and value that the scientific paradigm instituted as a guarantee of the truth does not exist, reason is no longer a monopoly of one. And, instead of the deliberation inherited from the Greeks, in which the reasons face each other, and the debate must end in the victory of one and only one position, the model suggested is the one inspired by the “arts of the word” (“these exchanges of words interminable, commonly considered idle” that the Africans imposed on the Portuguese colonizers to establish minimum agreement). It is no longer a question of knowing who is right, but of establishing a learning relationship with the world and with others. As Stengers (2020) beautifully defines: “To learn: to become acquainted with, follow the clues, inquire, try, induce by analogy, discover, understand, perhaps, but never in general, always with an issue, a concern, or a situation.”¹¹

Now, accepting that logical argumentation can be exchanged for analogy would be anathema to modern reason, were it not for the precedents in the Western tradition itself (Aristote, 2014). Much more recently, Derrida (1987) said that it is impossible to go beyond metaphor: “I try to talk about metaphor, to say something proper or literal of which it can be an object, to treat it as my object, but I am for it, one could say, bound to speak *more metaphoric*, in its own way” (Derrida, 1987, p. 64). Separated by centuries, these incursions testify to the impossibility of seeking transparency of language, from which the fixation of a well-established determination would be deduced. But, in the philosophical process, as well as in the scientific environment, analogies are accused of a promiscuous relationship with false appearances, of an easy appeal to the commonplace, of superficiality and argumentative deficiency. Not that the condemnation of “simple metaphors” guarantees, comments Stengers (2020), any precise and literal meaning for its opponents: it only makes an exception clause for the analogies considered to be linked to “good problems,” to the issues about specialized studies that convene them.

11 *Réactiver*, chap. 3, “*une cohérence à créer*”. *Meletô*, the Greek verb that is usually translated as “to learn” is also to take care of, “to occupy oneself with”, “to get used to” (Bailly, 2000).

Nonetheless, by highlighting similarities that appeal to acquisitions of perception, analogies allow the invention of other ways to enter into a relationship with reality. And here, it is also a task of education, says Whitehead (1948, p. 26), to cultivate habits of aesthetic appreciation that encourage the discovery of these new ways of entering into relation.

The “arts of the word” thus refer to a practice of seeking meaning that involves an intense exchange, but which does not avoid nor disguise disagreements and the multiple ways of being right. In this sense, it concerns learning that not only opens up to other epistemologies but depends, above all, on a radical transformation of the very foundations of our socialization — on a recovery of the collective dimension that is the hallmark of cultures that have not abdicated the body or experience, such as African or forest peoples. These arts are “ways of making sense in common” — an exercise in composition that, making new possibilities of saying and feeling emerge, transform “the antagonistic reasons into contrasts that matter” (Stengers, 2020).

It would be a small revolution to imagine that one could, instead of learning-about, or learning-against, learn-with those whose reasons diverge from ours — building, not unanimity, but coexistence and, who knows?, agreements. After all, if there is something that the present indicates to us is that we are no longer in the time for the “speech of those who know,” of the violence implied in the imposition, however well-intentioned, of truths.

In everyday life, it is no longer science or the specialized discourse of philosophy, but the situation itself that challenges “common sense:” “The option to learn, from now on, to live in ruins is the option to learn to think without the security of demonstrations, of consenting to a world that has become intrinsically problematic” (Stengers, 2020), ponders the philosopher. Consenting to live in the absence of guarantees, in the absence of the right to “count on;” consenting to inhabit precariousness, paying attention to everything: it is the art of attention that is needed, to “grant what touches us the power to make us feel and think, but always ‘here,’ never ‘off the ground’” (Stengers, 2020).

And this seems, after all, to be a good definition of the challenges facing the *paideia* today.

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